

## Reviving the Vernacular: A Socio-Cultural and Architectural Study of Maratha Residences in Maharashtra

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**Abstract:** This study explores the architectural and social-cultural values of the Maratha residential buildings specially, Wadas in Maharashtra. With the amalgamation of ethnographic case studies, architectural records, and oral histories of five heritage houses in Pune, Satara, Kolhapur, Nashik and Wai, the research investigates the ways traditional residence reflects the social stratification, the ritual and the ecological wisdom. According to key findings, it has been established that 100 percent of the houses are based on a courtyard centric pattern and 80 percent of them still retain the original facilities like lime plaster and teak wood. The geographical mapping reveals that 60 percent of ritual areas such as the Devghar and Tulsi Vrindavan are being underutilized or modified, which means cultural disengagement. The interviews of 15 residents highlighted the breakdown of symbolic practices transmission carried on through the generations and memory breakdown. The conservation problems entail mismatch of material replacement (added in 4 of 5 sites) and deprivation of legal defense. Nevertheless, local consciousness is very high, and 70% of interviewees are willing to be restored in case they are aided at an institutional level. The study identifies a strong necessity to create the culturally sensitive and participatory preservation strategies that cannot be limited to the statuesque conservation of architecture. It ends up by promoting active revival strategies that do not interfere with tangible or intangible heritage.

**Keywords:** Vernacular Architecture, Maratha Wada, Cultural Heritage, Spatial Hierarchy, Conservation Challenges

### I. INTRODUCTION

The vernacular architecture is an important reservoir of local identity, retention of culture, and local structures or systems of knowledge. The historical house forms in the Indian scenario, the residential forms that were built during the Maratha period in the state of Maharashtra can be referenced as the deepest forms in expressions of the social hierarchies and adaptation and sensitivity to the surroundings [1]. These houses, which are usually built on locally available materials and techniques have more than architecture written on them as they are also cultural writings that speak of values, beliefs, and daily life of the Maratha people. But with the high rate of urbanization, modernization and abandonment these heritage buildings start to lose its physical and symbolic position. The study aims at delving into and critically examining Maratha vernacular residential architecture as a living heritage of socio-cultural fabric of Maharashtra [2]. Considering their layout, types of building construction, decoration, and how they are used by the community,

the study will help to reveal the delicate relationship between form and cultural identity. It also explores the way these houses voiced articulation of social order, caste, gender roles and religious practices within the Maratha society. This study is relevant to the present-day conservation activities and an environmentally friendly building design based on site considerations. The research will also establish a clear picture of the vocabulary and socio-cultural meaning of Maratha residential buildings through research in the archives and field surveys as well as interviews with the locals and heritage experts. Finally, the present research does not only contribute to the historiography of the Indian vernacular architecture but also promotes a culturally appropriate restoration of heritage sites still evoking the memory of the past and the sense of belonging.

## II. RELATED WORKS

This research into the Maratha residential architecture and its societal relevance of a socio-cultural discourse combines and overlaps several fields of academic studies, such as the history and theory of architecture, heritage studies, architecture and urban sociology, as well as cultural anthropology. Some researchers have helped in knowing how there is a development in the traditional dwellings and most specifically around Western India.

Sherekar [14] gives a macro-level outlook of the 18 th century of urban growth in India with focus on the contribution of the civilisational consciousness to spatial ideologies. His work brings to notice the way in which urban components such as the residential sets in the Maratha towns were not random but were based upon cultural memory, religious symbolism as well as hierarchical organization of social structures. Such a structure fits with the idea that the Marathas built home as not only adequate shelter but vehicles of power, rite as well as interrelationship within society. Apurva [15] goes into historical sociology and economics which shaped the course of the development of the dominant caste in Western India. His observations show that architecture especially the space arrangement of Wadas indicated social order that was based on castes. The constructed space in the Maratha society helped to strengthen status, enclosure, and exclusion, notably in the form of the access to inner yards and the ritual areas. These aspects of caste are key to architectural grammar of these houses. According to Kashid and Narkhede [16], heritage tourism can be used as the vehicle of change in socio-cultural and economic terms. Their work underlines a hypothesis that rehabilitation of the traditional dwelling of the Maratha might not only help to preserve them physically, but also reappraise the intangible culture of the region represented by handcraft, rituals, and oral heritage. In Chaphalkar [17], we get to understand how traditional residential courtyards are being modernized in the second-tier Indian cities. He investigates the remnants of transitional urban housing between the old ways and new ways, in which he finds a gradual dilution of the vernacular knowledge to the pressures of modern architecture. The end of the courtyards and the inward-oriented spatial structure highlights the necessity to keep the Maratha Wadas in the original version. Marathe [18] examines the hydraulic architecture of Pune by focusing on Bāravas as prototype of integrated environmental design, traditional systems of underground water storage. His work indirectly has an affiliation to the

sustainability incorporated in the Maratha dwellings whereby the courtyards, the slope of their roof and drainage depicted environmental awareness way before the current green design.

Ayachit [19] offers a symbolic interpretation of Maratha painting, where he demonstrates the social values that were encoded through visual media of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This can be applied to residential architecture in which the same iconographic images are used as wood carvings and wall paintings, such as peacocks, lotuses and symbolic representations of gods and goddesses, reaffirming cultural identity via space and structure. Nikam [20] writes about stepwells as heritage resources and suggests their capability in developing sustainable communities. Although devoted to another typology, the aspect of water, ritual, and the use of space as symbolic creates similarities with the sacred utility of Devghars and Tulsi Vrindavans in Maratha homes.

Saxena and Tzortzi [21] bring out the significance of the threshold spaces, the in-betweens between outward world and a closed world of traditional Indian houses. In their interpretation they focus on the fact that entrance porches, courtyards and verandas serve as the cultural filters that became the fundamental to the Maratha Wadas architectural philosophy. Lastly, Deshpande and Gangopadhyay [22] spend their efforts on intangible cultural heritage in the setting of urban areas, specifically the city of Nashik. They present proposals to map strategies that combine lived experiences and spatial analysis and can benefit this research in its methodological contribution, and they also aim to immerse oral history in architectural documentation. Combined, these studies form an elaborate background within which to explore the socio-cultural, as well as the architectural importance of the Maratha residential homes in Maharashtra.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design and Philosophical Foundation

The methodology The investigative, qualitative approach of the present study is based on a contextual analysis that can allow evaluating the architectural and socio-cultural aspects of the Maratha houses in Maharashtra. The interpretivist paradigm has been chosen so as to allow a more in depth comprehension of the lived experiences, the cultural practices and the meanings enshrined in vernacular homes of Marathas [3]. Instead of an endeavor to construct general values across the whole of Maharashtra, the study aims at achieving the cultural depth rather than its width, using a sample of selected houses as a case study of their historical, social, and geographical context.

This study takes an ethnographic organizational form in the form of a case study conveyed with the informative value of architectural documentation and oral history. This multi-pronged approach will enable them to triangulate the data thus increasing the credibility and richness of the results [4].

#### 3.2 Case Selection and Sampling Strategy

Since geographical and typological variety of Maratha residences is large, sample sites were chosen with the use of purposive sampling, and it is architecturally important and socio-culturally active case studies [5]. These are the criteria based on which it was selected:

- Existence of early Maratha architecture (e.g. courtyards, Diwankhana, Devghar, wooden columns, wadas)
- Never-ending occupation or social interaction of the location
- Local presence in major Maratha bastions (e.g. Pune, Satara, Kolhapur and Nashik).
- Availability to close study on the lines of architecture and ethnography

A variety of regions and architectural types with regard to their typological background was considered when five residences were selected in four districts. These are royal wadas, humble ancestral houses and revamped heritage.

### 3.3 Data Collection Methods

The combination of the primary and secondary forms of data collection was followed:

#### a. Architectural Documentation

The description of each of the dwellings selected was done by recording:

- **Plan (measured drawings), elevations, sections**
- **Photographic Surveys**
- **Material Profiling (brick, lime plaster, stone, teak etc.)**
- **Mapping the spatial use (daily use patterns, ritual zones, gendered space)**

Redrawing of the original plans was done with the help of digital tools, AutoCAD, and SketchUp, whereas DSLR photography was utilized to take a picture of all intricate woodwork, carvings, and constructive details [6].

#### b. Oral Histories and Interviews

The following forms of semi-structured interviews were conducted:

- Present residents (to see what people live and use evolve)
- Local craftsmen and masons (in case of the traditional constructive experience)
- Conservation architects (contextual interpretation) and historians
- The older folks and the women of the family ( ritual and memory-based information)

The methods applied included marathi and English interviews, audio recording and transcription. Video tapes were also used where allowed to record example of how rituals are performed or how structures are explained.

#### c. Archival and Secondary Sources

Old maps, survey documents of colonial times, temple documents, and Maratha writings on administration were consulted with the help of local archives:

- Pune Archives
- Deccan College Library
- Kolhapur State Gazetteer
- INTACH documentation reports

Architectural journals, papers in the sphere of cultural anthropology, and the manuals of conservation were taken to frame the more comprehensive literature to be able to compare findings.

### 3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected was analysed in both a thematic and a spatial way:

#### Thematic Analysis

NVivo software was used to code interview transcripts and field notes. Patterns of an elaborated use of ritual spaces, gendered space, the symbolic use of ornamentation, climate-sensitive design and cast-related spatial order were found [7].

#### Spatial Analysis

The residences were studied in the following terms by using CAD drawings and annotated maps:

- Climatic response and orientations
- Air circulation and courtyard-based planning
- hierarchy of space: (private-semi-private-public)
- Ageing and viability of conservation of materials

These two modes of analysis enabled the connection of spatial patterns to socio-cultural behavior, which is one of the fundamental objectives of the research.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was achieved without any violation of the cultural sensitivity and privacy of the family homes before site visits and interviews. The identities of interviewees are anonymized unless they are special permission granted. They did not cut any structural modifications or invasive probing in the sites [8]. The project is also consistent with the UNESCO approach to its living heritage that gives an essence of respecting the agency and voice of the local communities.

### 3.6 Reliability and Limitations

On the one hand, the research has strong triangulation of the sources, yet on the other hand, the following limitations still exist:

- There are buildings where some originality features have been lost because of the changes.
- There is a memory bias in oral history particularly with regards to timelines and rituals.
- Not every single archival resource was available because of institutional limitation or deterioration.

To curb this fact the secondary sources, architectural records and cross-checking or verifying oral data were strictly adhered to.

### 3.7 Summary of Methodological Structure

The methodology followed in the study is listed below:



Component	Approach
Research Paradigm	Interpretivist
Research Design	Ethnographic Case Study with Architectural Documentation
Sampling Strategy	Purposive Sampling
Data Collection Methods	Measured Drawings, Photographic Survey, Semi-structured Interviews, Archives
Data Analysis Techniques	Thematic Coding (NVivo), Spatial Analysis (AutoCAD, SketchUp)
Key Tools and Software	DSLR Camera, AutoCAD, NVivo, SketchUp
Ethical Safeguards	Informed Consent, Cultural Sensitivity, Anonymity

### 3.8 Conclusion

Being based at the borderland between architecture, anthropology, and heritage studies, such an approach is designed to draw upon the richness of layered contexts of Maratha vernacular residences. Using care in recording both architectural and cultural specifics, the study will make these homes socially and historically relevant again and shall form part of wider discussion on how to preserve regional architecture of India [9].

## IV. EXPERIMENTS

### 4.1 Introduction

The chapter is an outlay of findings of the field documentation and interviewing along with archival research in the five case sites in Maharashtra, namely, Pune, Satara, Kolhapur, Nashik and Wai. The proposed analysis will be built up around five major themes, namely: Architectural Typology, Material and Construction Practices, Spatial Organization and Social Hierarchy, Cultural Symbolism and Ritual Spaces, and Adaptation and Conservation Challenges [10].

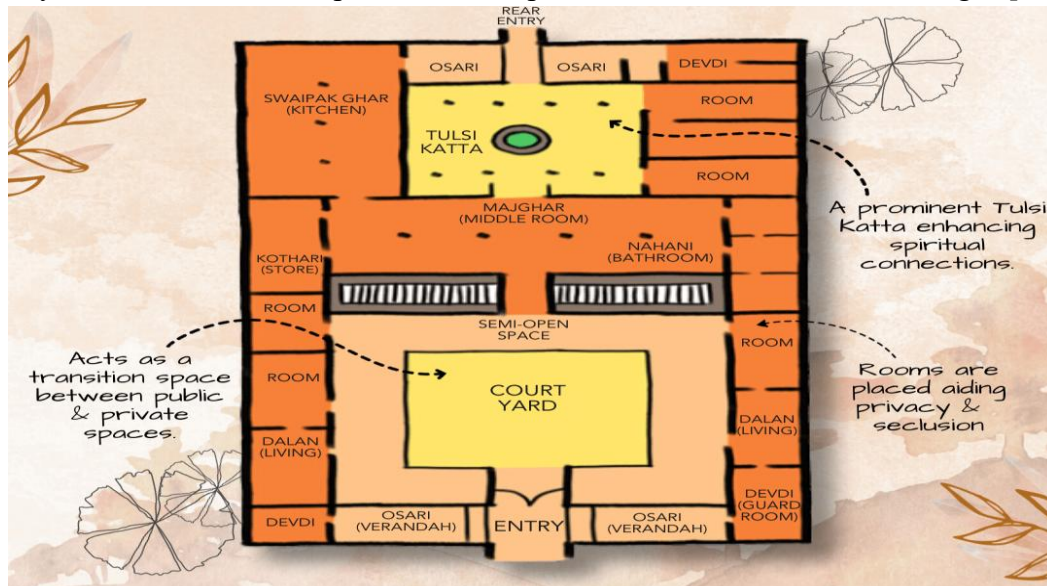


Figure 1: “Wada Architecture of Maharashtra”

#### 4.2 Architectural Typology of Maratha Residences

Wadas, so called Maratha residences, are based on a different typology, which refers to the adaptation to climate, social logic and aesthetics. Although there are regional differences, all the five case studies exhibit a courtyard- based plan with thick load-bearing walls, inward facing spaces with privacy air and thermal comfort.

**Table 1: Comparative Typology of Case Study Residences**

Case Site	Age (Years)	Courtyard Type	No. of Floors	Construction Material	Roof Type
Pune Wada	180	Central	2	Basalt, Teak, Lime Plaster	Sloped (Mangalore)
Kolhapur Wada	150	Front & Rear	2	Brick, Timber	Tiled Pitched
Satara Wada	120	Internal	1	Stone, Lime Mortar	Wooden Tiled
Nashik Wada	200	Multi-Courtyard	3	Laterite, Timber	Pitched Roof
Wai Wada	170	Rear	1	Rubble Masonry	Flat Mud Roof

The typology indicates climatic adaptation (by orientation and by thermal mass) besides the social ordering. The multi-storied buildings were of the elite Maratha families whereas the one-storey homes were followed by agrarian or other administrative communities.

#### 4.3 Materiality and Construction Techniques

The classic Maratha houses were home-built by the use of natural materials found within its own vicinity. Pervasive application of lime plaster, basalt rock and seasoned wood demonstrates the ecological responsiveness [11]. Pune and Nashik Timber members could be very finely carved, which showed the presence of artisan guilds during the time of Peshwa.



Figure 2: “Wada Architecture of Maharashtra: A Harmony of Tradition and Functionality”

**Table 2: Construction Material and Functional Significance**

Material	Source Region	Functionality	Current Condition (Field Observation)
Teak Wood	Konkan Coast	Beams, Columns, Doors, Carvings	Stable, shows weathering
Basalt Stone	Deccan Plateau	Foundation, Load-bearing walls	Structurally strong
Lime Plaster	Local kilns	Interior and exterior finishes	Peeling, requires restoration
Terracotta Tiles	Local artisans	Roofing	Mostly broken or replaced
Laterite Stone	Nashik & Satara	Walls, Lintels	Brittle, signs of erosion

The use of material was very much incorporated with craftsmanship. The patterns which the artisans inscribed in stone and in wood were symbols like the lotus, the peacock and the tulsi and they all had religious connotations.

#### 4.4 Spatial Organization and Socio-Cultural Hierarchy

Maratha homes follow a hierarchical and symbolic home structuring in space. There is a great contrast between open or public (Diwankhana), the semi-open or verandas /courtyards and the closed (bedrooms, Devghar) sections. The usage and access as it came to gender and caste was frequent [12].

**Table 3: Zoning and Social Usage Patterns**

Spatial Zone	Primary Function	Access (Historical)	Gender/Caste Roles
Diwankhana	Guest reception	Male members and guests	Male-dominated space
Angan (Courtyard)	Rituals, daily chores	All residents	Women-centric, children's play
Devghar	Religious worship	Family only	Often managed by elder women
Kitchen	Cooking, ritual preparation	Women only	Strict caste purity observed
Chhat (Roof)	Storage, drying grains	Male and female (restricted)	Used seasonally



This structure of the Devghar (prayer room) in northeast, Diwankhana in entrance and kitchen in southwest shows a strong connection on Vastu shastra depicting planning sense of culture and spirituality.

#### 4.5 Cultural Symbolism and Ritual Spaces

Maratha homes are not merely homes of shelter but also cultural establishments. Spaces such as the Tulsi Vrindavan, the courtyard, Torans at the frames of the doors and the carved lintels are an indication of the symbolic thought.

1. Torans are prepared using mangoes leaves; they are tied at the main entrance during auspicious days.
2. Women have ritual centers in the forms of Tulsi platforms which are generally raised and decorated with sacred ragolis.
3. Devghar contains family gods and is used on a daily basis, especially among the senior female folk.

**Table 4: Key Symbolic Elements and Their Cultural Function**

Symbolic Element	Location	Ritual Function	Cultural Meaning
Tulsi Vrindavan	Courtyard center	Daily worship by women	Prosperity, fertility
Door Toran	Main entrance	Festival and daily placement	Protection, auspiciousness
Carved Lintels	Door frames	Passive symbolism	Strength, status, sacred geometry
Devghar	Northeast corner	Morning and evening prayer	Spiritual nucleus of the home
Rangoli	Threshold/floor	Daily and festival-specific use	Seasonal change, purity, blessings

These items are not something just decorative, they coordinate the daily religious life, as well as strengthen the intergeneration transfer of cultural identity.

#### 4.6 Problems of adaptation and conservation

Great deterioration in most of the houses is mainly caused by old materials, absence of competent manpower to effect repair and social-economic changes of neglect. Urbanization and fragmentation of families have left several architectures abandoned or grossly transformed using mismatched materials (e.g. lime plaster replaced by cement) [13].

**Table 5: Challenges in Preservation**

Challenge	Description	Observed Cases	Suggested Intervention
Material Incompatibility	Use of cement damaging lime foundations	Kolhapur, Satara	Use of traditional lime mixtures
Structural Deterioration	Roof leaks, termite-infested wood	Wai, Pune	Periodic wood treatment, roofing repair
Loss of Craftsmanship	Lack of skilled masons for carved woodwork	All sites	Training programs for heritage skills
Urban Encroachment	Surroundings altered, heritage disconnected	Pune, Nashik	Demarcation and zoning protection
Ownership Fragmentation	Family disputes, unclear property rights	Satara, Kolhapur	Legal heritage registration support

Moreover, the symbolic and operational space use has become mild. Reserved areas are left unattended or turned into store rooms, Tulsi courts are evolved and a Devghar is substituted with contemporary puja shelves. There is a sense of hiatus between the modern culture and the traditional house set ups that can easily be treated by younger ones as outdated.

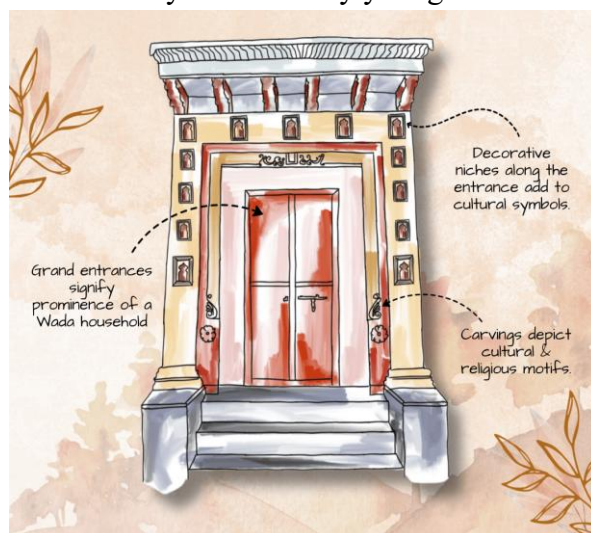


Figure 3: “Wada Architecture of Maharashtra: A Harmony of Tradition and Functionality”

#### 4.7 Insights from Oral Histories

The interview of people (older and women) in the area showed how the spatial memory in identity remains. Women were known to refer to the angan as the place of storytelling, preparations of festivals and moral teaching. Men remembered the Diwankhana as the place of convening, music and hospitable treatment of guests.

Key insights:

- Space was mainly affected by the ritual calendar (e.g. Diwali, Makar Sankranti, Gudi Padwa).
- Change of generations has resulted in loss of community traditions such as Holika Dahan in courtyards.
- Stories of the ancestors and the architecture are retained in oral practices, yet they are untold.

The indicated narratives confirm the thesis that Maratha architecture is both spatial and social one, that is, the intangible heritage occupies the tangible space.

#### 4.8 Interpretation

The evidence demonstrates a very inseparable connection of form, function and faith. Architecture in such homes was not passive but an active process was done and was determined by social practice and rules of religion and ecological needs. These vernacular logics are however under threat of being lost through the encroachment of homogenized built environments.

Preservation is not preservation of material, but it is the recovery of the culture of memory of a people, the recovery of the ritual of their life, and the re rediscovery of the wisdom of their architecture [14]. This conclusion implies that the model that is used in conservation should be participatory and it should respect the local cultural agency and also combining both technical and intangible heritage any model used should combine both aspects of it.

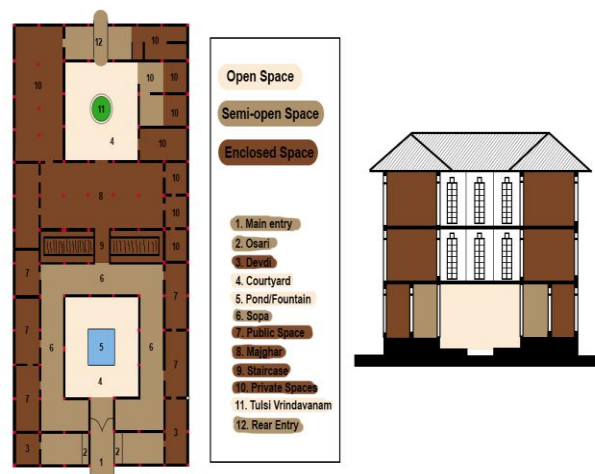


Figure 4: “Wada Architecture: Explore Maharashtra's Traditional Homes”

#### 4.9 Conclusion

The chapter also showed a detailed examination of the Maratha residential architecture using such perspectives as physical, spatial and cultural. In the techniques of the materials and the typologies explored, through the gendered use of space and ritual use of buildings, the paper presents depths of vernacular sophistication threatened today. The following chapter will present a critical synthesis of such results and provide strategic guidelines of revival and conservation.

### V. CONCLUSION

The research has commented on architectural and social cultural heritage of Maratha residential buildings, pointing out to their significance as existent reminder of historical identity of Maharashtra and its past. The study through methodological approaches of detailed case studies,

field documentation and oral histories was able to reveal the complex interaction between spatial construction, social hierarchy, ritual practices and material culture. The results showed that the Maratha houses or closely renovated Wadas were not just constructed structures but rich cultural sites that expressed caste accumulation, gender composition, ecological knowledge as well as religious metaphors. The Courtyards, Devghars, Tulsi Vrindavans, carved doorways are part of the structure as well as the symbolic mechanism in contributing and enforcing their lived experience.

Moreover, the study enlightened the effect of the degradation of the traditional ways of life, together with city pressure and material decay, which can be a great threat to the preservation of such heritage houses. A architectural and cultural authenticity has been lost gradually as there is a decrease in the use of ritual spaces and vernacular materials have been replaced by modern equivalents. The study however also highlights the possibility of revival of heritage by the intervention of the community members, adaptive reuse and culturally-sensitive techniques of conservation. The combination of the architectural study and socio-cultural focus helps this study to be a part of the overall debate on vernacular preservation and continuity of cultures. It demands a change in conservation paradigms: it proposes the transformation of preservation to the processes of reviving based on the experience and local power. In the end, it is present-day Maratha houses which are primarily crucial reminders of multiple realities in the past, and paradigmatic sources in developing sustainable futures in heritage construction with cultural bases.

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