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"ART IN THE KULU VALLEY"

by

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The Art Pattern which developed and partially survived in Kulu goes back to remote antiquity and has its roots in the earliest periods of Indian history. This pattern is the outcome of multiple influences, indigenous as well as extraneous.

Because of the remoteness of this area and the difficulties of access to certain sheltered inner valleys, there was a stability in this pattern, yet it was constantly being enriched by the very nature of the geographic position of Kulu and the inherent attractiveness of this tract by virtue of which it would receive influences from lower India, adjoining Himalayan tracts, Kashmir, Chamba, and the Western Tibetan as well as the Central Asian complex of cultural and artistic centers.

To appreciate the art pattern of Kulu we must bear in mind its origins, its history, its background and the peculiar conditions of the Himalayan regions where it was situated and formed.

Though these areas have been mentioned in ancient Sanscrit literature, the earliest factual record of Kulu as a Sovereign State, we have in a coin which dates from the first or second century A.D. and bears the legend:

Coin of  
King Virāyasa

RĀJNA KŪLŪTASYA VIRĀYASASYA  
or (of) King of Kuluta VIRĀYASA 1

Thus Kulu or the Kingdom of Kuluta was already an independent state at the beginning of our era while local lore traces its



origins far beyond to the time of the Mahabharata and speaks of Bhīm Sen who defeated the Demon Tandi and of Vidāra as its founder heroes, with the boundaries of the state extending beyond the present Kulu across the territories of Mandi and Sukhet. Tradition likewise mentions Mirmand in lower Kulu as the great center where the Atharva Vedas were recorded and also mentions Rishi Jamad Agni of the Vishnu Puranas with his wife Renuka seeking solitude in these areas. At Manikaran in the Parbati Valley there are a few pages of a manuscript named Kulāntapīthā Mahātmya purporting to be a transcript of a part of the Brahmanda Purana and describing a tract Kulāntapīthā, east of the Beas river. A fourth or fifth century commemorative rock inscription of Shri Chanishvarahastin Vatsa can be seen at Salanu.

Though King Virāyasa, mentioned in the legend of the coin has not been identified so far and his name does not appear in the known genealogical records of the Kulu rulers, one may assume that he was prior to the Dynasty described in the Kulu Vamsāvali. Whatever may be the case these genealogical lists as we know them today, seem to go back to a period in the history of Kulu not very distant from the time of Virāyasa.

Tradition narrates that the early rulers of Kulu came from Mayapūri or Hardwar and established their rule over local chieftains some of whom may have continued as such for comparatively long periods as their vassals. From then on we have a long succession of rulers bearing the surname of Pāl, experiencing the various yet common fortunes of ruling houses, successes and reverses, obscurations and re-establishments of their dynasty leading up to the time when the name of the dynasty changed to Singh which was about 1500 A.D., though the dynasty itself seems to be a continuation of the original one.



This period coincides with the expansion of Kashmir and Chamba-Brahmapura which may explain the prevalence of Kashmir prototypes dating approximately from that period.





The original founders of the dynasty and their followers have undoubtedly brought with them their own particular deities, and the new links with the sub-Himalayas brought fresh cultural and artistic contacts into the valley which must have influenced the already existing local culture.

There is every evidence that by the ~~7th~~ <sup>and possibly earlier</sup> 8th and 9th centuries there was a great cultural and artistic activity and efflorescence and an advanced civilisation spread throughout the valley. This can be clearly seen in monuments such as temples, sculptures and carvings that remain to this day scattered over the whole length of Kulu, from Nirmand in the South right up to Manali in the North through Makarsa, Bajaura, Naggar, Baragraon and Jagatsukh which was the first historic capital of Kulu. Many temples and places connected with worship must have been destroyed in the course of centuries, only scattered fragments of beautiful sculptures and carvings remind us of some fine edifice long since lost physically, but often alive and remembered in local lore.

Another important historical evidence and record came from the great Chinese traveller Hsuan-Tsang who visited these regions in the 7th century A.D. He describes Kulu or "Kiu-lu-to" as a country of some 500 miles in circumference having upwards of 20 Buddhist monasteries and rich in minerals. Nothing remains of these Buddhist sites except tradition and a few scattered Buddhist relics that may or may not date from these periods.

A few early Buddhist bronzes that have been found in Kulu would date from about the 8th century onwards if we are to follow the present accepted chronology. They belong to the North-Western, Kashmir and Chambe-Lahoul tradition. No excavations have been conducted in Kulu so far and the traditional sites may contain some interesting and important documentation.



The country is a beautiful and fertile region. Rich in forests and game. Rich in rivers and mountain streams with vast pasture lands at different altitudes, natural springs dotting the countryside and with a number of hot springs along the bed of the Beas and Parbati rivers. The climate is temperate, yet healthy and bracing. No hunger was ever reported in these areas and an agricultural community could maintain itself in comfort with comparative ease. These are some of the features that made this region attractive for settlements, but on the other hand also forced its rulers into extensive wars to defend its frontiers and keep out the invaders.

#### Ethnic Groups.

The Ethnic groups inhabiting Kulu form a very interesting and complex pattern. Here we find the descendants of the aboriginal tribes of the Kolis and the ancient Kuninias, tribes related to the Southern Himalayan Mongoloids the Khasas, Khasht. Traces of the numerous invaders from Central Asia and the North-West, remnants of continuous Tibetan infiltrations as well as the important Rajput and other penetrations from lower India. The isolated Malana Valley constitutes a unique and relatively undisturbed island of the early inhabitants of these regions.

Of quite a special interest also are the Kshatraya groups represented by the Ranas, Thakurs and Rathis who constituted or belonged to the early ruling classes of these areas.

This rich pattern has still survived in one form or another and is reflected in very interesting and varied Ethnic types, some very handsome and refined.

The Tibetans found the lower valleys of Kulu too warm and they only settled along the higher fringes of the surrounding mountains. Life in valleys such as Kulu is



usually very conservative, habits, beliefs, modes of life survive undisturbed for long periods of time. The Kulu folk art and crafts reflect these conditions. They are a precious record of ancient cultures and in the peculiar and typical ornaments, patterns of woollen shawls and blankets, sculptures, wood carvings as found on temples and houses, on wooden chests and in jewellery preserved for us a glimpse into a distinct cultural expression that somehow harmonises and blends with the natural surroundings of the valley.

This folk art often absorbed outside motifs and in turn influenced borrowed forms, transforming them into its own unmistakable expression. It is in these so called folk patterns and art that we must look for some lost keys to find an answer to the many problems posed by ancient migrations.

Temples  
and  
Shrines.

Temples, Sculptures and places connected with worship are the most important early artistic heritage and documentation we have in Kulu. Religion up to quite recent times played an all important role in the life of the people. It was an integral part of the community, a common bond and was a living rich mixture of Hinduism with the ancient local beliefs in nature spirits, and all sorts of minor deities that filled the life of the people in a very real way. Trees were worshipped and sacred forests can still be found in many places, serpents were held in high veneration and the whole of nature was vibrantly alive in legends and fairy tales throbbing in a thousand different ways, sometimes very beautiful.

The surviving temples of the Kulu region can be roughly divided into two groups. The Hill Temples and Shrines, representing an indigenous pattern common to most Western Hill tracts, harmonising with the architecture of local dwellings, built of wood or of wood and stone and the type that was introduced from lower India and which may be



designated as the temples of the Plains. These are of the shikhara type built entirely of stone, but sometimes having a wooden superstructure covered with slate and forming a sort of parasol as a protection for the main structure against heavy snow falls and rain. A number of these latter temples must have been executed by master builders, sculptors and masons brought from lower India or neighbouring areas by the Rajas and chieftains.

#### Hill Temples.

The so called Hill Temples can be again divided into two main groups - one with a simple rectangular cella of stone usually with wooden stays covered by a high sloping roof of slate or wood, forming a gable over the doorway which is often set in an elaborately carved large ornamental panel of carved wood surrounding and framing the door. This may be surmounted by a window set in a carved frame or further decorative panels. There are often two windows or panels on either side of the entrance also with ornamental carvings. The roof on either side usually projects to form a covered passage around the cella and is often supported by pillars which may be carved and forms a kind of circumambulatory passageway or pradakshinapatha. From the lower edges of the roof or cornices are suspended oblong wooden pendants which taper downwards and terminate in a round knob. They remind one of a fringe and are free to move in the wind. Sometimes the Eaves are provided with sitting or crouching figures of animals. The general scheme goes right back to the Gupta tradition, superimposed upon and modified by local features which we must seek in the architecture of local dwelling houses and other allied structures.

The other group of Hill Temples are of the so called Pagoda type. This type of temples are the most conspicuous and their cella is surmounted by a tall superstructure of a steep wooden roof in receding tiers (usually three),



forming a sort of pyramid, with the lower roof projecting over the cella and like in the former temples forming a covered passageway usually supported on pillars. Of the latter type of temples only four seem to have survived, the most important one of them is the Hirman Devī Temple at Dhungri in Manali. There is one at Naggar, the Tripura Sundari Temple, the Temple of Triyuga Nārāyana near Bajaura at Dyar and the Ad Brahm at Khokhan. Though many of these Hill Temples in their foundations go back to very early periods of Kulu's history, they have been periodically rebuilt and their wooden components are not more than some four or five centuries old in their present state, though the Deodar wood of which they are built could under favourable conditions last much longer.

Hill Temples are very numerous and are scattered all over the main valley, as well as in the complex pattern of valleys that surround it and open into it from all sides. With some variations they follow the same general pattern and sometimes combine features of both types.

#### Hirman Devī Temple.

Of the outstanding Hill Temples, the large temple of Hirman Devī considered to be the original protectress of Kulu at Manali, is an important example of the pure Pagoda type of Hill Temple architecture. Besides the fine architectural and ornamental features we also know the date of the present structure. It was built in the year 1553 A.D. by Raja Bahādur Singh, but everything seems to point to a much earlier date for the original shrine. Even the existing mask of the presiding Goddess Hirman Devī bears the date 1418 A.D. in the reign of Raja Uahran Pāl, almost one and a half centuries earlier. The Hirman Devī Temple stands in a forest surrounded by magnificent Deodars some of which are over a thousand years old. The disposition of the trees around the temple as well as the surviving legends seem to point to a much earlier shrine on the







foundations of which the present structure has been erected.

Tradition links the name of the master builder and carver-sculptor of the present temple with the master who repaired and carved the more recent carvings and sculptures in the temple of Markūla Devī in Chamba-Lahoul.

The Hirman Devī Temple is a rectangular stone structure with its entrance facing East, standing on an elevated platform of cut stone. It is surmounted by a pyramidal Pagoda type wooden roof rising in three receding tiers, projecting beyond the cella and is supported by pillars. The entrance or doorway is set in a large and very typical ornamental panel of intricately carved bands of conventionalised designs and floral motifs interspersed with figures of Gods, minor Deities, personages and animals. The general scheme of the panels is similar to the patterns used with local variations in other Hill shrines and goes back to the Gupta tradition in its prototype, as we find it in the temple of the famous Lakshana Devī at Brahmor in Chamba<sup>2</sup> where the carved panels go back to the 7th or 8th century. As in most of the temples Deodar wood has been used throughout.

The Hirman Devī Temple has four main ornamental bands around the door, but since two of them are again subdivided into two in their upper portions one could describe them as six. The door itself is made of a single massive Deodar plank and has a fine bronze knob of a lion's head in the upper middle of the door.\*

The inner ornamental bands surrounding the door begin at the bottom with two figures of Durgā. One standing on a lion to the left of the door and one in the aspect of Mahishamardini on the right side. Above double semicircular haloes the band is subdivided into two distinct ornamental motifs. The inner one, a conventionalised somewhat geometrical



scroll pattern and the outer also a stylised floral design arranged to give a rhomboidal effect with two floral roundels in the upper corners. Across these two bands above the door is a figure of Ganesha. The next band begins with two figures of worshippers or attendants standing with folded hands on either side. Above them begins a very remarkable and original band of churning waves in which fishes swim. It is in a deeply undercut technique and forms a very rich and unusual decorative motif. The next 3rd (or 4th) band is broad and begins with the Lakshmi-Nārāyan motif (with a Garuda of Kashmir-Chamba type) on the left side and a Gaurī-Shankar group to balance it on the right side. Above them is a pediment with a floral design forming a kind of cusped arch over the figures with a lotus petal band above it. From it starts a short round pilaster with a semicircular floral roundel at its base and at its top where it terminates in a steep triangular gable with a central floral design and with two prominent peacocks on either side of the gable. Two crouching lions are above these capitals flanking the horizontal continuation of the band with a curious foliage motif reminiscent of the treatment of waves in the other band and has interspersed conventionalised Kirtimukha heads. Above it is a band containing the nine Grahas. In front of this band numerous iron tridents have been fixed by worshippers. The outer and largest vertical band contains a number of Gods and Deities and is again subdivided into two. Among the Gods are prominent the avatars of Vishnu, Devīs, Gopis and of special interest are the two large panels of Deer eating leaves off a tree.

The horizontal portion of the outer band has an interesting frieze of sixteen female figures in dancing postures on either side of a male figure in the center. They are flanked by two carved squares, the left one containing a horseman with a bow. The final top horizontal band is formed of upturned lotus petals. Though the carving is not very fine and can be directly linked with folk art,



it is nevertheless very original and decorative and the whole ensemble is rich and vital. Portions of skulls with horns of Deer, Antelopes and Mountain Goats sacred to the Goddess are hung over the carved panels of the doorway.

The doorway is flanked by two windows with carved ornaments on their frames and central dividing pillars harmonising with the motifs of the central door panel.

As already mentioned <sup>related</sup> ~~similar~~ wood carvings can be found in other Hill Temples of Kulu, as for instance in the temple of Gautama Rishi at Gosai which is a smaller but very typical shrine of the gable roof type in which the carved wood ornamental panel around the door is surmounted by an ornamental window. The door panel contains a number of details reminiscent of the carvings of the Hirman Devī Temple including the ganas, figures of Deities, the wave and scroll motif, the peacocks and the deer eating off a tree. The same upturned lotus petal motif appears in the last upper band over the doorway. The late Gupta tradition is here again quite obvious in the general treatment and details. Similar <sup>details</sup> features can be found in <sup>Devi Primi Temple</sup> ~~several other~~ ~~temples of the Kulu Valley.~~ <sup>not far from Jagatishukh.</sup>

<sup>Devi Primi Temple</sup>  
Tripura Sundari Temple at Naggar. The Tripura Sundari Temple at Naggar, another Pagoda Type temple, dates in its present form from the 15th century. Undoubtedly like so many other temples it is originally of much greater age. Around it we can find some sculptures that go back to the period of Kulu's great artistic activity, the 8th and 9th centuries.

Situated at Naggar which became the capital of Kulu in the early centuries of our era in the time of Raja Visudh Pāl or Raja Uttam Pāl the eleventh and twelfth Raja of Kulu, one is inclined to believe tradition which ascribes its foundations to a remote past. It also has a three-tiered pyramidal wooden roof with crudely carved



figures of monkeys and lions at the corners, but unlike Hirman Devī's Temple it has but few carvings. The rectangular cella contains no images of great interest. The central image is a late bronze figure of Durga as Mahishamardini of good size.

Naggar having been the capital of Kulu for more than a thousand years, from about the 4th-5th century A.D. onwards has preserved in all some six larger and about a dozen smaller shrines. Tradition places the original number of them as much higher.

Bijli Mahādev  
Temple.

Among the more important other Hill type shrines with a gable roof is the well known Bijli Mahādev Temple near Bhuin, a very typical and imposing structure. A Shaivite Shrine, it possibly was the place of worship of some mountain or nature God originally.

The tall wooden staff which stands on its northern side and is a special feature of this temple may well have originated from the ancient traditional symbol of the Mountain or Nature Gods, which is a plain staff or even stick.

The actual temple is a large rectangular structure of well cut unbonded stones, surrounded by a balcony or verandah of carved Deodar elements with intricately carved window arches and good open work on the balcony panels in the typical Kulu ornamental motifs.

The roof forms a massive gable made of six tiers of large Deodar planks with a heavy ridge beam studded with iron tridents, the usual offerings by devotees in similar shrines.



The temple is situated on a high promontory overlooking the confluence of the Beas and Parbati rivers and commands a very fine panorama all around.

Temples of the  
Plains.

It is not possible here to give more space to the so called Hill Temples and shrines and we shall now consider the temples that have been introduced into the valley from the plains or adjoining areas. These structures have preserved remarkably the basic traditions of their origin and have apparently borrowed local idioms only when repeated or rebuilt at later stages.

Basheshar  
Mahādev Temple  
at Bajaura.

Of the Shikhāra type of temples, the most important one is the Basheshar Mahādev at Hat, Bajaura. The temple undoubtedly constitutes one of the finest monuments of the Western Himalayas and is a unique example of the later Gupta tradition.

It is not large in size as was the case with most temples in these mountain tracts. In these remote valleys we shall not find large monumental edifices or ensembles. Everything was on a comparatively modest scale to conform to the specific conditions prevailing in these areas.

Yet, while the Basheshar Mahādev Temple is not large, it is a most beautiful example of Shikhāra architecture endowed with great dignity, strength and compositional unity.

The architecture and sculptural details of the temple take us right back to the great Chalūkiyan tradition and we clearly discern elements that remind us of Badami, Aihole, the temples of Pattadakal and right through to the great temples of Central India and Rajasthan, some of the earlier temples of Bhubaneswar in Orissa and the temple of Masrur in Kangra.

How remarkably vital must have been this tradition to spread over the subcontinental plains, inspire various racial



and small figures of apsaras as part of the ornamental  
bands and



groups and travel intact beyond the high ranges into remote and difficult of access areas.

The Basheshar Mahadev Temple as the name implies is dedicated to Shiva and a simple lingam has been placed in the sanctuary. Whether it originally had any other statues inside we do not know as only the three sculptures in the porch chapels, ~~and~~ the Ganga and Yamuna reliefs flanking the entrance ~~belonging~~ <sup>though of interest</sup> to the original shrine can be found there at present. The few ~~stray~~ images found in the sanctum <sup>though of interest</sup> were obviously brought there from outside. All the architectural details of the temple are well designed, balanced and executed. A feature of this temple are the four large projecting chapel porches at the four sides of the Shikhara. The entrance of the temple faces East and the three other chapel porches face North, West and South. They are massive and prominent, projecting well beyond the central structure and give it a cross shaped plan. The central structure is only 13 feet square with massive walls of well cut stones. The sanctuary is also comparatively small.

The beautiful Shikhara gently curves upwards to finish in a fine Amalaka stone and is divided into six successive horizontal bands or elements of ornamental units in its upper portion. At the four corners the rectangular elements alternate with and are intercepted by semicircular mouldings of the coriander or Amalaka pattern building up towards and repeating the motif of the Amalaka Stone which crowns the edifice.

Vertically the Shikhara's sides are divided into seven unequal segments. The central wider segment is flanked on either side by two narrow receding mouldings which vary in design and these rest against the wide corner elements already described. A motif of diminutive arches



repeating the Chaitya arches above the porch chapels is used throughout the Shikhāra along the axial centers of the vertical segments or bands.

The details and motifs used in the chapel porches are the conventionalised and simplified elements used in the Shikhāra mouldings, combined with great wealth of imagination yet unity. The porches which reach to about two thirds of the height of the edifice have a very fine and rich superstructure composed of two related superimposed receding terminal elements, both terminating in a finely designed arch, the lower one being larger and containing the heads of the Trimūrtis of Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva or of Shiva alone. A frieze of little chapels as replicas of the temple, three in front and one at the side of the porch form a rich band below the Trimūrti arches. The entablature rests upon a plain double moulding which divides the upper portion of the Shikhāra from the lower walls and runs around the entire edifice. A narrow continuous band of semicircular floral roundels finishes the walls of the porches and the projecting corners of the main Shikhāra.

The walls of the chapel porches consist of simple vertical mouldings decorated with a beautiful superimposed vessel and ornamental foliage motif.

Two little brackets project over the front corner pilasters of the porches supporting the upper entablature and are carved with a leaf design.

On the side walls of the main porches are two superimposed small chapel niches more or less repeating the general scheme.

The largerectangular openings or apertures of the main chapel porches are set in receding bands of a plain moulding. Only in the doorway porch where the two reliefs of Ganga and Yamunā flank the entrance, the outer band has a beautiful and



rich scroll motif. Above the apertures is an architrave panel containing small simplified chapel brackets. The dexterity with which the various related and interdependent motifs and elements have been dispersed throughout the structure give it a great sense of unity and integrated harmony.

Whoever the actual builders of this temple may have been they were certainly masters of their craft fully conversant with the best traditions of the late Gupta structural and plastic heritage.

The sculptures  
of the  
Basheshar Mahā-  
dev Temple.

The sculptures at the entrance and in the porch chapels of the Bajaura Temple likewise point to the same links with the Gupta sculptural tradition. Though it has been suggested that the reliefs of Vishnu, Durga and Ganesha may be reproductions of lost early originals and are of later date than the Gangā and Yamunā reliefs, they have so much in common in the technical treatment of their details that one is inclined to treat them as contemporary, but possibly by another artist.

The reliefs of  
Gangā and Yamunā.

The elongated, elegant and dignified figures of Gangā and Yamunā flanking the entrance porch are shown standing against a rich background of intricate foliage and heavy floral scrolls. Small figures of female attendants stand at their feet in very beautiful poses. The scarves or dupattas of the Goddesses fall over their hair gathered in a side bun, flow over their shoulders and arms in beautiful continuous wavy lines and repeat themselves in the likewise wavy flowing contour of their transversely pleated skirts.

Their skirts are held by a girle from which beaded loops and tassels hang. The skirt extends over the abdomen above the belt in vertical incised folds that continue in oblique lines over the legs below. The Goddesses wear



three progressively heavier necklaces and a string of beads falling between their breasts and ending in a knot or pendant. On their heads they wear a three pointed crown. The hair is parted in the middle and sweeps in wavelets towards their ears. Heavy circular earrings are worn by both the Goddesses and they both wear armlets with a triangular upper extension, narrow bracelets and anklets. In one hand they hold a water vessel and in the other the heavy stem of a flower.

The female attendants wear a similar, but simplified attire and the attendant of Yamunā holds a tall parasol over the Goddess.

Both reliefs of Gangā and Yamunā are flanked on the outside by a very rich and intricate scroll motif moulding of great strength and beauty.

The entire composition, the figures of the River Goddesses and their attendants, their dress, the floral motifs and scrolls all conform to the great tradition which inspired the architecture of the temple.

The three sculptural reliefs in the main chapel porches at first appear different, yet are similar in many of their details to the other reliefs. They are over 5 feet in height, only the panel of Ganesha has been broken across the top.

The sculpture of Vishnu is in the chapel porch facing West, Durgā faces North and Ganesha South. Unfortunately the faces of these sculptures have been mutilated it is said, at the time of Raja Ghamant Chami's of Kangra invasion of Kulu in 1760-70 A.D.

One of the first things that strikes one when looking at these sculptures are the slender elongated proportions of the figures reflecting the canons of the 7th century,



Durga measures over eight and half heads, while Vishnu is nearly eight. The clear yet simple and well defined composition, the excellent execution, the characteristic tall three pointed ornamental crowns, the fine flowing wavy lines of the draperies and the rich floral scrolls merging with the draperies into one flamboyant background, are common to all the reliefs.

While we recognise in them some characteristics of the Trigarta School, certain Rajasthani features and Kashmir-Chamba details, yet they have a striking originality all of their own.

The Vishnu relief.

In the Vishnu figure inspite of the apparent rigidity of the central figure, there is an outward rising movement in the composition beginning with the flexed figures of the male and female attendants that flank it, both looking upwards, and continued in the posture of the rear arms that rise obliquely holding the ~~base~~ <sup>serrated sword</sup> and the disc. This flexed attitude of the attendant figures can be already found in Kushana sculptures and has later been adopted in the North Western and Kashmir sculptures where the hands of the God were made to rest upon the heads of the flexed attendants.

The girdle of the God is a simple ornamental band with a central buckle. The dhoti is short and of equal length on both legs with the central folds treated in the same characteristic rich, wavy pattern. A scarf flares out horizontally on either side of the arms as can be found in Sassanian, Kashmir and Chamba sculptures. Vishnu wears a thin Yajnopavita, prominent earrings and simple thin bracelets and armlets which are worn high near the arm pits. The hair falls in wavy curls on either side of the head and a large floral garland follows the line of the shoulders, and falls over the arms and below the knees. The round flower in the right hand follows the pattern of the flower held by the river Goddesses. Upon the pedestal, between the feet of the God is an eroded projection which must have been the head



of a Prithvi Lakshmi.

A large round halo common to all the figures has a flaming edge which lifts gently into a point at the top. Inside, the halo is divided into concentric bands with floral ornaments. The male attendant of Vishnu wears a tall crown similar to the one worn by the God, while the female attendant wears a dress conforming to the dresses in the River Goddesses reliefs. There are two prominent flying gandharvas with garlands on either side and overlapping the halo.

The Durga  
relief.

Durga as Mahishamardini is shown in a very dramatic yet slender and angular form. The whole composition has a sense of action and is imbued with a certain triumphant rhythm. She is depicted with eight arms and also wears a tall elaborate three pointed crown, heavy earrings and hair arranged in a bun over her left shoulder. Jewellery, bracelets, and armlets are the same as in the other reliefs with the exception that the front pair of arms has the broad Chūri type of bracelets, as found in the Mahishamardini relief at Aihole. Like the other female figures she wears thin anklets edged with small pendants. The dupatta is carried over the bun and flows in free ripples behind the Goddess, while a heavy floral garland follows the outline of her shoulders and falling over the arms makes a loop low over the legs. Her skirt is held by a tasseled girdle and extends in pleats over the abdomen above the girdle, similar to the skirt pleats of the River Goddesses. Above the skirt and across the abdomen of the Goddess can be seen the semi-circular ornamental band which is a characteristic detail found on a number of Kashmir and Chamba images of female Deities - both Hindu and Buddhist. It may be an ornament or the lower edge of a diaphanous upper garment. She plunges her trident into the chest of the Asura whom she holds by a tuft of his hair. He is shown in an angular flexed posture, kneeling.




Of special interest are the two finely sculptured lions supporting the throne of Ganesha, they are shown with crossed front paws, a posture that originated in Gandhara and has been repeated in bronze sculptures of the North-Western tradition and Chamba.



A smaller Asura figure in an almost similar posture and attitude is at the lower right corner, while Durga's lion can be seen to the left in the background behind the vanquished Buffalo Demon crumpled at Durga's feet.

The Ganesha relief.

The figure of Ganesha is a traditional image in the style of the other two panels. It is also well designed and elegant and except for the broken top portion is well preserved.  These three sculptures though following traditional cannons and ornamental details have a character all of their own. There is an originality in their treatment which makes them unique and striking.

In all some sixteen temples of the Shikhāra type have been recorded in Kulu. Many more must have fallen to ruin and one can still find here and there traces of such old structures. These temples are found mostly along the lower shelf of the valley. A number of them can be seen at Naggar, but the temples at Naggar are mostly of later date and not of the same merit having been restored and rebuilt, though the foundations of some of them are undoubtedly of considerable age. Thus the temple of Murli-Dhar at Thawa is built over Gupta foundations, but of that period only the plinths remain. The temple of Gaurī-Shankar below the Naggar Castle is of an earlier date, but has also been restored. Some ornamental stone details and columns belonging to the old structure can be seen nearby. This temple has a comparatively simple Shikhāra and the side chapels or porches have been already reduced to small flat niches, the ornamentation is also much simpler. The entablature over the entrance has five small chapels of which the central one is the largest and the Trimūrti motif over the entrance is enclosed in a simplified arch. An Amālaka Stone crowns the edifice. The whole structure is divided horizontally into eleven progressively diminishing successive bands or elements separated by simple projecting horizontal cornice bands. A stone Nandi

Temples of Murli-Dhar and Gaurī-Shankar at Naggar.



faces the entrance of the temple.

An important Gaurī-Shankar Temple is at Dashed not far away and is also a protected monument. It is a fine example of Shikhara architecture and is in good condition. The outer walls are enriched by numerous reliefs of Deities, ghanas and beautiful ornamental details. An interesting feature is the figure of a lion in a sitting posture above the Chaitya arch containing the Trimūrti heads over the entrance to the temple. An Amālaka finial crowns the edifice and a Nandi stands in front of the entrance facing it.

Jagatsukh, the first ancient capital of Kulu contains at present some seven temples, but they have also been rebuilt and renovated at different times. The temple of Devī Sandhyā Gayatri dates from the 8th century.

Sandhyā  
Gayatri  
Devī Temple  
at Jagatsukh.

Of the original temple only the walls, the entrance and the subsidiary chapels remain surrounded by a comparatively late structure erected at the time of Raja Udhran Pal in 1428 A.D. which has been again renovated at a later date. The original shrine has some affinities with the Teli-ka Mandir at Gwalior and the sculptures remind us of some of the early

sculptures at Osian in Rajasthan. <sup>The</sup> ~~A~~ smaller temple of Shiva nearby is also <sup>an</sup> ~~a~~ fairly early shrine <sup>and contains a fine stone group of Gauri-Shankar on Nandi.</sup>

Temples at  
Nirmand.

Many temples at Nirmand are also of great age. The copper plate grant of Maharājā Mahāsāmanta Samudrasena to the Parasūrama temple is of the early seventh century. In this grant a temple of Shiva Sulapani is mentioned, but one cannot with certainty identify it at present. There are a number of Shaivite shrines in the neighbourhood, as for instance at Shamsar, many of them dating back to very early periods. The most famous temples are the temple of Devī Ambica founded according to legend by Parasūrama son of Rishi Jamed Agni and the temple of Parasūrama an equally ancient shrine. The beautiful bronze mask of Majani Devī



at Nirmand dating from the 9th century is the earliest metal mask in the Kulu region known to us at present and is an object of great veneration.

Nirmand like Triloknath in Chamba-Lahoul is an important place of pilgrimage. The Sutlej River flowing nearby carries its waters from the sacred regions of Lake Manasarovar and Mount Kailas one of the greatest centers of Hindu Pilgrimages, the abode of Mahadev, the seat of Lord Shiva. The region of Spiti was once ruled by Hindu Kings and possibly areas further upstream along the Sutlej extending up to Mount Kailas were also at one time under the rule and within the territories of early Indian dynasties that have long since receded into the realm of legends. Spiti may have been only a remnant of a much larger area.

The Temple of  
Raghunathji  
at Sultanpur.

Sultanpur has become the capital of Kulu at the late date of 1660 A.D. and has no shrines of great age. The patron God of the Kulu Rajas is Raghunathji whose image was brought to Kulu from Oudh by Raja Jagat Singh (1637-72) who transferred the capital from Naggar to Sultanpur and assumed the office of Vice-Regent of the God.

Manikaran  
Parbati  
Valley.

Manikaran in the Parbati Valley has also a number of fairly interesting shrines built near the hot springs which are held sacred, but the largest one, the temple of Raghunathji, has collapsed and has not been so far restored.

It is not possible here to describe or even mention all the places of artistic interest or merit in the Kulu region. The large number of temples and shrines and the innumerable Gods and Goddesses that are such a feature of the Kulu Valley have given it its name:

"THE VALLEY OF THE GODS".

We shall now deal with the next part of our narrative, a short description of some unattached sculptures, metal images, carvings in stone and wood and other fields of creative expression.



SCULPTURES, WOOD CARVINGS, BRONZES, MASKS AND OTHER ARTS

Stone sculptures, reliefs, carvings, fragments of ornamental details can be found over the whole length of the Kulu Valley.

Once they must have formed part of some temples or shrines long since fallen to ruin and now lie scattered in courtyards of other temples and enclosures or simply in open fields.

In age they may date from the 8th or 9th centuries in their earlier examples and through all the later centuries right up to fairly modern times.

We can find among them some fine examples of the late Gupta tradition, sculptures that show Chalukian influences or again with Pratihara-Rajasthani, Trigatha and Kashmiri-Chamba features. The finer sculptures and carvings are interspersed with quaint examples of folk art that are often difficult to date.

Beautiful carvings of door jambs, lintels and key stones can be found in the vicinity of the old sites of Makarsa at <sup>at Bajaura</sup> ~~Urla~~ and right up the valley to Jagatsukh and the old fort of Manali village where a number of fine carvings and ornamental details dating from about the eighth century and representing fragments of ruined shrines can be seen even today. Sculptures and a fine Trimurti found nearby were part of some ancient temple. The rich and intricate floral scroll motifs link them with the sculptural details of Bajaura and Masrur.

Practically all the old inhabited places of importance especially the sites of the old capitals such as Nist at Jagatsukh, Naggar and Makarsa have some interesting sculptural fragments or documentation, at times exhibiting a marked



difference in style and provenance, thus a Devī relief from Manali has the early Brahmar-Kashmiri characteristics while some sculptures at Nast have both Rajasthani and Chamba influences. An interesting early Mahishamardini relief at Jagatsukh has some Chalukian features.

Naggar likewise has a number of fairly early sculptures mostly of Durgā, Vishnu and Lakshmi-Nārāyan, Gaurī-Shankar, Narsingh and Ganesha reliefs, besides some equestrian statues purporting to be Guga Chauhan, but obviously sometimes depicting female riders.

Sculpture of  
Vishnu at  
Bajaura.

Perhaps one the most outstanding and important, independent sculptures in the valley is the figure of Vishnu within the compound of the Basheshar Mahadev temple at Bajaura in a fine late Gupta Pratihara idiom. It is a very beautiful sculpture of great strength and dignity, yet great simplicity. Unfortunately it has been broken at the feet, but the pedestal with the feet stands nearby. Vishnu is represented with four arms. Two back arms are broken at the wrists, but being held downwards and slightly outwards, they may have rested upon two attendants, since there are two projections on either side of the long base that seem to indicate the place where the attendants might have stood. Vishnu is shown against an elaborate multfigured Prabha of the type found in a Vishvarupa Vishnu figure from Kanauj. Like that figure it also has its five avatar aspects, the smaller Fish and Tortoise heads being superimposed upon the Boar and Lion heads. Above the crown is what appears to be the head of a horse. The aspect assumed to destroy Hyagriva.

The face of a fine Gupta type is somewhat eroded, but still quite clear. It strongly resembles some of the faces at Masrur. The well preserved lobe of the left ear shows most excellent workmanship.

The crown is of the square semi-cylindrical type.







raised in the center and with a rich central floral design, reminiscent of the Deogarh or later Nepalese crowns. The hair falls in thick locks and the heavy circular earrings with a beaded or ribbed outer edge rest with the locks upon the shoulders.

Vishnu wears two necklaces, an inner string of single beads and an outer double string with a pendant in the center. He wears thin beaded armlets near the armpits and narrow bracelets. The flower in Vishnu's right hand is a lotus with reversed petals held facing backwards towards the figure. A conch is in the left hand resting upon his thigh. The girdle is a narrow and simple one. The dhoti is short and of equal length on both legs. The long floral garland is relieved by three large round flowers, over the arms and below the knees. Between the feet is a damaged projection that might have been the head of a Prithvi-Lakshmi.

← This beautiful, powerful and dignified figure must have been part of some outstanding temple long since lost. <sup>important</sup> A number of other sculptures can be seen in <sup>the</sup> its vicinity of the <sup>Bajanna Temple</sup> but of all these the figure of Vishnu is the most important.

Along with the fine early sculptures of accomplished workmanship we find a local idiom which follows closely the early Pratihāra-Rajasthani tradition on the one hand and the Kashmir-Chamba style on the other. But in most of <sup>these</sup> them the figures are already short and squatty and the workmanship is often clumsy, though the prototypes must have been of quite a pure early style.

Vishnu relief  
from Naggar.

A Vishnu relief from Naggar has many of the characteristics of the Kashmir-Chamba tradition. The God is shown standing with his second pair of hands resting upon the heads of two female attendants in flexed postures holding fly whisks and flowers. He wears a crown of five floral roundels resting upon a band of circular knobs, and has a







simple necklace of beads and narrow bracelets and armlets. The hair falls in curls on either side of his head. A scarf billows outwards near the Gods elbows and he wears a massive long garland. His feet rest not upon a Garuda, but upon the shoulders of a female figure shown just below her breasts, very likely a Prithvi-Lakshmi motif common at the feet of Kashmir Vishnu figures. This sculpture though of later date clearly shows the Kashmir-Chamba influences, somewhat modified and adapted to the local idiom.

Gauri-Shankar  
group at Naggar.

There is a large Gauri-Shankar stone group in the Gauri-Shankar temple at Naggar, but though imposing in size it is also fairly late. The God with the Goddess upon his left knee is shown sitting on Nandi whose head is turned towards them. The figures are squatty and heavy, though the sculpture follows an early prototype. Two flying Gandharvas with garlands are in the upper corners. Both figures have the typical small protruding chin as we find in some Chamba-Lahoul sculptures, besides some other features of the Chamba-Kashmir school. The sculpture is in good condition and is the largest group at Naggar.

Sculptures  
at Dashed.

Inside and outside the Dashed temple are several detached sculptures some of considerable merit and interest as for instance the figure of Kartikeya and the Vishnu figure with two attendants inside the temple. Outside the temple is a fairly large sculpture of Vishnu with Lakshmi on his knee astride Garuda. The sculpture is of the Kashmir-Chamba type with a typical Kashmir Garuda holding the amrita vessel in his two hands. Vishnu is represented with the Lion and Boar aspects and in his front right hand holds a flower of Kashmir design.

Fountain Stones  
and Tanks.

Fountain stones are not numerous in Kulu, but one occasionally comes across some water spouts with heads of Lions or Makaras. Some decorative panels with figures and



ornamental designs still survive near the outlets of some springs and tanks as for instance at Bashist near Manali. This tank has a fairly large panel of ornamental and floral designs and figures of Gods. The panel builds itself up through a series of receding horizontal bands into a prominent rectangular panel with a fine Trimūrti set in a round frame. Above it is an oblong horizontal panel with a double petaled floral roundel in its center flanked by two small standing figures with folded hands and ending in side brackets of floral design. This panel rests upon two lion heads that project well beyond the panel. The mouldings of the lower portion contain floral motifs, the flower vessel motif, Makaras and various other ornamental details and figures of Gods and Goddesses of which a Mahishamardini is prominent. The large square niche or aperture at the bottom of the panel has a Ganesha in the key stone moulding and what appears as two River Goddesses at the lower corners.

A now discarded large cut stone water tank at Tawa above Naggar had some carved features, but the masonry has crumbled in many places and has been used for subsequent buildings.

#### Memorial Stones of Kulu Rajas.

A number of memorial stones of the Kulu Rajas with figures of Rajas and Ranis can be found in the valley. Below the main road leading to the Naggar Castle from Katrain and not far from it is a large number of them, but they are of indifferent workmanship and some are in a crude folk idiom. Many of them have suffered from exposure, while others sank into the soil. They usually show equestrian figures of Rajas surrounded by female figures and in their general pattern conform to similar stones found in neighbouring states.

No large bronzes of importance are known in Kulu. The few bronzes like the bronzes at Naggar or Sultanpur are of



Metal Images.

late date and reported to have been brought from lower India and Bashahr. The already mentioned Mahishamardini bronze in the Tripura Sundari Temple and the standing Vishnu in the Vishnu Temple both at Naggar though of good size are not of great artistic merit. According to tradition they have been brought in the <sup>17th</sup> 16th century. *by Raja Man Singh.*

The smaller bronzes must have been quite numerous at one time and they belonged to a number of schools, the earlier bronzes were Buddhist of the North Western, Kashmir and Chamba-Lahoul tradition dating from about the 8th century onwards. They were mostly figures of the <sup>Avalakitesvara</sup> Buddha, and the Bodhisattva Padmapani in either standing or sitting postures. An early Mahishamardini of the Gupta-Kashmir type was seen many years ago at Naggar and was perhaps one of the earliest Hindu metal images in this region. It was about a foot high standing on an oblong plain plinth with just two moulding projections and had a round simple halo behind the head of the Goddess, her right rear hand held a sword high above the head in a horizontal position, the trident was plunged into the Buffalo-Demon at her feet. The proportions were refined and the bronze was of fine workmanship, though very simple in its details. The sword held horizontally above the head has been seen in several Kulu Mahishamardini bronzes and carvings.

The better earlier bronzes were of the Pratihara-Rajasthani Hill pattern of the 11th and 12th centuries. They were mostly Lakshmi-Narayana or Gauri-Shankar groups rarely Suryas, with elaborate back supports usually flanked by Elephants, Lions, Makaras and Peacocks. The nimbus or halo was of a many petaled rich floral type and rested against an architectural superstructure sometimes terminating in an Amalaka finial. In both these groups the Goddess was depicted sitting on the Gods' left knee in a slightly flexed pose and in the case of the Lakshmi-Narayana bronzes Vishnu was supported by a Garuda of a human type and in a



posture found in some medieval sculptures from Ajmer. The figures were elongated, well proportioned and wearing tall crowns. In the Vishnu bronzes the disk had a flame ascending from its hub while the long mace had a prominently ribbed terminal. The whole composition was well balanced and usually of very good workmanship. These finer bronzes may have been brought from outside the area, but their general style has been repeated in a number of later images, which while following the original prototypes, show a progressive deterioration of form and execution. These later bronzes could be of Vishnu, Durgā, Saraswati, Lakshmi-Nārāyan and Gaurī-Shankar groups also figures of Rama, Krishna, Radha and Ganesha. Many years ago the author has seen very beautiful and early Gaurī-Shankar bronzes of smaller size which have long since disappeared. They were of the square Prabhāvali type which were filled with many small figures of Deities arranged in rows, of very fine workmanship and were made of a bronze assuming a black patina, one could tentatively date them in the 9th century. Along with these was the pure folk idiom often following the above compositions and changing them to the common Kulu Folk art denominator. They are quaint, decorative and sometimes very interesting, as one finds in them an adaptation of local traditional ornaments and details. Some of them may be of quite an early period. In this idiom, we mostly find images of Devīs, Ganeshas, Vishnus and Krishnas, Gods who were always very near to the peoples heart. Durgā as Mahishamardini was <sup>the</sup> ~~also a~~ most popular image. Bronzes similar to those found in Kulu have been also found in Chamba and other neighbouring areas.

Metal images of the later Kashmir-Chamba type and Chamba-Lahoul style have ~~also~~ been occasionally seen in Kulu. Some were of very good quality others were again a local adaptation of these forms. Most of the early images were made of the Ashtadhātu bronze or the eight metal alloy and



as such held in great esteem by the people.

#### Hill Masks.

The next and most important group of metal images are the so called Hill Masks. They are usually hollow reliefs of heads and busts of Gods and Goddesses of different sizes, cast and chased by local craftsmen in the shape of plaques that are carried on parasol-surmounted palanquins and portable altars during festivals, sometimes a large number of masks being fixed on to the sloping front portion of the shrine. They are a very typical feature of the Hill Art of Kulu and the adjacent areas and often exhibit all the characteristic peculiarities of local styles and tradition. They are made of bronze or silver, with conventional designs and ornaments sometimes with inlays of other metals and seldom with stones like coral and turquoise.

The importance of these Hill Masks becomes all the greater, as a number of them are inscribed and dated and they thus provide us with very valuable documentation. They give us an insight into the styles and influences that prevailed at a particular time and also give us the dates and names of some of the Kulu rulers.

The oldest mask we know of at present in Kulu and one to which we have already referred earlier, is the very fine and beautiful mask of Mujani Devī at Nirmān dating from the 9th century, a rare and splendid example of this craft, while the earliest inscribed and dated Mask is the Mask of Hirman Devī at Manali bearing the date 1418 A.D. in the reign of Raja Udhran Pāl and the other is the Mask of Vishnu at Sajla, Kothi Barsai dated 1500 A.D., in the reign of Raja Sidh Pāl. There are a number of other inscribed and dated masks, but they are of later periods, mostly of the 17th and 18th centuries, though some of them are quite interesting.



### Utensils in Temples.

Utensils in temples were often decorated with quaint ornaments and little figurines of Gods or Godlings. Krishna and the Gopis were sometimes interlaced on the handles of oil lamps and ladles. Images of Garudas were also plentiful, some of better workmanship and sometimes of very unusual and decorative patterns. Crystal lingams set in fine bronze were common in the Shaivite shrines.

### Wood Carvings.

Wood carvings must have been very popular at one time. Most of the old houses had some type of carvings on their balconies, balusters, pillars and around the windows and door architraves. The carvings as found on some of the Hill Temples have already been discussed, but stray pieces of unattached wood carvings have also been found, probably parts of some old structures that have disintegrated or been dismantled long ago. In one of these wood carvings of Lakshmi-Nārāyan from Naggar, Vishnu is represented in his three faced aspect in a tall pointed crown astride upon Garuda with a small flexed Lakshmi on his knee and a Kirtimukha at the top, we can clearly discern in this carving the Chamba-Kashmiri influences. Vishnu has a small projecting chin and an elongated body, he holds a serrated <sup>sword</sup> ~~mace~~ and a flaming chakra, and both Vishnu and Lakshmi wear garlands of a prominent round knobbed pattern, identical with the garlands found in the early wood carvings of the Markūla Devī Temple in Chamba-Lahoul. The panel suffered from exposure, but is a typical early wood carving of superior workmanship.

The ornamental designs which we find in the wood carvings on houses repeat themselves in some of the old wooden chests of Kulu and Lahoul and are always typical of the so called Kulu Patterns. Here we find the scroll motif, the interlaced or plaited, often double plaited motif, snake and square designs, basket weave, geometric floral motifs, various swastika and cross motifs, the letter S motifs, undercut cube and triangular motifs, hammer motifs and a large variety of allied designs highly stylised and sometimes arranged in



rich geometric patterns. Some of these patterns as we shall show repeat themselves in the designs of the famous Kulu shawls.

These highly stylised and bold ornaments and patterns form one unified whole in the Folk Art expression of Kulu, quite unusual and striking, yet blending beautifully and expressing the general pattern of the old Kulu life.

Kulu Shawls  
and Blankets.

The Kulu shawl or blanket such as worn by women is a most distinct woollen garment with its beautiful designs in <sup>bright</sup> bold patterns and colours. These designs, and colour schemes were so typical of the Kulu Valley, of its people and their entire pattern of life that it is impossible not to mention them, however briefly, when discussing the arts of the Kulu Valley.

The importance of the Kulu Shawls lies in the fact that today practically the only living artistic expression surviving in Kulu, still continuing in however a lesser degree is the weaving of blankets and shawls in which the traditional designs and patterns are maintained even now and the colour combinations still remind of the original chromatic schemes.

The shawl or blanket worn as a dress piece is usually made of two narrow strips sewn together in the middle and is cleverly draped to form a dress. Both ends of the shawl have three bands of rich patterns, the lower band being usually the broadest. The spaces which separate the bands from one another are wider than the transverse ornamental bands and are of the same shade as the body of the shawl. They are often interspersed with large individual patterns which give them the appearance of another band. Counting these spaces as two extra bands, there are five successive bands in all. A fringe finishes both ends of the shawl.



The longitudinal borders or edges of the shawl may be just a simple strip of a different colour or may have a projecting design going into the body of the shawl from the strip, sometimes the entire strip may have a complex ornament. All these designs are woven in the tapestry weave, individually finished and are alike on both sides.

The body colours of the ornamented shawls may be white, black, brown and seldom of some brighter shade. Often the body of the shawl may be in broad chequered stripes ~~or~~ in a plaid pattern or small checks usually black and white or black, gray and white, sometimes brown and yellow.

The patterns used in the transverse borders are very varied and rich. They may have a variety of combinations of the cross pattern where the cross itself may be duplicated or reduplicated at its ends, or have a series of crosses enclosed in multicoloured borders giving them a rhomboidal effect from a distance, or the wavy and zig-zag pattern made up of many coloured squares or triangles, or bands of series of small crosses of many hues arranged diagonally across the bands. The same diagonal pattern may consist of triangles, giving it an effect of scales or waves, or again we may find the swastika motif, the characteristic letter S pattern, the hammer pattern and the popular diamond pattern with its endless combinations of differently coloured diamonds ingeniously arranged and distributed to form variegated and original patterns. Or again it may be a rich combination of them all, but whatever the patterns used, the colours chosen especially in the designs of the old shawls were beautifully blended and distributed, striking and bold, yet always with the certain restraint and harmony of good taste. Thus in the white shawls pinks may be mixed with yellows, reds, peridot greens, and blacks, or again oranges and reds with whites and greens. Blues will be interspersed with white, red, green and black accents. Especially striking were the rich black and deep brown shawls



with broad ornamental bands of red and orange, black and white and deep green designs.

The vivid colours used in the ornamental patterns of the shawls blend and harmonise with the hues of the surrounding nature and both these ornaments and colour schemes are in some ways one of the most typical, striking and true creative expressions of the Kulu people.

Jewellery consisted of necklaces, bracelets, earrings, nose rings, pendants and plaques worn over the chest or at the side, with strands of chains coming down or sweeping across to be fastened to the sides of the garment. Enamel on silver pendants are usually suspended from necklaces fastened around the neck, while plaques hang on chains fastened to the shoulder folds of the garments and are decorated with figures of Gods or with geometric and conventional floral designs, swastikas and crosses. Bright strings of coral, turquoise and amber beads are often used interspersed with silver. Silver ribbed beads of an elongated coriander pattern were also often used. Elongated small pendants of very ancient patterns or silver coins in great profusion sometimes in several rows are also worn interspersed with beads in necklaces. The ears are perforated all along the outer lobe and small or large, often ornamented rings are passed through them. Chains of filigree work may be worn at the side of the head from the center of the forehead towards the ears, with a small pendant in the middle of the forehead. In former days the nose rings often assumed exaggerated proportions and on festive occasions the women would come out literally laden with silver ornaments, gold being seldom used except in nose rings, earrings and nose pendants. The bracelets were of the narrow open Karā type plain or terminating in Lion or Griffin heads or of the broad Chūri type made of silver.

Local silversmiths were able workers in metals and



could fashion some very fine jewellery of good workmanship, well finished, rich and decorative.

Architecture  
of Dwelling  
Houses.

We shall not discuss here the architecture of dwelling houses, but it is of an equally striking and substantial design well adapted to local conditions. It is important because it preserves some old traditional features that must have come down from very early periods and constitutes the basis for the Hill Temple architecture which was an amalgamation of the Gupta and other early styles with the local architectural features. The houses were built of stone and wood with slate roofs usually of two stories with a balcony around the upper floor and remind us somewhat of a Swiss Chalet. Stone and dressed wooden logs alternate in the walls and give them strength. Carved pillars and balusters, arches, window frames and doors were a special feature of the old houses. Balconies of old residences were often decorated with figures of horsemen and peacocks carved on the baluster panels. A wide frame of rich ornamental designs is sometimes painted around the entrance of the houses. Red, ochre, white and yellow being used with taste and discrimination.

Some of the houses are tall imposing tower-like structures of many stories terminating in a projecting wooden superstructure, well built of fine selected materials. The Naggar Castle, the old residence of the Kulu Rajahs is a good example of traditional Kulu architecture, though rebuilt, it still maintains the original outlines, with its massive walls of cut stone and heavy Deodar beams. The central multistoried structure of the residence of the Thakurs at Gundla Lahoul has the typical Kulu features.



### PICTORIAL ART IN KULU

The art of painting in the region of Kulu as we know it today begins towards the close of the 17th century and continues right through the 18th and well into the 19th centuries. Whether there were some earlier periods of pictorial activity we are not in a position to say so today with certainty for want of definite and better documentation.

A birch bark Buddhist manuscript containing a few fairly large square illuminations of a very fine quality was seen by the author in the valley some forty years ago, but has long since disappeared and could never be traced again. It could tentatively be dated as of the tenth century. The use of Birch bark and other characteristics pointed to its provenance from neighbouring areas.

The Rāmāyana  
Set.

Up to date the most important and also perhaps earliest surviving document of pictorial art in Kulu is the Rāmāyana set formerly in the possession of the late Raja Raghubir Singh of Shangri<sup>3</sup> containing some 270 miniatures in an idiom having the basic characteristics of the Basohli school of painting whence came, according to tradition the artist or artists who painted the set. The ruling house of Kulu was related to the Rajas of Basohli.

This particular set was obviously painted by several artists and at different times. The miniatures are of several dimensions and vary in technique, they are also of different quality, but the set was a most interesting and unique pictorial collection with a certain unity underlying the entire series.

One can tentatively date it as in the reign of Raja Man Singh (1688-1719), though the family tradition traces its beginnings as earlier, during the reign of Raja Jagat Singh (1637-72) and Raja Bidi Singh (1673-1688).



The artist or artists who came from Basohli may have brought with them their pupils, which would explain the variations in style and quality and they appear to have later settled in the Kulu Valley. Families who claim to be descendants of these artists still live in the vicinity of Naggar.

The Kulu  
School of  
Paintings.

The early Hill idiom with its Basohli accents persisted in the valley for a very long time and we can find it in several other comparatively late sets and miniatures that are fortunately dated or can be dated with certainty. They provide us with a most important authentic key to the type of paintings and styles that were actually to be found in Kulu at a particular period. At one time the expression, "Kulu School" was a sort of collective, general term for a certain type of hill paintings exhibiting characteristics of the early hill schools with an admixture of popular folk art style, but not necessarily coming from any actually known area. Their exact provenance was often not known and moreover similar type of paintings have been found over a very wide area including the States of Mandi, Sukhet and Kangra. One may assume that extensive hill tracts were interconnected in this artistic expression and it would be difficult to classify with certainty these groups of paintings, unless they bear some specific mark of identification. All that may be said of a certain type of miniatures is that they could have been painted in the Kulu region.

It is of interest that hardly any Kulu miniatures reflect the true architecture, dress and scenery of the country which is so characteristic of this area. Snow scenes are almost unknown. Yet, a parallel school of Basohli-Kulu affinities that worked in Lahoul and of which unfortunately very few examples are known at present, depicts the characteristic costumes of those regions.

One is inclined to believe that the artists followed a



certain fixed, borrowed tradition and worked in an idiom or fashion acceptable to the patrons who formed the upper class. It is true one may occasionally find the Gaddi dress, but the Gaddi dress is not the true Kulu attire.

The quality of miniatures actually found in the valley varies greatly. From the earlier and also popular Hill idiom with its more primitive approach and often crude technique to the finest miniatures of the later Kangra Style that must have been brought into the valley at different periods by descendants and members of the ruling families. They might have been painted in the valley itself by some visiting artists, but for lack of documentation we must choose the first theory.

Portrait of  
Raja Tedhi  
Singh, the  
Bhagavata  
Purana and  
Madhu Mālatī  
Set.

The next important documentation of the mid and late eighteenth century school of painting in Kulu are the portraits of Raja Tedhi Singh (1742-1767) of Kulu, the later but important set of the Bhāgavata Purāna<sup>4</sup>, the set of Madhu Mālatī<sup>5</sup> and some other paintings by the same artist or of the same atelier.

Both the Madhu Mālatī set and the set of the Bhāgavata Purāna were painted by the artist Bhagwāndās who worked in Raghunāthpura in the reign of Raja Pritam Singh (1767-1806) of Kulu. The Bhāgavata set bears the date of 1794 A.D. while the set of Madhu Mālatī 1799 A.D. We can assume that these dates must have been the dates of the completion of both these sets and in the five intervening years Bhagwān could have painted some other paintings. Raghunāthpura undoubtedly stands for modern Sultanpur which was the capital of Kulu at the time when these sets were painted as it remains to this day, though there was another place in Kulu by the name of Raghupura. Portraits of Rulers such as the portraits of Raja Tedhi Singh provide us with valuable information as they



show the common characteristics and transitions to the later miniatures. Perhaps some yet unknown data may come to light, but it would seem that in the time of Raja Man Singh when the Rāmāyana was painted there was no other important school of art in Kulu since the work was entrusted to artists from outside.

The Rāmāyana  
Set.

The Rāmāyana set though it obviously contains paintings painted by different artists and at different periods has a certain continuity of style and detail. The buildings are of the early Basohli type in bright and striking colours with most original and unusual architectural features. The background in many miniatures is of a resonant golden yellow against which the bright blue, burnt sienna, red, pink and white architectural details of buildings stand out with great clarity. The angular position of walls accentuated by the dark patches of doorways and crisp ornaments give strength and richness to the composition. In some of the earlier paintings of the set, gold or silver were used in the ornaments and details and the design often projects into the borders of the paintings.

The personages depicted have features of several types, some with long noses and sloping foreheads, some with short noses and some with heavy chins. The younger male personages including Rama often have long wavy side locks ending in a prominent curl. Many of the coats, (Jamah), worn by the men are prominently striped and sometimes have a frilled flap on both sides of the chest. They wear a variety of turbans, some quite small and of the earlier type, others have tall turbans slanting backwards with a broad band across them. Some of the men have a sort of beaded yajnopavita over their left shoulder.

The women wear short cholis with frilled collars of a different shade to the choli, a full skirt and a dupatta



or odhni draped over the skirt forming a wide flare in front and carried over the back of the head. Sometimes they wear a shawl over the head and shoulders. They wear black bajubands and tassels and earrings of black circles with a small black cup like projection from which hang thin black threads. Some of the earrings are of a circular floral design with or without a pendant. Two prominent black tassels occasionally hang from their shoulders and the same are found in some of the men's costumes. The women generally have the same facial characteristics as the men and have large oblong eyes with a small pupil.

The treatment of trees is most decorative with complex masses of conventionalised foliage and elaborately designed stems. Among them we find shapes that suggest pine trees, poplars, cypresses and a variety of creepers interspersed with purely imaginary, but nevertheless striking vegetation.

The horizon is high and the background below it can be of any colour to suit the composition. It can be brown, light or dark green, orange pink or yellow. Though not all the paintings of the Rāmāyana set are of uniform quality, yet in its best examples it has great freshness and unsophisticated directness, it has a crispness both in design and colouring and an originality not often met with in other similar sets.

The number of shades used in these paintings is quite extensive and their distribution and combinations are original and striking. The sky is usually simple consisting of a strip of blue with longish clouds that may be lighter or darker than the sky or may be just a sharply shaded strip of blue.

The whole set is a rich and striking collection of paintings and was certainly the most important known



As a rule like in the earlier Rāmāyana paintings or the portraits of Raja Tedhi Singh the contours of the face, the features and the hands are usually outlined in red while the eyes and eyebrows are in black.



pictorial document in the Kulu Valley before its dispersal.

Paintings of  
Bhagwāndās.

The paintings of Bhagwāndās are distinguished by a simple yet well balanced colour scheme, a forceful and direct composition and a careful, though sometimes stiff design. Burnt sienna, brown, ochre, vermillion, peridot green, mauve, yellow and soft blues predominate.

*As a rule like*  
like in the earlier Rāmāyana paintings or the portraits of Raja Tedhi Singh the contours of the face, *the features and* and hands except for the outline of the eyes and eyebrows are usually in red.

The personages in both the Bhāgavata set and the set of Madhu Malatī show the same facial characteristics, the typical high heavy foreheads and short noses in the profiles facing right, while the profiles facing left have a more slanting outline. We must attribute this to a peculiarity of the artists hand. The trees are comparatively simple and stereotype and clearly show later characteristics.

Other miniatures by the same artist or by his school make use of an effective orange-ochre background. Some of the facial types found in Kulu miniatures are also found in paintings of other hill tracts, hence it is difficult to ascribe to Kulu a specific type, except that it may be on the heavier side.

Rāgamālā  
Paintings.

A number of Rāgamālā paintings of more or less the same period and of related characteristics have burnt umber, powder blue or red backgrounds and make use of gold. The borders may be yellowish, brown ochre, powder blue, red or of no colour at all. The average miniature is not of large size.

Murals.

Murals must have been an accepted and popular means of decoration for the palaces of Rulers and residences of prominent families. Unfortunately such murals have survived



in only a few instances. The old residence of the Kulu Rajas, the Shish Mahal Palace at Sultanpur had a number of such murals before the earthquake of 1905, when most of them have been destroyed. What little remains belongs to the late periods of Raja Pritam Singh and Raja Bikram Singh (1806-1816).

The murals in the Shish Mahal Palace depict religious subjects such as the marriage of Rama, the Abode of the Devi, and the Krishna Lila, but there are also panels with the equestrian portraits of Raja Bikram Singh who is shown with his retinue and also hunting scenes.

The murals are usually on a white background and some of the compositions are arranged in vertical narrow panels or bands containing various episodes. They reflect the deterioration of style, the figures are short and often clumsy and the technique is correspondingly inferior, but the general effect is quite pleasing.

These areas, though they may have had periods of comparative quiescence as far as the art of miniature painting is concerned, were surrounded by areas where advanced Buddhist painting prevailed. The Kashmir artists who painted murals in Spiti<sup>6</sup> and in the neighbouring kingdom of Gugē in the 11th century must have travelled along these tracts and may have passed through the Kulu Valley.

Communications with Spiti, Ladak and Gugē were either by the upper routes through Lahoul or along the lower Sutlej valley road and these contacts must have been maintained in various degrees all along.

The pictorial tradition in the neighbouring Buddhist areas continued and survived upto quite recent times and banner paintings were being produced at many monasteries. Some of the earlier banners are of very fine quality and technique and reveal a living and very developed tradition. Thus Kulu was never really isolated from advanced pictorial



schools, either from the Indian side of its borders or from the Buddhist areas that surrounded the valley from the North, East and South East.

Murals in  
Lahoul and  
Spiti.

Traces of very early murals exist in neighbouring Lahoul while Spiti still preserves the precious records of the rich Buddhist-Kashmir pictorial tradition of the 11th century.

Since paintings of a high standard are always few in number, a large number of indifferent paintings does not exclude the possibility of some very fine paintings co-existing in limited numbers, but in the case of Kulu with its limited resources one can hardly expect to find something exceptional and better than the Rāmāyana set, the portraits of Tedhi Singh, or the paintings of Bhagwānās as these were the miniatures painted for the Rulers and Rulers usually invited the best artists to work for them.

As already mentioned some of the very fine Rāgamālā miniatures found in Kulu must have been brought from outside, as they are in the pure and advanced style and technique as we find it in Kangra, and other neighbouring areas.

With all that, Kulu had a very interesting and original pictorial tradition which was rather stable because of the remoteness of the area and also perhaps because of the limited scope which prevailed within its boundaries.

### EPILOGUE

The Valley  
of the Gods.

Having considered some of the highlights and aspects of the arts as found in the Kulu region, one can turn back and take another glance afresh at the pattern of life which survived after assimilating the successive waves and often trials of history and maintained up to quite recently its own particular, unique and vital expression.



44

Above all the manifold influences that have poured into this valley in the course of centuries stands the inherent character of the Kulu Valley, the rich tradition and the specific mode of life with all its expressions as it manifested itself in Kulu and was in some ways the true natural expression of the Kulu people. We found it in the well built houses of Kulu with their typical and striking architecture, in the rich Kulu Folk Art, stone, wood or bronze images, in the enigmatic smile of the Kulu Masks and in the decorations, carvings and ornaments on temples and shrines, with their typical rich designs so characteristic of the valley. We still find it in the dress of the Kulu women with its bright colours and bold patterns worn on festive occasions at the numerous fairs and feasts when all the Gods in their palanquins and <sup>portable</sup> altars come out to keep company and mingle with the richly clad crowds, decked in their striking heavy silver ornaments. We find it in the reverberating sound of the long curved trumpets and flutes keeping time to the beat of drums, in the smoke of Juniper and Deodar incence, in the sparkle of Monal and Kwahta feathers worn in the caps of the swaying male dancers dressed in their original and dignified attire and in the colourful songs and countless tales and legends that formed the background of Kulu's rich faith. These and so <sup>many</sup> ~~such~~ more are the true expressions of Kulu's creative spirit, in them still linger and through them express themselves the ancient faith, tradition and hopes of the people. This is the living bridge across the waters of time that links us with the ancient realms of the Upanishads and the Vedas, still alive and vital as it always was throughout the thousands of years of Kulu's rich history.

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- 45
1. The dates of the Kulu Rulers as well as other chronological data have been based on the 'History of the Punjab Hill States' by J. Hutchison and J. PH. Vogel, Lahore 1933 and the 'Punjab District Gazetteers' Volume XXX A Kangra District - Lahore 1917.
  2. 'The early wooden temples of Chamba' by Hermann Goetz. Memoirs of the Kern Institute No.1 Leyden 1955.
  3. 'Basohli Paintings'  
M.S. Randhawa D.Sc. I.C.S.  
The Publications Division (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting)  
Government of India - 1959.
  4. 'Pahari Miniature Painting'  
Karl Khandalavala  
The New Book Company, Bombay - 1958.
  5. Lalit Kala  
Vol. 3-4 April 1956 March 1957  
An illustrated manuscript of Madhu Malatī and other paintings from Kulu.  
Jagdish Mittal  
Lalit Kala Academi.
  6. G. Tucci - 'I templi del Tibet Occidentale e loro Simbolismo Artistico'
    1. 'Spiti e Kunavar' (Indo-Tibetica III) - Rome 1935
    2. 'Tsaparang' - Rome 1936.



PAGE NO.

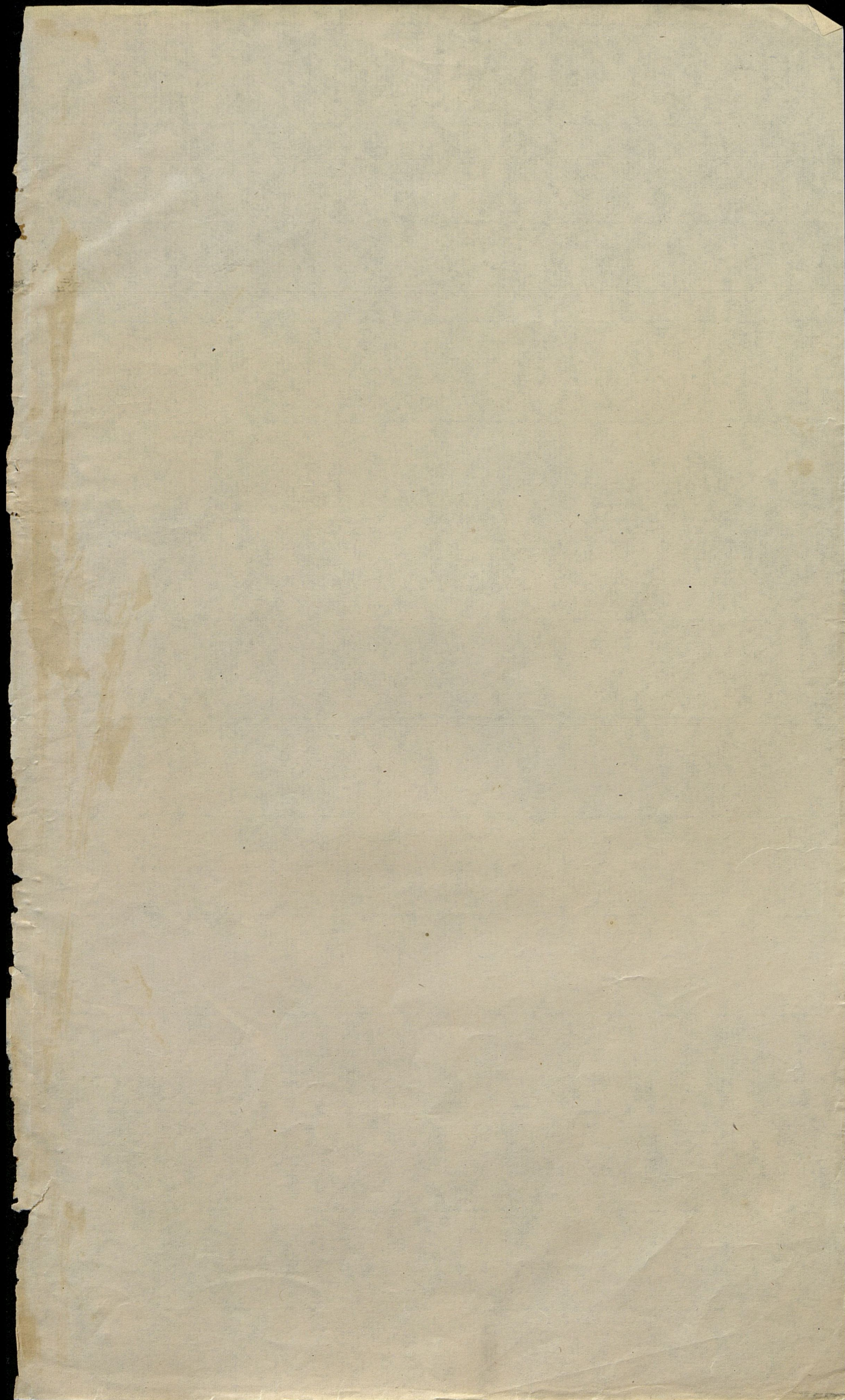
- |     |    |   |
|-----|----|---|
| 3   | .. | 7th line - deleted '7th'<br>8th line - added 'and possibly earlier'<br>20th line - added 'This period coincides with the expansion of Kashmir and Chamba-Brahmapura which may explain the prevalence of Kashmir prototypes dating approximately from that period.'  |
| 8   | .. | Footnote 'Since these lines have been written the temple has been grievously disfigured by ignorant restorations. Many details have been irretrievably lost including the bronze lion head on the door of the temple.'  |
| 10  | .. | 8th line - instead of similar 'related'<br>20th line - 'Similar details can be found in Devi Prini Temple not far from Jagatsukh'.  |
| 12  | .. | 32nd line 'sub-continental'   |
| 13  | .. | 7th line - 'chapels, the Ganga and Yamuna reliefs flanking the entrance and small figures of apsaras as part of the ornamental bands and belonging to the original shrine can be found there at present. The few images found in the sanctum though of interest were obviously brought there from outside.'   |
| 14  | .. | 12th line - delete comma after Trimurtis.   |
| 17  | .. | 1 & 2 lines Delete the brackets.<br>6th line added 'are common to all the reliefs'.<br>16th line instead of <u>mace</u> - 'serrated sword'  |
| 19. | .. | 5th line 'The figure of Ganesha is a traditional image in the style of the other two panels. It is also well designed and elegant and except for the broken top portion is well preserved. Of special interest are the two finely sculpted lions supporting the throne of Ganesha, they are shown with crossed front paws, a posture that originated in Gandhara and has been repeated in bronze sculptures of the North-Western tradition and Chamba. These three sculptures though following traditional canons and ornamental details have a character all of their own. There is an originality in their treatment which makes them unique and striking.' |
| 20. | .. | 21st line 'The smaller temple of Shiva nearby is also an early shrine and contains a fine stone group of Gauri-Shanker on Nandi.'   |
| 22. | .. | 19th line added 'at Bajaura'  |



PAGE NO.

24. 17th line - 'This beautiful, powerful and dignified figure must have been part of some outstanding temple long since lost. A number of other important sculptures can be seen in the vicinity of the Bajaura temple but of all these the figure of Vishnu is the most important. Many of the sculptures have marked early Kashmir characteristics and according to tradition have been brought here from neighbouring shrines.'
- 24th line instead of them 'these'
25. 31st line 'A number of good early sculptures can be seen around the small Shiva Temple at Jagatsukh and of these a Mahishamardini relief is particularly interesting.'
- add para
27. 6th line '17th century by Raja Man Singh'
- 11th line add 'Avalakiteshwara'
28. 28th line delete also a 'the'
- 32nd line delete also
30. 21st line delete mace 'sword'.
31. 10th line delete bold 'bright'
32. 9th line delete or
40. 7th line 'As a rule like in the earlier Rāmāyana paintings or the portraits of Raja Tedhi Singh the contours of the face, the features and the hands are usually outlined in red while the eyes and eyebrows are in black.'
43. 15th line add 'portable'
- 24th line delete much 'many'







The Kulu shawl or dress as worn by women is a most striking and original woolen textile with its beautiful geometrical and conventionalised designs in bold patterns and colours.

*These designs, patterns and colour schemes were so typical of the Kulu Valley, of its people and their entire pattern of life, that it is impossible not to mention them, when describing the life of the Kulu Valley.*

The shawl as a dress piece is usually made of two narrow strips sewn together in the middle <sup>and is worn draped closely draped to form a dress,</sup> ~~and terminating at both ends~~ <sup>of the shawl have</sup> in three bands of rich patterns, the lower band being usually the <sup>broader</sup> ~~widest~~, the spaces <sup>which</sup> ~~separate the bands~~ <sup>from one another</sup> are usually two, wider than the transverse ornamental bands and are of the same <sup>shade</sup> colour, as the body of the shawl. They are often interspersed with large individual patterns which gives them the appearance of another band. Counting these spaces as two extra bands, there are five successive bands in all. A fringe finishes both the ends of the shawl.

The longitudinal borders of the shawl may be a simple strip of a different colour or may have a <sup>projecting</sup> design going into the body of the shawl from the strip, sometimes the entire strip may have a complex design. <sup>Ornaments</sup> *The designs are woven in the Tapestry Weave individually finished, along on both sides.*

The colours of the shawls may be White, Black, Brown or seldom of some brighter shade. Often the shawl may be in broad chequered stripes of a plaid pattern, usually Black and White or Black, Grey and White, sometimes Brown and Yellow. The patterns used in the transverse borders are very varied and rich. They may have a variety of cross patterns where the cross itself is duplicated or reduplicated at the ends, or ~~may~~ <sup>may</sup> have a series of <sup>small</sup> ~~crosses~~ <sup>SS</sup> inclosed in multicoloured borders giving a rhomboidal effect from a distance, or the wavy and zig zag pattern made up of <sup>many coloured</sup> ~~multicoloured~~ squares or triangles or bands of series of small crosses of many hues arranged diagonally across the bands. The same diagonal pattern may consist of triangles, giving it an effect of scales, or <sup>waves</sup> ~~again~~ we may find the <sup>motif</sup> Swastika and the characteristic S pattern. *and the*

*and the popular diamond pattern with its endless combination of differently coloured diamonds ingeniously arranged and distributed to form variegated and original patterns.*



499  
and both ~~the~~ ornament ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> colors schemes used  
Art in some ways one of the most typical  
and striking and true Creative Expressions of the Indian people.



Again — <sup>it may be</sup> ~~A~~ rich combinations of them all. <sup>but</sup> whatever be the patterns used, the colours chosen in the <sup>designs</sup> pattern of old shawls were beautifully <sup>blended and</sup> distributed, <sup>and bold</sup> striking, <sup>the</sup> but always with a certain restraint and harmony. <sup>of good taste</sup> These designs and patterns were so typical of the Kulu Valley, of its people, <sup>and</sup> of their entire pattern of life that it is impossible not to mention them when one speaks of the art in the Kulu Valley.

<sup>on page 1</sup> <sup>diamond</sup> The rhomboidal pattern with its endless combinations of differently coloured rhomboids arranged to form variegated patterns was also very popular. <sup>and original</sup>

1. The shawls have fringes at the ends
2. The ornaments are in the tapestry weave individually finished.
3. These patterns are cleverly arranged and set off in different colours, so as to give a different effect from a distance.

Rhomboids alternating in sizes and in different combinations provide a rich pattern which may be further enriched through the introduction of some other elements and made infinitely rich by different combinations of colours.

as to end

The vivid colours of the ornaments of the shawls patterns <sup>damaged with</sup> blend and <sup>after</sup> ~~the~~ blues of the surrounding nature <sup>express</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>pure</sup> separation in both the <sup>intense</sup> sense of and feel and both the ornaments, <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>creative</sup> and the colour schemes used are the true expression of the creative Kulu people.



distinct and striking, yet blending beautifully into the general pattern of the old Kulu life.

*Shank.*  
Jewellery consisted of necklaces, bracelets, earrings, Nose rings, pendants and <sup>the</sup> plaques worn <sup>over the chest</sup> in the middle or at the sides with strands of chains coming down or sweeping across to be fastened to the other <sup>side</sup> end of the garment. Enamel on silver. <sup>were are often usually</sup> pendants <sup>are</sup> suspended from necklaces fastened around the neck, or <sup>while plaques</sup> hanging on chains <sup>suspended</sup> from the shoulder folds of the garments <sup>are decorated</sup> with figures of Gods or with geometric and conventional floral designs; <sup>Swasika's crosses</sup> Bright strings of coral, turquoise and amber beads are <sup>often</sup> interspersed with silver. Silver ribbed beads of an elongated coriander pattern were <sup>also</sup> often used. <sup>Elongated silver small pendants beads or</sup> Silver coins, sometimes <sup>great</sup> in profusion <sup>and sometimes in several rows</sup> are fixed to the necklaces. The ears are perforated <sup>also worn as pendants</sup> all along the lobe and small <sup>often</sup> ornamental rings are passed through them. <sup>and the nose rings</sup> Formally on festive occasions the women would come out <sup>literally</sup> covered with silver ornaments, gold being seldom used except in nose rings, earrings and <sup>pendants</sup>. The bracelets were of the narrow, <sup>type often</sup> open carra terminating in Lion or Griffin heads or <sup>of</sup> the broad Churi type made of silver. <sup>Local silversmiths were able to</sup> Some very fine jewellery - Jewellery was often of very good local workmanship, well finished, rich and decorative. =

We shall not discuss here the ordinary architecture of dwelling houses, but it is of a <sup>striking</sup> very fine and substantial <sup>Design</sup> pattern. <sup>well adapted to local conditions.</sup> The houses were well built of stone and wood with slate roofs and <sup>remind us somewhat</sup> often were of the Swiss Chalet. <sup>Stone and wood alternate in the walls and gables</sup> Carved pillars and balusters, arches, window frames and doors were a special feature of the old houses. Balconies of old residences <sup>the</sup> were often <sup>decorated with</sup> carved figures of horsemen and peacocks along the baluster panels and remind one of the architecture of the Swiss Chalet. Some of the houses were <sup>imposing</sup> tall structures of many stories well built of fine selected materials. A wide frame of ornamental designs is <sup>sometimes</sup> often painted around the entrance. Red, ochre, white <sup>and yellow</sup> were used <sup>with taste</sup> for discrimination.



My Dear Dewan Sahib,

Please accept my grateful thanks  
for your kind and very helpful  
letter of Sept 10<sup>r</sup>.

~~I specially value your~~

Words of appreciation coming from a  
person for whom one has given  
~~high~~ <sup>and affectionate</sup> ~~and sincere~~  
special regard ~~of~~ always held  
& quite a special significance.

With Madame and myself. Sent  
 you my affectionate warmest greetings,  
 and we hope to shall soon forward  
 to ~~that~~ <sup>the</sup> pleasure of seeing you again  
~~before long~~  
~~in our father's during one of our~~  
 visits to Germany.



As for entrance is in fine facade of  
 the ~~Devi~~ <sup>Devi</sup> Temple in Chamba -  
~~that~~ The goes back to the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup>  
 Century and follows the <sup>late</sup> Gupta Tradition.

Prabhuval?  
~~Astha~~ <sup>Astha</sup> Astha Dhatu?  
 Astha Dhatu

Manara's Parras?

Bhim Sen

\* ~~the~~ conquered the Demon Pandi who -  
 must have been some aboriginal ruler.

Prabhu  
 As real  
 parivara dhatu  
 attending P. D.



SCULPTURES, WOOD CARVINGS, BRONZES & MASKS *and Tablets*

Stone sculptures, reliefs, carvings, fragments of ornamental details lie scattered over the whole length of the Kulu Valley.

Once they must have formed part of some temples or shrines long since fallen to ruin and now lie untended in courtyards of other temples and buildings or simply in open fields.

In age they may date from the 8th or 9th centuries in their earlier examples and through all the later centuries right up to fairly modern times.

We can find some fine examples of the late Gupta tradition, sculptures that show Chalukian influences or again with Pratihara-Rajastani and Kashmiri-Chamba features. The finer sculptures and carvings are interspersed with the quaint examples of folk art that are often difficult to date.

Beautiful carvings of door jambs, lintels, key stones can be found in the vicinity of the old sites at Makarsa at Urla and right up the valley to Jagatsukh and the old fort of Manali village where a number of fine carvings and details of mouldings dating from about the eighth century and representing fragments of ruined shrines can be seen in its vicinity. A fine Trimurti found nearby is also part of the some ancient temple. The rich and fine floral scroll motifs link them with the sculptural details of Bajaura or Masrur.

Practically all the old inhabited places of importance like the sites of the old capitals of Nast at Jagatsukh, Naggar and Makarsa have some interesting sculptural fragments or documentation, sometimes exhibiting a marked difference in style and provenance. An early Devi relief from Manali has the early Brahmar - Kashmiri characteristics while some sculptures at Nast (the old Jagatsukh) have both Rajastani and Chamba influences.



An interesting early Mahishamardini relief can be seen at Jagatsukh.

Naggar likewise had a number of early sculptures mostly of Durga, Surya, Vishnu and Lakshmi-Narayan, Narsingh, Gauri-Shankar and Ganesha, <sup>reliefs</sup> besides some equestrian statues purporting to be Guga Chauhan, but obviously sometimes depicting female riders.

Perhaps one the most outstanding and important, independent sculptures in the valley is the figure of Vishnu in the compound of the Basheshar Mahadev temple at Bajaura in what appears to be a Gupta-Pratihara style. It is a very beautiful sculpture of great strength and dignity, yet great simplicity. Unfortunately it has been broken at the feet, but the pedestal with the feet stands nearby. Vishnu is represented with four arms. Two back arms are broken at the wrists, but being held downwards and slightly outwards, they may have rested upon two attendants, since there are two projections on either side of the long base that may indicate the place where the attendants stood. Vishnu is shown against an elaborate multfigured Prabha of the type found in a Vishvarupa Vishnu figure from Kanauj. Like that figure it also has its five avatar aspects, the smaller Fish and Tortoise heads being superimposed upon the <sup>Boar</sup> Varaha and Lion heads. Above the crown is what appears to be the head of a horse. The aspect assumed to destroy Hyagriva.

The face is of the fine Gupta type somewhat eroded, but still quite clear. It strongly resembles some of the faces at Masrur. The well preserved lobe of the left ear shows most excellent workmanship.

The crown is of the square semicircular type rising to a point in the center, somewhat like the later Nepalese crowns, with a rich central floral design. The hair falls in thick locks to the shoulders, heavy circular earrings with a beaded or ribbed outer edge also rest upon the shoulders.



Vishnu wears two necklaces, an inner string of single beads and an outer double string with a pendant in the center. He wears thin beaded armlets near the armpits and narrow bracelets. The flower in Vishnu's right hand is a lotus with reversed petals held facing backwards towards the figure. A conch is in the left hand resting upon his thigh. The girdle is a narrow and simple one. The dhoti is short and of equal length on both legs. The long floral garland is relieved by three large round flowers, over the arms and below the knees. Between the feet is a damaged projection that might have been the head of a Prithvi-Lakshmi.

It is a very beautiful, strong and dignified figure and must have been part of some outstanding temple long since lost. A number of other sculptures can be seen in the vicinity but of all these the figure of Vishnu is the most important.

Along with the fine early sculptures of accomplished workmanship we find the local idiom which follows closely the early Pratihara-Rajasthani tradition on the one hand and the Kashmir-Chamba style on the other. But in most of them the figures are already short and squatty and the workmanship is often clumsy, though the prototypes must have been of quite a pure early style.

A Vishnu relief from Naggar has all the characteristics of the Kashmiri-Chamba tradition, with <sup>his</sup> two hands resting upon the heads of two female Chauri-Bearers who besides the fly whisks also hold flowers in their hands and stand in flexed poses typical of some Kashmiri groups. The figure of Vishnu has a crown consisting of five round floral elements resting on a band of round beaded knobs, with long curls on either side of the head. He wears a necklace of a single strand of beads and simple beaded bracelets. The earrings are heavy of the round and beaded edge type often found in sculptures and bronzes from Kashmir-Chamba to Rajasthan ~~even~~ and even in Bihar (Kurkihar). Vishnu holds a tall mace and chakra in his rear hands. A heavy floral garland falls over his shoulders and arms and under his knees, relieved by a single flower below.



A decorative scarf billows out <sup>laterally</sup> horizontally over the arms. A thin Yajnopavita falls from Vishnu's left shoulder and he wears a beaded belt with loops and tassels.

The figure of the God stands upon the shoulders not of a Garuda, but of a prominent female figure of which only the upper portion just below the heavy breasts is shown. Very likely a Prithvi-Lakshmi motif which is often found at the feet of Vishnu figures from Kashmir. This sculpture illustrates the close contacts with the Chamba-Kashmir school. *Though this sculpture is a later adaptation of some early original.*

There is a large Gauri-Shankar stone group in the Gauri-Shankar temple at Naggar, but though imposing in size it is fairly late. The God with the Goddess upon his <sup>left</sup> knee is shown sitting on Nandi whose head is turned towards them. The figures are squat and heavy though the sculpture follow an early prototype. Two flying Gandharvas with garlands are in the upper corners. Both figures have the typical small protruding chin as we find in some Chamba <sup>-Lahoul</sup> sculptures, besides some other features of the Chamba-Kashmir school. The sculpture is in good condition and is the largest group at Naggar.

Fountain stones are not numerous in Kulu, but one occasionally comes across some water spouts with heads of lions or Makkaras. Some decorative panels with figures and ornamental designs still survive near the outlets of some springs, as for instance at Bashist near Manali.

This tank is <sup>decorated</sup> with a fairly large panel of ornamental and floral designs and figures of Gods. The panel builds itself up through a series of receding horizontal <sup>bands</sup> mouldings into a prominent rectangular panel with a fine Trimurti in its center set in a round frame. Above it is an oblong horizontal panel with a double petaled floral roundel flanked by two small standing figures with folded hands and ending in side brackets of floral design. This panel rests upon two Lion heads that project well beyond the panel. The mouldings of the lower portion contain floral motifs, the flower vessel motif, figures of Gods and



(2)



page 22

56

It was ~~only about~~ <sup>about a</sup> foot high. Standing on an oblong <sup>single</sup> platform would just two mounting projections. It had a round simple flange below & head and the right rear had held a sword high above the head in a known position. The trident was plunged into the buffalo <sup>at the feet</sup> ~~head~~ <sup>and was held up</sup> ~~by the tail~~. The perforations were elongated and <sup>the bronze was of</sup> fine workmanship, shaft very simple. It was of a Ash to a horn alloy. The sword held <sup>horizontally</sup> ~~high~~ above the head has been seen in several Native American bronzes and carvings. -



The better bronzes were of the Pratihara-Rajasthan  
 Hill pattern. They were mostly Lakshmi Narayan or  
 Jami-Shankar groups with Elaborate  
 back-supports ~~and Patters~~. ~~The actual~~  
 flanked by Elephants, Lions, <sup>makaras</sup> ~~Makaras~~  
 and peacocks. The <sup>Nimbus</sup> Halo was  
 of a many petaled rich floral type  
 and vested against an architectural  
 superstructure <sup>often</sup> terminating in an <sup>avaloka</sup> ~~avaloka~~  
 finial. In both these groups the Goddess  
 was depicted sitting on the Gods' left knee  
 in a slightly flexed post and in the  
 case of the <sup>Lakshmi</sup> ~~Lakshmi~~ Narayan bronzes  
<sup>Vishnu was</sup> ~~they were~~ supported by a female of  
 a human type as found in some sculpture  
 from Ajmer ~~in Rajasthan~~.  
 The figures were elongated and well  
 proportioned wearing tall crowns, ~~and~~  
~~in the case of~~ <sup>in</sup> Vishnu bronzes  
 the disk had a flame ascending from  
 its hub ~~of the disk~~ <sup>the disk</sup> the base  
 had a prominently ribbed terminal. — P.T.O.



The whole composition was well  
balanced and of very good  
workmanship.



Goddesses of which Mahishamardini is prominent, Makkaras and various other ornamental details. The large square niche<sup>or aperture</sup> at the bottom of the panel has a Ganesha in the key stone moulding, ~~but the figure inside the niche is of very crude and recent workmanship.~~

A now discarded large cut stone water tank at Tawa above Naggar had some carved features, but the masonry has crumbled in many places and has been used for subsequent buildings.

<sup>a number of</sup> Memorial stones of the Kulu Rajas <sup>with</sup> ~~containing many~~ figures of Rajas and Ranis can be found in the valley. Below the main road leading to the Naggar Castle and not far from it is a large number of them, but they are of indifferent workmanship and some are in the crude folk idiom. Many of them have suffered from exposure, while others <sup>sank</sup> sank into the soil. They show equestrian figures of Rajas surrounded by female figures and in their general pattern conform to similar stones found in neighbouring states.

No large bronzes of importance are known in Kulu. The few bronzes like the bronzes at Naggar or Sultanpur are of late date and reported to have been brought from lower India and Rampur-Beshahr. The Mahishamardini bronze in the Tripura Sundari Temple and the Vishnu bronze in the Vishnu Temple both at Naggar though of good size are not of great merit. According to tradition they have been brought in the 16th century.

The smaller bronzes must have been quite numerous at one time and they belonged to a number of schools, the earlier bronzes as already mentioned were Buddhist of the North Western, Kashmir and Chamba tradition dating from about the 8th century onwards. An early Mahishamardini of the Gupta-Kashmir type was seen many years ago at Naggar and was perhaps one of the earliest Hindu metal images in this region. ~~Several~~ <sup>also</sup> Lakshmi-Narayan groups of the better Hill Pratihara-Rajasthani style of the 11th-12th centuries were seen in Kulu. The Garuda in these bronzes is in the typical posture found in some Rajasthani sculptures from Ajmer and the elaborate Prabhas have Makkaras, Lions, Elephants and Peacocks along their outer edges of the Prabha. These finer bronzes may have been brought



or cast outside the area, but their general style has been repeated in a number of other later bronzes, which while following the original prototypes, show a progressive deterioration of style and execution. <sup>These later</sup> <sup>images are</sup> <sup>could be</sup> They include figures of Surya, Vishnu, Durga, <sup>and</sup> <sup>images in</sup> <sup>also</sup> Saraswati, Lakshmi-Narayan and Gauri-Shankar groups ~~and also~~ figures of Krishna, Radha and Ganesha. The author has ~~also~~ seen very beautiful and early Gauri-Shankar bronzes of smaller size which have now disappeared. They were of the square Prabhavati <sup>e. li</sup> type <sup>which were</sup> filled with many small figures of Deities, <sup>and were</sup> made of a bronze assuming a block patina <sup>a</sup> and of very fine workmanship.

Along with these was the pure ~~folk~~ folk idiom often following the above compositions and changing them to the common Kulu Folk art denomination. <sup>or</sup> They are quaint, decorative and very interesting, as one finds in them an adaptation of local ornaments and details. Some of them may have been of quite an early period. Bronzes similar to some Kulu bronzes have also been found in Chamba.

Bronzes of the later Kashmir-Chamba type and Chamba-Lahoul style have also been seen in Kulu. Some are of good quality others are again a local adaptation of these forms. The early bronzes <sup>were</sup> ~~are~~ made of the Ashtadhatu bronze or the eight metal alloy and as such are held in great esteem by the people.

The next most important group of metal images are the so called Hill Masks. They are usually hollow reliefs of heads and busts of Gods and Goddesses of different sizes, cast and chased by local craftsmen in the shape of plaques that are carried on parasol-surmounted palanquins and portable altars during festivals, sometimes <sup>portion</sup> a large number of masks being fixed onto the sloping front <sup>portion</sup> surface of the shrine. They are a very typical feature of the Hill Art of Kulu and the adjacent areas and often exhibit all the characteristic peculiarities of local styles and tradition. They are made of bronze or silver, with conventional designs and ornaments sometimes with inlays of other metals and seldom with stones like coral and turquoise.

Insert from page 24



The importance of these Hill Masks becomes all the greater, since a number of them are inscribed and dated and they thus provide a very valuable documentation. They give us an insight into the styles and influences that prevailed at a particular time and they also give us the dates and names of some of the Kulu rulers.

The oldest mask we know of at present, <sup>in Kulu and</sup> one to which we have already referred earlier, is the very fine and beautiful mask of Mujani Devi at Nirmand dating from the 9th century, a rare and splendid example of this craft. <sup>while</sup> The earliest inscribed and dated Mask ~~known~~ is the Mask of Hirman Devi at Manali bearing the date 1418 A.D. in the reign of Raja Udhran Pal and the other is the Mask of Vishnu at Sajla, Kothi Barsai dated 1500 A.D., in the reign of Raja Sidh Pal. There are a number of other inscribed and dated masks but they are of later periods though some of them are quite interesting.

*Insert on page 23*  
~~In the local folk~~ <sup>In the</sup> idiom, we mostly find images of Devis, Ganeshas and Krishnas, Gods who were always very near to the peoples heart. Durga as Chamunda was always a most popular image.

Utensils in temples were also <sup>Sometimes</sup> ~~often~~ decorated with ornaments and little figurines of Gods or godlings. Krishna and the Gopis were sometimes interlaced on the handles of oil-lamps and ladles. Images of Garudas were also plentiful, some of better workmanship and sometimes of very decorative patterns. Crystal lingams set in fine bronze were common in the Shaivite shrines.

Wood carvings must have been very popular at one time. Most of the old houses had some type of carvings on their balconies, balusters, pillars and around the windows and door architraves. The carvings as found on some of the Hill Temples have already been discussed, but stray pieces of wood carvings have also been found unattached, probably parts of some old



structures that have disintegrated or been dismantled long ago. In one of these wood carvings of Lakshmi-Narayan, <sup>from Naggar</sup> Vishnu is represented in his three faced aspect in a tall pointed crown astride upon Garuda with a small flexed Lakshmi on his knee and a Kirtimukha at the top, we can clearly discern in this carving the Chamba-Kashmiri influences. Vishnu has the ~~same~~ small projecting chin and an elongated body. He holds a serrated mace and a flaming chakra. The panel suffered from exposure, but is a typical early wood carving of superior workmanship.

The ornamental designs which we find in the wood carvings on houses repeat themselves in the old wooden chests and are always typical of the so called Kulu patterns. Here we find the scroll motif, the interlaced or plaited, often double plaited motif, snake and square designs, basket weave, geometric floral motifs, various Swastika and ~~Cross~~ motifs, S motifs, undercut cube and triangular motifs, Hammer motifs and a large variety of allied patterns highly stylised and sometimes arranged in rich geometric patterns. Some of these patterns as we shall show repeat themselves in the designs of the famous Kulu shawls.

The highly stylised and bold geometric designs and patterns form one unified whole in the Folk Art expression of Kulu, quite distinct and striking, yet blending beautifully into the general pattern of the old Kulu life.

The Kulu shawl or dress <sup>piece</sup> as worn by women is a most striking ~~and~~ original woolen textile with its beautiful geometrical and conventionalised designs in bold patterns and colours. These designs, patterns and colour schemes were so typical of the Kulu valley, of its people and their entire pattern of life that it is impossible not to mention them <sup>however briefly</sup> when <sup>discussing</sup> presenting the art of the Kulu Valley.

The shawl as a dress piece is usually made of two narrow strips sewn together in the middle and is worn cleverly draped to



to form a dress. Both ends of the shawl have three bands of rich patterns, the lower band being usually the broadest. The spaces which separate the bands from one another are wider than the transverse ornamental bands and are of the same shade as the body of the shawl. They are often interspersed with large individual patterns which give them the appearance of another band. Counting these <sup>spaces</sup> as two extra bands, there are five successive bands in all. A fringe finishes both ends of the shawl.

The longitudinal borders <sup>on edges</sup> of the shawl may be <sup>just</sup> a simple strip of a different colour or may have a projecting design going into the body of the shawl from the strip, sometimes the entire strip may have a complex ornament. The designs are woven in the tapestry weave individually finished, alike on both sides.

The colours of the shawls may be ~~White, Black, Brown~~ or seldom of some brighter shade. Often the body of the shawl may be in broad chequered stripes of <sup>in</sup> a plaid pattern, usually black and ~~White or Black, Grey and White~~, sometimes Brown and Yellow.

The patterns used in the transverse borders are very varied and rich. They may have a variety of cross patterns where the cross itself <sup>maybe</sup> is duplicated or reduplicated at the ends, or have a series of crosses enclosed in multicoloured borders giving them a rhomboidal effect from a distance, or the wavy and zig-zag pattern made up of many coloured squares or triangles, or bands of series of small crosses of many hues arranged diagonally across the bands. The same diagonal pattern may consist of triangles, giving it an effect of scales or waves, or again we may find the swastika motif, the characteristic S pattern,

The Hammer pattern and the popular diamond pattern with its endless combinations of differently coloured diamonds ingeniously arranged and distributed to form variegated and original patterns. Or again it may be a rich combination of them all, but whatever the patterns used, the colours chosen <sup>Especially</sup> in the designs of the old shawls were beautifully blended and distributed, striking and bold



actual patterns

The colours used in the border designs of

the Stools are <sup>always</sup> bright and resonant.

When in the Stools.

Penns may be mixed with yellows, reds, <sup>deep</sup> greens, and blacks, or again oranges, reds, whites

and greens. Blue will be interperused with

whites, with red, and black <sup>green</sup> accents.

As always penbrind

The older Stools always <sup>had</sup> better

and richer combinations. Especially

<sup>striking</sup> beautiful were the ~~deep~~ black and

deep brown stools with <sup>most ornamental bands</sup> red and orange

black and white and deep green ~~designs~~ <sup>designs</sup> ornamental bands.



yet always with the certain restraint and harmony of good taste.

~~These~~

The vivid colours of the ornamental patterns of the shawls blend and harmonise with the hues of the surrounding nature, and both <sup>the</sup> ornaments and colour schemes ~~used~~ are in some ways one of the most typical, striking and true creative expressions of the Kulu people.

Jewellery consisted of necklaces, bracelets, earrings, nose rings, pendants and plaques worn over the chest or at the side with strands of chains coming down or sweeping across to be fastened to the ~~other~~ sides of the garment. Enamel on silver pendants are usually suspended from necklaces fastened around the neck while plaques hang on chains <sup>fastened to</sup> ~~suspended from~~ the shoulder folds of the garments and are decorated with figures of Gods or with geometric and conventional floral designs, Svastikas and crosses. Bright strings of coral, turquoise and amber beads are often used interspersed with silver. Silver ribbed beads of an elongated coriander pattern were also often used. Elongated small pendants, beads or silver coins in great profusion and sometimes in several rows are also worn as pendants <sup>on</sup> ~~and~~ necklaces. The ears are perforated all along the <sup>outer</sup> lobe and small or large, often ornamented rings are passed through them. In former days the nose rings sometimes assume <sup>d</sup> exaggerated proportions and on festive occasions the women would come out literally covered with silver ornaments, gold being seldom used except in nose rings, earrings and nose pendants. The bracelets were of the narrow open carra type often terminating in Lion or Griffin heads or of the broad Churi type made of silver.

Local silversmiths were able <sup>women in metals and could fashion</sup> ~~to fashion~~ some very fine jewellery of good workmanship, well finished, rich and decorative.

We shall not discuss here the ordinary architecture of dwelling houses, but it is of a striking and substantial design well adapted to local conditions. The houses were well built of



*Amalgam of two stories*  
stone and wood with slate roofs and remind us somewhat of Swiss Chalet. Stone and wood alternate in the walls and give them strength. Carved pillars and balusters, arches, window frames and doors were a special feature of the old houses. Balconies of old residences were often decorated with carved figures of horsemen and peacocks carved on the baluster panels. A wide frame of rich ornamental designs is sometimes painted around the entrance. Red, Ochre, white and Yellow being used with taste and discrimination.

~~The houses were built of two stories~~  
Some of the houses were tall imposing structures of many stories well built of fine selected materials.



Practically all the old inhabited places of importance like the sites of the old capitols, <sup>a of</sup> Nast at Jagatsukh, Naggar and <sup>Manawa</sup> ~~Nakorsay~~ <sup>interesting</sup> have some <sup>fragments</sup> ~~early~~ <sup>documentary</sup> sculptural fragment remains, sometimes exhibiting a marked difference in style and provenance. An early Devi relief from Manali has the early Brahmor - Kashmiri characteristics while some sculptures at Nast (the old Jagatsukh) have both Rajastani and Chamba influences.



<sup>An</sup>  
~~There is~~ an interesting early Mahishamardini relief at  
~~Can be seen at~~  
(Jagatsukh).

Naggar likewise had some early sculptures of <sup>mostly</sup> Durga,  
Surya, Vishnu and Lakshminarayan, <sup>Narsingh</sup> Gaurishankar and Ganesha,  
~~Besides equestrian statues purporting to be Guqar Chautan, but~~  
~~sometimes obviously depicting female figures. riders~~  
Perhaps the most outstanding and important independent  
<sup>in the valley</sup> sculpture is the figure of Vishnu in the compound of the  
Basheshar Mahadev temple at Bajaura in what appears as a Gupta-  
Pratihara style. It is a very beautiful sculpture of great  
strength and dignity, yet great simplicity. Unfortunately it  
has been broken at the feet, but the pedestal with the feet  
stands nearby. Vishnu is represented with four arms. Two back  
arms are broken at the wrists, but being held downwards and slight-  
ly out, they may have rested upon two attendants, since there  
are two projections on either side of the long base that may  
indicate the place where the attendants stood. Vishnu is  
shown against an elaborate <sup>(multi-figured)</sup> Prabha of the type found in a  
Vishvarupa Vishnu figure from Kanauj. Like that figure it  
also has its five avatar aspects, the Fish and Tortoise heads  
being superimposed upon the Varaha and Lion heads.

The face is of the fine Gupta <sup>Type</sup> tradition somewhat eroded,  
but still quite clear. It <sup>strongly</sup> reminds of some of the faces of at  
Masrur. The well preserved lobe of the ear shows <sup>most</sup> a splendid  
~~excellent~~ workmanship.

The crown is of the square semicircular type rising to a  
point in <sup>the</sup> its center, somewhat like the later Nepalese crowns,  
with a rich floral <sup>design</sup> ornament ~~on its surface~~. The hair falls in  
<sup>thick</sup> rich locks to the shoulders, heavy circular earrings with a  
beaded or ribbed outer edge <sup>also upon</sup> rests near the shoulders.

Vishnu wears two <sup>7</sup> beklaces, an inner string of single  
beads and an outer double string with a pendant in the center.  
He wears thin beaded armlets near the armpits and narrow bracelets.  
The flower in Vishnu's right hand is a lotus with reversed petals  
<sup>facing</sup> held backwards towards the figure. A conch is in the left hand



resting upon his thigh. The girdle is a narrow and simple one. The dhoti is short and <sup>of length</sup> equal on both legs. The long floral garland is relieved by three large round flowers, over the arms and below the knees. Between the feet is a damaged projection that might have been the head of <sup>a</sup> Prithvi-Lakshmi.

It is a very beautiful, <sup>2</sup> strong and dignified figure and must have been part of some outstanding temple long since lost. <sup>A number of</sup> Other sculptures can be seen in the vicinity but of all these the figure of Vishnu is the most important.

Along with the fine early sculptures of accomplished workmanship we find the local idiom which follows closely the early Pratihara-Rajasthani tradition on the one hand and the Kashmir-Chamba style on the other. But in most of them the figures are already short and squatty and the workmanship is often clumsy, though the prototypes must have been <sup>of</sup> quite a pure early style.

A Vishnu relief from Naggar has all the characteristics of the Kashmiri-Chamba tradition, with two hands <sup>resting upon the heads of</sup> ~~leaning against~~ <sup>besides the fly whisk</sup> two female Chauri-bearers who <sup>also hold flowers in their hands</sup> and stand in flexed poses typical of some Kashmiri groups. The figure of Vishnu has a crown consisting of five round decorated elements resting on a band of round <sup>beaded</sup> knobs, with long curls on either side of the head. He <sup>necklace of a garland of beads</sup> wears a <sup>single</sup> beaded necklace and simple beaded bracelets. The earrings are heavy of the <sup>round and beaded edge</sup> type often found in sculptures and bronzes from Kashmir-Chamba, Rajasthan and even <sup>from</sup> in Bihar. (Kirkihar). Vishnu holds a tall mace and chakra in his rear hands. A heavy floral garland <sup>relieved by a single flower below</sup> falls over his shoulders and arms and under his knees. A decorative scarf billows out horizontally over the arms. A thin Yajnopavita falls from Vishnu's left shoulder and he wears a beaded belt with loops and tassels.

The figure of Vishnu stands upon the shoulders not of a Garuda, but of a female figure of which only the upper portion



The Vanna is provided with a rock decorated  
motifs, over the spring which builds itself  
up through a series of receding, <sup>horizontal</sup> ~~vertical~~  
mouldings into a prominent rectangular  
panel with a <sup>fine</sup> ~~large~~ Trimurti in <sup>its</sup> ~~the~~ center  
in a round frame. Above it is an  
oblong horizontal panel with a double lotus  
flower roundel flanked by two small standing  
figures with <sup>folded</sup> ~~folded~~ hands and ending in  
a projecting <sup>base</sup> ~~base~~ of floral design.  
This panel ~~is~~ <sup>rests</sup> ~~supported~~ <sup>upon</sup> two projecting  
Lion heads that project beyond the  
whole panel. The lower <sup>portion</sup> ~~portion~~ contains  
floral motifs, the flower vessel motif,  
<sup>of which Mahishasurardini is</sup> ~~of which Mahishasurardini is~~ <sup>prominent</sup> ~~prominent~~ various  
figures of Goltis and ornamental  
details. The large square  
The ~~lower~~ <sup>lower</sup> ~~rock~~ <sup>rock</sup> as it  
contains a figure bottom of the panel has  
a Ganesh in the key stone <sup>element</sup> ~~element~~ but the  
~~figure is of very crude and recent workmanship.~~  
<sup>crude</sup> ~~figure~~ <sup>figure</sup> inside the niche is  
of very crude and recent workmanship. ~~It is~~  
~~water~~



~~insert~~ <sup>insert</sup> page 20 <sup>after</sup> ~~section~~.

70

~~The~~ Remnant Stones of 8 Rajas often  
containing many figures <sup>of Rajas and Rani's</sup> can be  
found in the Valley. ~~Now~~ Below the  
main road leading to the Rajas  
Cave one can find a large number  
of them, but they are of indifferent  
workmanship and some are in the  
false idiom. Many <sup>of them</sup> have suffered  
from exposure, while ~~some have~~ <sup>others</sup> sunk  
into the soil. In their general pattern  
they conform to the Stones found in the  
neighbouring States.



+ insert page 20. below

The author has <sup>also</sup> seen very beautiful and  
 Early Jamistonnas bronze of smaller size  
 which have now disappeared they were ~~at~~ <sup>of</sup>  
 the square prebta type filled with many  
 small figures of Deities, of a bronze  
<sup>assuming</sup> ~~having~~ the black patina and of very fine  
 workman ship.



just below the heavy breasts is shown. Very likely a Prithvi-Lakshmi motif which is <sup>often</sup> usually found at the feet of the Vishnu figures from Kashmir. This <sup>Sculpture</sup> ~~only~~ illustrates the close contacts with the <sup>Chamba-Kashmir School</sup> ~~various schools of art~~.

There is a large Gauri-Shankar stone group in the Gaurishankar temple at Naggar, but though imposing in size it is fairly late. The figures are squatty and heavy though it follows an early prototype. Both figures have a typical <sup>small</sup> protruding chin as we find in some Chamba sculptures and besides have some other features of the Chamba-Kashmir school. —

Ton Pains

Stones  
from page 33

are  
personal  
stones.

No large bronzes of importance are known in Kulu. The few bronzes like the bronzes at Naggar or Sultanpur are of late dates <sup>and</sup> reported to have been brought from lower India and Rampur-Beshahr. The Mahishamardini in the Tripura Sundari temple and the Vishnu bronze at the Vishnu temple both at Naggar though of good size are not of great merit. <sup>According to Tradition they</sup> ~~They are reported to have~~ been brought in the 16th century. The smaller bronzes <sup>most</sup> have been quite numerous at one time. <sup>and</sup> They belonged to a number of schools. <sup>as already mentioned</sup> The earlier bronzes being Buddhist of the North Western, Kashmir and Chamba tradition dating from about the 8th century. <sup>onwards</sup> An early Maheshamardini was seen <sup>of the</sup> ~~after late~~ Gupta-Kashmir style and was perhaps one of the earliest Hindu metal image <sup>in</sup> of the region. A few of <sup>Hill</sup> ~~Lakshmi~~, Lakshmi-Narayan groups <sup>are</sup> of the better Pratihara-Rajasthani style. <sup>of the 11-12 centuries were seen in Kulu in these bronzes</sup> The Garuda is in a typical posture found in some Rajasthani sculptures from Ajmer. <sup>style</sup> These finer bronzes may have been brought or cast outside the area, but the motif has been repeated <sup>in a</sup> ~~and~~ a number of <sup>other</sup> bronzes, while following the common prototypes, show a progressive deterioration of style and execution. They include figures of Surya, Vishnu, Durga, Saraswati, <sup>and also figures of</sup> ~~Lakshmi-Narayan~~ Gaurishankar groups <sup>and</sup> Krishna, Radha & Ganesha. Along with these was the purely folk idiom <sup>often</sup> repeating the above compositions and changing it to <sup>the</sup> ~~their~~ common Kulu Folk art denomination. They are quaint, decorative and very interesting as one finds in them the local ornaments and details. <sup>Some of them may have been</sup> of ~~very~~ quite early periods.



<sup>later</sup> Bronzes of the Kashmir-Chamba type <sup>and</sup> or Chamba-Lahoul style have also been <sup>seen</sup> found. Some are of good quality others are again the local adaptation of these forms. The early bronzes are made of the Ashtadhattu bronze or the eight metal alloy and <sup>are held</sup> ~~are held~~ in great esteem by the people. The next very important group of bronze images are the so called Hill Masks. They are usually hollow heads <sup>or heads</sup> and busts of Deities of different sizes cast and chased by local craftsmen in the shape of plaques that are carried on palanquin and portable altars during festivals, sometimes a large number of masks are fixed <sup>onto</sup> ~~upon~~ the sloping front surface of the shrines. They are a typical feature of Hill Art <sup>of the surrounding areas</sup> and often exhibit all the characteristic peculiarities of the local styles and traditions. <sup>They are made of bronze or silver</sup> With conventional designs and ornaments sometimes with inlays of <sup>other</sup> ~~metals~~ and seldom with stones like coral and turquoise.

The importance of these Hill Masks becomes all the greater, since a number of them are inscribed and dated and they <sup>thus</sup> ~~provide~~ a very valuable documentation. They give us an insight into the styles and influences that prevailed at a particular time and they give us the dates of some <sup>Rulers</sup> ~~rulers~~. The earliest mask we know of at present <sup>and already mentioned earlier</sup> ~~is the very fine and beautiful mask of Majani Devi from Nirmand which dates from the 9th century and is a rare and splendid example of this craft.~~ In the local, ~~so to say~~ folk idiom, we mostly find ~~the simpler~~ images of Devis, Ganesha <sup>gods</sup> and Krishna <sup>Deities</sup> who were always very near to the popular heart. <sup>Utensils in temples were also decorated with designs and little figures of Gods or Godlings.</sup> Krishna and the gopies were interlaced on handles of oil-lamps, <sup>spoons.</sup> The images of Garudas were plentiful. Some of better workmanship and <sup>of very decorative patterns</sup> ~~of very decorative~~ treatment. <sup>Crys ballingams set in bronze were common in the Shavite shrines.</sup>

Wood carvings must have been very popular at one time. Most of the old houses had some type of carvings on their <sup>balconies,</sup> balusters, pillars and around the windows and doors. The carvings as found on some of the Hill Temples have already been discussed,

*1418 A.D. is the reign of Raja Chahman Lal. The other parts of the reign of Vishnuvardhan, dated, 1500 A.D. in the reign of Raja Siddh Lal. Other inscribed and dated monuments are of later periods and are numerous.*



but stray pieces of wood carvings have also been found unattached, probably parts of some old structures that have <sup>disintegrated or been dismantled</sup> been lost long ago. In one of these wood carvings <sup>of</sup> representing Lakshmi-Narayan <sup>is represented</sup> with Vishnu in his three faced aspect in a tall pointed crown astride <sup>upon</sup> Garuda with a small flexed Lakshmi on his knee and a Kirtimukha at the top, we can clearly discern <sup>in this carving</sup> the Chamba-Kashmiri influences. Vishnu has the same <sup>small</sup> protruding chin and an elongated body. <sup>He holds a serrated mace and a flaming chakra.</sup> The panel suffered from exposure, but is a <sup>wood</sup> typical early carving of superior workmanship.

The ornamental designs which we found in <sup>the</sup> wood carvings on buildings <sup>and the old wooden chests,</sup> <sup>are</sup> typical of the so called Kulu patterns. We have the scroll motif, the interlaced or plaited, often double plaited motif, <sup>Snake and square designs.</sup> triangular, basket weave and geometric floral motifs, <sup>and the stylized and simple</sup> various Swastika motifs, <sup>S motifs,</sup> undercut cube and triangular motifs and a large variety of allied patterns, highly stylized and <sup>sometimes with</sup> often forming geometric patterns. Some of these patterns repeat themselves in the designs of the famous Kulu shawls. <sup>(Balconies of old residences)</sup> <sup>after last carved</sup> figures of horsemen and peacocks along <sup>the</sup> borders.

The highly stylized and bold geometric designs and patterns form one unified whole in the Folk Art expression of Kulu, quite distinct and striking, yet blending beautifully into the general pattern of the old Kulu life. Jewellery consisted of necklaces, bracelets, earrings, <sup>Nose rings</sup> <sup>pendants</sup> and <sup>plaques</sup> <sup>worn in the middle</sup> <sup>at</sup> the sides with strands of chains coming down or sweeping across to be fastened to the other end of the garment.

Enamel on Silver, pendants are suspended from necklaces fastened around the neck or hang on chains from the shoulder <sup>folds</sup> <sup>with e</sup> <sup>strings</sup> of the garments with figures of Gods or geometric and conventional <sup>beads</sup> floral designs. Bright <sup>beads</sup> of coral, turquoise and amber <sup>are</sup> used interspersed with silver. Silver ribbed beads of an elongated coriander pattern were often used. Silver coins, sometimes in profusion are fixed to the necklaces. The ears are perforated all along the lobe and small often



ornamental rings are passed through them. Formally on festive occasions the women would <sup>come</sup> take out covered with silver ornaments, gold being seldom used except in <sup>ear ring and nose</sup> the nose rings, <sup>pendants</sup>. The bracelets and ~~earrings~~ were of the narrow type of open carra- often terminating in lion or Griffin heads or the broad Churi- <sup>made</sup> type all of silver.

Jewellery was often of very good local workmanship well finished, rich and decorative.

There are not many fountain stones in Kulu, but one occasionally <sup>comes</sup> ~~may~~ across some water spouts with heads of lions or Makkaras. Some decorative panels with figures and <sup>ornamental</sup> designs <sup>still survive</sup> are sometimes set near the outlets of <sup>some</sup> springs, <sup>as for instance</sup> at ~~Bastri~~ in Manali.

The tank at ~~Bastri~~ near Manali is decorated with a rich <sup>panel</sup> entablature of ornamental and floral designs and figures of Gods. A now discarded large <sup>cut</sup> stone water tank at ~~Tawa~~ <sup>about</sup> Naggar had some carved features, but the masonry has crumbled in many places and was used for subsequent buildings.

We shall not discuss here the ordinary architecture of dwelling houses, but it is of a very fine and substantial pattern. The houses were well built of stone and wood, and often <sup>with slate roofs</sup> ~~were of~~ <sup>had many storeys</sup> ~~had many storeys~~. <sup>Carved pillars and balconies</sup> ~~Carved pillars and balconies~~ <sup>surrounded the</sup> ~~surrounded the~~ window frames and doors.

Figures of ~~warriors~~ <sup>warriors</sup> and Peacocks were carved on balcony panels. <sup>and reminding one of the architecture</sup> ~~and reminding one of the architecture~~ <sup>of a Swiss Chalet.</sup> ~~of a Swiss Chalet.~~

to. sculptures  
Page 20



SCULPTURES, WOOD CARVINGS, BRONZES & MASKS

Stone sculptures, reliefs, carvings, fragments of ornamental details lie scattered over the whole length of the Kulu Valley.

Once they must have formed part of some temples or shrines long since fallen to ruin and now lie untended in courtyards of other temples and buildings or simply in open fields.

In age they may date from the 8th or 9th or ~~perhaps even earlier~~ centuries in the <sup>earlier</sup> examples and through all the later centuries right up to fairly modern times.

We can find <sup>Some</sup> fine examples of the late Gupta tradition, sculptures that show Chalukian influences <sup>or</sup> and again <sup>with</sup> Pratihara-Rajastani <sup>and</sup> or Kashmiri-Chamba features. The finer sculptures and carvings are interspersed with the quaint examples of folk art that are often difficult to date.

Beautiful carvings of door jambs, lintels, key stones can be found in the vicinity of the old sites at Makarsa at Urla <sup>and</sup> right up the valley to Jagatsukh and the old fort <sup>at</sup> Manali village where a number of fine carvings and details of mouldings dating from about the eighth century and representing fragments of ruined shrines can be seen in <sup>its</sup> the vicinity. A fine Trimurti found nearby is also part of the some ancient temple. The rich <sup>and fine</sup> floral scroll motifs link them with the sculptural details of Bajaura <sup>or Masrur</sup>.

Practically all the old inhabited places of importance like the sites of the old capitals of Nast at Jagatsukh, Naggar and Makarsa have some interesting sculptural fragments, <sup>or</sup> documentation, sometimes exhibiting a marked difference in style and provenance. An early Devi relief from Manali has the early Brahmar - Kashmiri characteristics while some sculptures at Nast (the old Jagatsukh) have both Rajastani and Chamba influences.



An interesting early Mahishamardini relief can be seen at Jagatsukh.

Naggar likewise had <sup>a number of</sup> some early sculptures of mostly Durga, Surya, Vishnu and Lakshminarayan, Narsingh, Gaurishankar and Ganesha, besides <sup>some</sup> equestrian statues purporting to be Guga Chauhan, but <sup>at</sup> ~~sometimes~~ <sup>sometimes</sup> obviously depicting female riders.

<sup>one</sup> Perhaps the most outstanding and important, independent sculptures in the valley is the figure of Vishnu in the compound of the Basheshar Mahadev temple at Bajaura in what appears <sup>to be</sup> as a Gupta-Pratihara style. It is a very beautiful sculpture of great strength and dignity, yet great simplicity. Unfortunately it has been broken at the feet, but the pedestal with the feet stands nearby. Vishnu is represented with four arms. Two back arms are broken at the wrists, but being held downwards and slightly outwards they may have rested upon two attendants, since there are two projections on either side of the long base that may indicate the place where the attendants stood. Vishnu is shown against an elaborate multfigured Prabha of the type found in a Vishvarupa Vishnu figure from Kanauj. Like that figure it also has its five avatar aspects, the <sup>smaller</sup> Fish and Tortoise heads being superimposed upon the Varaha and Lion heads. <sup>Crown</sup> Above ~~to crown~~ <sup>is what appears to be</sup> the head of a face. The aspect assumed to destroy Hyagriva.

The face is of the fine Gupta type somewhat eroded, but still quite clear. It strongly <sup>resembles</sup> reminds of some of the faces at Masrur. The well preserved lobe of the <sup>left</sup> ear shows most excellent workmanship.

The crown is of the square semicircular type rising to a point in the center, somewhat like the later Nepalese crowns, with a rich <sup>central</sup> floral design. The hair falls in thick locks to the shoulders, heavy circular earrings with a beaded or ribbed outer edge also rest upon the shoulders.

Vishnu wears two necklaces, an inner string of single beads and an outer double string with a pendant in the center. He wears thin beaded armlets near the armpits and narrow bracelets. The flower in Vishnu's right hand is a lotus with reversed petals held



facing backwards towards the figure. A conch is in the left hand resting upon his thigh. The girdle is a narrow and simple one. The dhoti is short and of equal length on both legs. The long floral garland is relieved by three large round flowers, over the arms and below the knees. Between the feet is a damaged projection that might have been the head of a Prithvi-Lakshmi.

It is a very beautiful, strong and dignified figure and must have been part of some outstanding temple long since lost. A number of other sculptures can be seen in the vicinity but of all these the figure of Vishnu is the most important.

Along with the fine early sculptures of accomplished workmanship we find the local idiom which follows closely the early Pratihara-Rajasthani tradition on the one hand and the Kashmir-Chamba style on the other. But in most of them the figures are already short and squatty and the workmanship is often clumsy, though the <sup>original</sup> prototypes must have been of quite a pure early style.

A Vishnu relief from Naggar has all the characteristics of the Kashmiri-Chamba tradition, with two hands resting upon the heads of two female Chauri-bearers who besides the fly whisks also hold flowers in their hands and stand in flexed poses typical of some Kashmiri groups. The figure of Vishnu has a crown consisting of five round <sup>floral</sup> ~~decorated~~ elements resting on a band of round beaded knobs, with long curls on either side of the head. He wears a necklace of a single strand of beads and simple beaded bracelets. The earrings are heavy of the round and beaded edge type often found in sculptures and bronzes from Kashmir-Chamba, <sup>to</sup> Rajasthan and even <sup>in</sup> from Bihar (Kurkihar). Vishnu holds a tall mace and chakra in his rear hands. A heavy floral garland falls over his shoulders and arms and under his knees, relieved by a single flower below. A decorative scarf billows out horizontally over the arms. A thin Yajnopavita falls from Vishnu's left shoulder and he wears a beaded belt with loops and tassels.

The figure <sup>the God</sup> of Vishnu stands upon the shoulders <sup>not</sup> of a Garuda, but of a female figure of which only the upper portion just below the <sup>prominent</sup>



heavy breasts is shown. Very likely a Prithvi-Lakshmi motif which is often found at the feet of the Vishnu figures from Kashmir. This sculpture illustrates the close contacts with the Chamba-Kashmir school.

There is a large Gauri-Shankar stone group in the Gaurishankar temple at Naggar, but though imposing in size it is fairly late. *The God with his right leg upon his knee is shown sitting on Nandi whose head is turned towards them.* The figures are squatty and heavy though ~~it~~ follows an early prototype. *Two flying gandharvas with garlands are in the upper corners.* Both figures have the typical small protruding chin as we find in some Chamba sculptures, and besides ~~have~~ some other features of the Chamba-Kashmir school. *The Sculpture is in good condition and is the largest group at Naggar.*

~~There are not many~~ *are not numerous* fountain stones in Kulu, but one occasionally comes across some water spouts with heads of lions or Makkaras. Some decorative panels with figures and ornamental designs still survive near the outlets of some springs, as for instance at Bashist *near Manali.* ~~in Manala.~~

*fairly large*  
This tank is decorated with a rich ~~panel~~ of ornamental and floral designs and figures of Gods. ~~The tank is provided with a rich decorative motif, over the spring which builds itself up through a series of receding horizontal mouldings into a prominent rectangular panel with a fine Trimurti in its center.~~ *panel* Set in a round frame. Above it is an oblong horizontal panel with a double ~~petaled~~ *real* flower roundel flanked by two small standing figures with folded hands and ending in *side* projecting brackets of floral design. This panel rests upon two Lion heads that project *well* beyond the panel. The mouldings of the lower portion contain floral motifs, the flower vessel motif, figures of Gods and Goddesses of which Mahishamardini is prominent, Makkaras and various *other* ornamental details. The large square niche at the bottom of the panel has a Ganesha in the key stone *moulding* ~~element~~, but the figure inside the niche is of very crude and recent workmanship.

A now discarded large cut stone water tank at Tawa above Naggar had some carved features, but the masonry has crumbled in many places *has been* and ~~was~~ used for subsequent buildings.

Memorial stones of the Kulu Rajas ~~often~~ containing many



figures of Rajas and Ranis can be found in the valley. Below the main road leading to the Naggar Castle <sup>and not far from it is</sup> one can find a large number of them, but they are of indifferent workmanship and some are in the <sup>crude</sup> folk idiom. Many of them have suffered from exposure, while others sunk into the soil. <sup>These are equestrian figures of Rajas and their female figures</sup> In their general pattern they conform to <sup>Similar</sup> the stones found in neighbouring states.

No large bronzes of importance are known in Kulu. The few bronzes like the bronzes at Naggar or Sultanpur are of late date and reported to have been brought from lower India and Rampur-Beshahr. The Mahishamardini <sup>Already mentioned in</sup> in the Tripura Sundari Temple and the Vishnu bronze <sup>in</sup> at the Vishnu Temple both at Naggar though of good size are not of great merit. According to tradition they ~~to~~ have been brought in the 16th century. The smaller bronzes must have been quite numerous at one time and they belonged to a number of schools. The earlier bronzes as already mentioned <sup>were</sup> being Buddhist of the North Western, Kashmir and Chamba tradition dating from about the 8th century onwards. An early Mahishamardini <sup>was seen many years ago at Naggar.</sup> was seen of the Gupta-Kashmir type and was perhaps one of the earliest Hindu metal images in this region. <sup>Several</sup> A few Lakshmi-Narayan groups of the better Hill Pratihara-Rajasthani style of the 11th-12th centuries were seen in Kulu. The Garuda in these bronzes is in

the typical posture found in some Rajasthani sculptures from Ajmer. <sup>And the elaborate Prabhās have makaras, lions, elephants and peacocks along</sup> The author has also seen very beautiful and early Gaurishankar <sup>the outer edge of the Prabhās</sup> bronzes of smaller size which have now disappeared. They were of the square Prabha <sup>vali</sup> type filled with many small figures of Deities, <sup>made of a</sup> of a bronze assuming the <sup>a</sup> block <sup>patina</sup> and of very fine workmanship. These finer bronzes may have been brought or cast outside the area, but the <sup>their general</sup> style has been repeated in a number of other <sup>later</sup> bronzes, which while following the <sup>original</sup> common prototypes, show a progressive deterioration of style and execution. They include figures of Surya, Vishnu, Durga, Saraswati, Lakshmi <sup>and</sup> Narayan, Gaurishankar groups and also figures of Krishna, Radha and Ganesha. Along with these <sup>followers</sup> was the purely folk idiom often the above compositions and changing <sup>the</sup> to the common Kulu Folk art denomination. They are quaint, decorative and very interesting as one finds in them <sup>an adaptation of</sup> the local



ornaments and details. Some of them may have been of quite <sup>an</sup> early period. <sup>Some</sup> ~~Bronzes~~ <sup>similar to the</sup> ~~bronzes~~ <sup>have also been found in</sup> Chamba

Bronzes of the later Kashmir-Chamba type and Chamba-Lahoul style have also been seen. <sup>in Kulu</sup> Some are of good quality others are again <sup>a</sup> the local adaptation of these forms. The early bronzes are made of the Ashtadhatu bronze or the eight metal alloy and as such are held in great esteem by the people.

The next <sup>most</sup> very important group of <sup>metal</sup> bronze images are the so called Hill Masks. They are usually hollow <sup>reliefs and busts</sup> heads of Gods and <sup>goddesses</sup> busts of Deities of different sizes, cast and chased by local craftsmen in the shape of plaques that are carried on <sup>parasol surmounted</sup> palanquins and portable altars during festivals, sometimes a large number of masks are fixed onto the sloping front surface of the shrines. They are <sup>being</sup> a <sup>very</sup> typical feature of <sup>the</sup> Hill Art of <sup>Ruler and adjacent</sup> the surrounding areas and often exhibit all the characteristic peculiarities of <sup>the</sup> local styles and tradition. They are made of bronze or silver, with conventional designs and ornaments sometimes with inlays of other metals and seldom with stones like coral and turquoise.

The importance of these Hill Masks becomes all the greater, since a number of them are inscribed and dated and they thus provide a very valuable documentation. They give us an insight into the styles and influences that prevailed at a particular time and they <sup>also</sup> give us the <sup>and names</sup> dates of some <sup>of the</sup> Kulu rulers. <sup>Oldest</sup> The earliest mask we know of at present <sup>one for which is already mentioned</sup> and already mentioned earlier, is the very fine and beautiful mask of Mujani Devi <sup>at</sup> from Nirmand dating from the 9th century, which is <sup>a</sup> rare and splendid example of this craft. The earliest inscribed and dated Mask known ~~at present~~ is the Mask of Hirman Devi at Manali bearing the date 1418 A.D. in the reign of <sup>and</sup> Raja Udhran Pal. the other ~~one~~ is the Mask of Vishnu at Sajla, <sup>and</sup> Kothi Barsqi dated 1500 A.D. in the reign of Raja Sidh Pal. <sup>There are a number of</sup> Other inscribed and dated masks <sup>but they are of</sup> are of later periods, and are <sup>found</sup> more numerous. <sup>Though some of them are quite interesting.</sup>

In the local folk idiom, we mostly find images of <sup>devs</sup> deities.



Ganeshas and Krishnas, Gods who were always very near to the <sup>peoples</sup> popular heart. Durga <sup>in her aspect of Aschamunda</sup> as Mahishamardini was always a most popular image.

Utensils in temples were also often decorated with <sup>ornaments</sup> designs and little figurines of Gods or <sup>g</sup>Godlings. Krishna and the Gopis were sometimes interlaced on <sup>the</sup> handles of oil-lamp<sup>s</sup> and ladles. Images of Garudas were also plentiful, some of better workmanship and sometime of very decorative patterns. Crystall<sup>lingams</sup> set in fine bronze were common in the Shaivite shrines.

Wood carvings must have been very popular at one time. Most of the old houses had some type of carvings on their balconies, balusters, pillars and around the windows and <sup>architraves</sup> door<sup>s</sup>. The carvings as found on some of the Hill Temples have already been discussed, but stray pieces of wood carvings have also been found unattached, probably parts of some old structures that have disintegrated or been dismantled long ago. In one of these wood carvings of Lakshmi-Narayan, Vishnu is represented in his three faced aspect in a tall pointed crown astride upon Garuda with a small flexed Lakshmi on his knee and a Kirtimukha at the top, we can clearly discern in this carving the Chamba-Kashmiri influences. Vishnu has the same small projecting chin and an elongated body. He holds a serrated mace and a flaming chakra. The panel suffered from exposure, but is a typical early wood carving of superior workmanship.

The ornamental designs which we find in the wood carvings on houses repeat themselves in the old wooden chests and are always typical of the so called Kulu Patterns. <sup>Here find</sup> We have the scroll motif, the interlaced or plated, often double plated motif, snake and square designs, basket weave, geometric floral motifs, various Swastika <sup>and cross</sup> motifs, S motifs, undercut cube and triangular motifs, <sup>Hammer motifs</sup> and a large variety of allied patterns highly stylised and sometimes <sup>arranged in</sup> forming rich geometric patterns. Some of these patterns <sup>as we shall show</sup> repeat themselves in the designs of the famous Kulu shawls.

The highly stylised and bold geometric designs and patterns form one unified whole in the Folk Art expression of Kulu, quite



24                      26                      82

PICTORIAL ART IN KULU

The art of painting in the region of Kulu as we know it today begins towards the close of the 17th century and continues right through the 18th and well into the 19th centuries. Whether there were some earlier periods of pictorial activity we are not in a position to say so today <sup>with certainty</sup> for want of definite and better documentations.

A birch bark Buddhist manuscript containing <sup>a few</sup> fairly large square illuminations of a very fine quality was seen by the author in the valley some forty years ago, but has long since disappeared and could never be traced again. It could tentatively be dated as of the tenth century. The use of Birch bark <sup>characteristics</sup> and other pointed to its provenience from neighbouring areas.

<sup>at present the most</sup> ~~The next very important~~ <sup>perhaps</sup> ~~document~~ <sup>and also Earliest surviving</sup> is the Ramayana set formerly in the possession of the late Raja Ranbir Singh of Shangri containing some 270 miniatures in an idiom having the characteristics of <sup>the Basohli School of painting</sup> ~~the place whence came the artist who painted it, the State of Basohli.~~ <sup>and its</sup> The ruling house of Kulu was related to the Rajas of Basohli.

This particular set was obviously painted by several artists and at different times. The miniatures are of several dimensions <sup>and vary in</sup> ~~in different techniques~~ <sup>they are</sup> and also of different qualities, but the set was a most interesting <sup>and unique</sup> pictorial collection with a certain unity underlying the entire series.

It has the bold bright contrasting colours of the earlier Basohli <sup>school in many of its paintings and again</sup> ~~paintings, strong and very original design and composition and~~ <sup>and architecture</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>rich conventional lines</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>all of it is good</sup>

<sup>Moreover</sup> The whole set was in a very fine state of preservation. One can tentatively date it as in the reign of Raja ..... though the family tradition traces its beginnings as earlier

..... The artist or artists who came from Basohli may have brought with them their pupils, <sup>which explains the variations in style equally</sup> and they appear to have later settled in the Kulu Valley as families who claim to be descendants of those artists. <sup>settled in the vicinity of</sup> ~~live at Palighat village near Naggar.~~ <sup>some of the people may have come from local areas.</sup>



Waddit Basohli accents

The early hill idiom, <sup>can</sup> persisted in the valley for a very long time and we <sup>often</sup> find it in several comparatively late sets and miniatures that are fortunately dated or can be dated with certainty. They provide us with a most important <sup>authentic</sup> key to the styles that were actually <sup>to be found</sup> practiced in Kulu at a particular period. At one time the expression "Kulu School" was <sup>sort of</sup> a collective, general term for a certain type of hill paintings that exhibited <sup>by</sup> the characteristics of the early hill schools with and admixture of popular folk art style, <sup>but</sup> and did not necessarily come <sup>ing</sup> from any actual <sup>known area</sup> and. <sup>often no known</sup> Their exact provenance was difficult to establish and moreover similar type of paintings have been actually found over a <sup>very</sup> wide area including the States of Mandi, <sup>Sunher and Kangra</sup> One may assume that extensive hill tracts were interconnected in this artistic expression and it <sup>would be</sup> is very difficult to classify with certainty these groups of paintings, <sup>unless they bear some</sup> ~~some~~ <sup>specific marks of identification.</sup>

All that can be said is that certain types of miniatures could have been painted in the Kulu region. It is of interest that hardly any Kulu miniatures reflect the true architecture, dress and scenery of the country, <sup>which is so characteristic of this area.</sup> Snow scenes are almost unknown. Yet, a parallel school of Basohli-Kulu <sup>u</sup> characteristics that worked in Lahoul and of which unfortunately very few examples are known at present, depicts the characteristic costumes of these regions.

One is inclined to believe that the artists followed a certain fixed, borrowed tradition and worked in an idiom or fashion acceptable to the patrons who formed the upper class. It is true one may occasionally find the Gaddi dress, but the Gaddi dress is not the true Kulu attire. <sup>also</sup> The quality of miniatures actually found in the valley varies greatly. From the earlier and popular Hill idioms with their more primitive approach and often crude technique to the finest miniatures of the later Kangra Style that must have been brought into the valley at different periods by <sup>s</sup> descendants and members of the ruling families. They might have been painted in the valley



itself by some visiting artists, but for a lack of documentation we must choose the first theory.

*The next important documentation are the portraits of Raja Tedhi Singh of Kulu.*

The next important documentation we have is the Bhagavata Parana Set, the set of Madhu Malati and other paintings by the same artist or of the same atelier.

Both the Madhu Malati set and the set of the Bhagavata Parana were painted by the artist Bhagawan Das in 1794 A.D. who

- worked in Raghunathpura in the reign of Raja Pritam Singh of Kulu, and in the case of the Madhu Malati set we have the date as 1799 A.D. which must have been the date of its completion.
- *The Bhagavata Set bears date of 1794 A.D. while the set of Madhu Malati set we have the date as 1799 A.D. which must have been the date of its completion.*
- *We can assume that these sets were completed in the five intervening years Bhagawan Das could have painted other paintings.*

The portrait of Kulu Rulers such as the portraits of Raja Tedhi Singh also provide us with very valuable information as they show the common characteristics and transitions to later miniatures. Perhaps some yet unknown data may come to light, but it would seem that at the time of Raja ..... there was no well known school of art in Kulu since the artists who painted the Ramayana set were brought from Basohli.

The murals which must have been an accepted way of decoration for residences of ruling Princes and prominent families have only survived in one or two instances. Damage to walls, hazards of fires have taken a heavy toll of this aspect of pictorial art. The few murals that survived we have the murals in the palace of the Kulu Rajas, they date from

the reign of Raja ..... and Raja .....  
On page 29 in rev.

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Basohli



Many of them are found in the same place  
creations  
of the same  
style  
as the  
earliest  
ones  
of the  
same  
style  
as the  
earliest  
ones

The Ramayanaset though it obviously contains painting painted by different artists and at different periods has a certain continuity of style and detail. The <sup>buildings are</sup> architecture is <sup>and striking</sup> of the ~~striking~~ early Basholi type in bright <sup>and white</sup> resonant colours. <sup>with not original and unusual architectural features.</sup> The background in many miniatures is of a resonant golden yellow against which the bright blue, red, pink and architectural details of buildings stand out with great clarity. The angular position of walls accentuated by the dark <sup>patches</sup> areas of <sup>and richness</sup> doorways, and <sup>Burnt</sup> ~~crisp~~ ornaments give strength <sup>of the Earlier</sup> to the composition. <sup>and details of the miniature</sup> Burnt Siena is <sup>often</sup> used as background in some paintings there is gold or silver ornamentation, and <sup>the</sup> design <sup>often</sup> projects beyond into the borders of the paintings.

<sup>depicted</sup> The personages have features of several types, some with long noses and sloping foreheads, some with short noses and some with heavy chins. The younger male personages including Rama often have long wavy side curls (whiskers) ending in a prominent curl. Many of the achkans are striped and some have a frilled flap on both sides of the chest. The women wear short cholis, full skirts and a dupatta of different colours, but in some have <sup>Wear a</sup> ~~a~~ regular heavy shawl <sup>also</sup> ~~thrown~~ on the head and shoulders. They <sup>also</sup> wear black bajubands and tassels and have the same facial characteristics as the men. <sup>Their Eyes are large oblong with a small pupil.</sup> The trees are most decorative with complex conventionalised

stems and foliage. The whole set is a rich and striking collection of paintings and was certainly the most important and pictorial document before its dispersal.



The horizon is high and the background below it can be of any colour to suit the composition. It can be brown, light or dark green or yellow, though not all painting of the set are of uniform quality. Yet in its best examples the set has a great freshness and unsophisticated directness, it has a crispness both in design and colouring and an originality seldom met with in other sets.

Some of the men wear tall turbans slanting backwards with a broad band across them.

The number of shades used throughout the paintings is quite ~~considerable~~ <sup>extensive</sup> and their distribution and combinations are original and striking. The sky is usually simple consisting of a strip of Blue with lighter <sup>than the sky</sup> ~~or darker~~ longish clouds - or just a sharply shaded strip of Blue.



~~inset on page (7).~~

87

Murals have been an accepted and popular means of decoration for the palaces of Rulers and <sup>residences of</sup> prominent families. Unfabulously such murals have survived in only a few instances. The Old <sup>residence</sup> palace of the Ruler Rajas at <sup>The Shikhar Mahal Palace</sup> Subbanpur had a number of <sup>such</sup> murals before its <sup>discovery</sup> and <sup>discovery</sup> of 1905 and <sup>subsequent</sup> ~~other~~ <sup>other</sup> damages by fire ~~and~~ ~~damaged~~.

What little remains belongs to the late periods of Raja Pritam Singh (-) and Raja (-). Some of the murals depict:

~~and another~~ While others to Portrait of Raja with his residence. The style <sup>and execution</sup> reminds somewhat of some of the known paintings of that period, but is not very <sup>the better</sup> of very ~~fine~~ quality.



The paintings of Bhagawandas are distinguished by a simple yet well balanced palette. <sup>Siena</sup> Burnt sienna, vermillion, peridot green, mauve, yellow, ochre..... and soft blue <sup>pudding</sup> ~~pudding~~.

Like in the earlier Ramayana paintings or the portraits of Raja Teddhi Singh the contours of the face and hands except for the outline of the eyes and eyebrows are usually in red.

The composition of both the <sup>the 2</sup> Bhagavata and <sup>the 2</sup> Modhu Malati paintings is simple yet direct and forceful and the personages show the typical high foreheads and short noses in the profiles facing right. <sup>while</sup> The profiles facing left have a more slanting outline. <sup>we attribute this to</sup> This must be a peculiarity of the artists hand.   
*The Trees are composed of simple and show later characteristics.*

Other miniatures by the same artist or by his school show an effective orange-ochre background. <sup>Some of the</sup> The same facial types <sup>we find</sup> ~~we find~~ in some Kulu miniatures. <sup>also</sup> We find in other paintings of <sup>the 2</sup> Hill Tract Houses and it is difficult to <sup>hence</sup> describe <sup>a</sup> ~~a~~ particular type. <sup>specific</sup> A number of Ragmala paintings of more or less the same period have burnt amber, powder blue and red backgrounds. <sup>and have use of gold</sup> The borders may be brown, powder blue, red or of no colour at all. The average miniature is not of large size.   
~~murals~~ <sup>murals</sup> ~~murals~~

These areas, though they may have had periods of comparative quiescence as far as the art of miniature painting is concerned, were always surrounded by areas where advanced <sup>painting</sup> Buddhist ~~murals~~ prevailed. The Kashmir artists who painted murals in Spiti and in the kingdom of Guge in the 11th century must have travelled along these tracts. The pictorial tradition in these neighbouring areas never ceased <sup>continued & survived in various degrees</sup> ~~and~~ the banner <sup>paintings</sup> ~~paintings~~ were being produced all along upto quite recent times. Some of these banners are of very fine technique which bespeaks <sup>of</sup> a living and very vital tradition. <sup>One</sup> We can be fairly certain that <sup>some cultural</sup> these pictorial contacts albeit with artists working in the Buddhist idiom never ceased and may have been <sup>even</sup> quite pronounced during the <sup>Ladaki</sup> Ladaki incursions into Kulu. <sup>In that way Kulu was</sup> ~~Traces of very early~~


*Surrounded by areas with a continuous pictorial tradition. Was not isolated from advanced pictorial tradition.*



begin page 25

~~it's~~

Either from the Tibetan Side or from  
the Ladakhi-Tibetan areas on the  
other. Traces of Very Early Murals.

  
page 25



murals exist in neighbouring Lahoul while Spiti preserves the previous records <sup>with Buddhist Rasmis</sup> of the 11th century.

Communications with Lahoul, Spiti, Ladak, and Guge were either by the upper routes through Lahoul or <sup>the</sup> lower Sutlej valley, but <sup>there</sup> contacts must have been maintained and <sup>in this</sup> Kulu was not an isolated territory. Since paintings of a high standard are always few in number, a large number of indifferent paintings does not exclude the possibility of some very fine paintings co-existing in limited numbers, but in the case of Kulu with its limited resources one can hardly expect to find ~~many~~

<sup>Something exceptional and</sup> ~~something much~~ better than the Ramayana ~~or~~ the portraits of Tedhi Singh <sup>or</sup> the paintings of Bhagawan Das as the better <sup>miniatures were painted for the Rulers</sup> artists were always in demand at the courts. <sup>and Rulers usually invited the better artists to work for them.</sup>

✓ Some of the very fine, (as already mentioned), Ragmala <sup>found in Ruler</sup> miniatures must have been brought from the outside, as they are in a pure and advanced style <sup>and technique</sup> as we find it in Kangra, <sup>galer</sup> at its best. <sup>and in the lower foot hills.</sup>

With all that Kulu had a very interesting and striking pictorial tradition which was rather stable because of a certain remoteness of the area and <sup>also because of</sup> ~~perhaps~~ the limited scope <sup>which prevailed</sup> within its boundaries.



Having considered some of the aspects of the art of the Kulu region, one can turn back and take another <sup>glance</sup> look at it afresh before our mental vision.

<sup>as to pattern of life which surrounded it</sup>  
<sup>the successive trials of its day, and carried through its own particular vital expression of its own</sup>  
<sup>maintaining the influences that poured into it from all sides.</sup>

Above all the manifold influences that have poured into this valley rises and stands out the inherent, <sup>Kulu spirit, its tradition</sup> traits, the specific mode of life <sup>with</sup> and its expression as it manifests itself in Kulu and is <sup>in some ways</sup> the true expression of the Kulu

people. The well built houses of Kulu with their typical and striking architecture, <sup>the reminder of Swiss chalet style</sup> the rich Kulu Folk Art,

manifesting itself either in stone, wood or bronze images, <sup>into</sup> in the enigmatic smile of the Kulu Masks, in the ornamental <sup>decorative carvings</sup> wood carvings on houses, temples and shrines, with its <sup>their</sup>

typical rich designs so characteristic of the valley, <sup>In</sup> The <sup>deep</sup>

<sup>of the</sup> Kulu <sup>women</sup> <sup>as</sup> <sup>patterns</sup> <sup>when</sup> <sup>come out to keep company with the</sup> with its bright colours and designs on festive occasions, the numerous fairs and feasts with all the Gods, in their palanquins and on altars, <sup>the heavy silver</sup> <sup>adorned</sup>

ornaments and the <sup>reverberating</sup> sound of the long carved trumpets and flutes <sup>the</sup> and the beat of <sup>in</sup> drums. The smoke of

Juniper and Deodar incense and the sparkle of Monal and Kwahta feathers in the caps of the swaying <sup>role</sup> <sup>and</sup> dancers. <sup>in</sup> The colourful songs and countless tales and legends. <sup>that form the background of their life.</sup> These

are <sup>Some of the</sup> the true expressions of Kulu's creative spirit, in them still linger and <sup>through them</sup> express themselves the ancient faith <sup>Tradition</sup> and traditions. <sup>and hope of the people</sup> This is the living bridge across the waters of

time that links us with the ancient <sup>realms</sup> land of the Upanishads and the Vedas, still alive, as it <sup>and it always were through the</sup> <sup>they</sup> <sup>of the last period.</sup> was thousands of years ago

of rich history.



The Art Pattern which developed and partially survived in Kulu goes back to remote antiquity and has its roots in the earliest periods of Indian history. This pattern is the outcome of multiple influences, indigenous as well as extraneous.

Because of the remoteness of this area and the difficulties of access to certain, sheltered, inner valleys there was a stability in this pattern, yet it was constantly being enriched by the very nature of the geographic position of Kulu and the inherent attractiveness, of this tract, by virtue of which it would receive influences from lower India, adjoining Himalayan tracts, Kashmir, Chamba, and the Western Tibetan as well as the Central Asian complex of cultural and artistic centers.

To appreciate the art pattern of Kulu we must bear in mind its origins, its history, its background and the peculiar conditions of the Himalayan regions where it was situated and formed.

Though these areas have been mentioned in ancient Sanscrit literature, the earliest factual record of Kulu as a Sovereign State, we have in a coin which dates from the first or second century A.D. and bears the legend:

RAJNA KOLUTASYA VIRAYASAYA  
or (of the) King of Kuluta VIRAYASA

Thus Kulu or the kingdom of Kuluta was already an independent state at the beginning of our era and local lore takes its origins far beyond to the time of the Mahabharata with Bhim Sen and Vidara as its founder heroes and speaks of its boundaries extending beyond the present Kulu across the states of Mandi and Sukhet. Tradition likewise mentions Nirmand in lower Kulu as the great center where the Attharva Vedas were recorded and also mentions Rishi Jamaḍ Agni of the Vishnu Puranas with his wife Renuka seeking solitude in these areas. At Manikaran in the Parbati Valley there are a few pages of a manuscript named Kulantapitha Mahatmya purporting to be a part of the Bhahmanda Purana and describing a tract Kulantapitha east of the Beas river.

Though King Virayasa, mentioned in the legend of the coin has not been identified so far and his name does not appear in the known