

PALA ART.

As I have already mentioned in my other articles, the present dynasty of the Mandi State Rulers, whose surname is Sen, has come to Mandi from Bengal. Evidence is that they came somewhere between the 11th and 12th century and undoubtedly it must have marked a period when Pala Art was first introduced in the Kulu Valley. Whether artists of the Pala School had come at that particular time or had come earlier taking part in that migration from Bengal westwards which was precipitated by certain local conditions and have found their way to the Kangra and Kulu Valleys independent or in connection with the migrating ruling dynasties is difficult to say at this particular moment. One fact is obvious, first that we have in Kulu and elsewhere in the region definite traces of Pala Art and we have the tradition of the ruling dynasties having come from Bengal.

The local Schools developed in Kashmir in the post Gupta period may have influenced the style of the Pala artists and there are certain features in the surviving sculptures which tend to support this theory. Thus in the attitude of the two attendants of Vishnu in the Bajaura temple at Kulu there is a reminiscence of poses found in the early Surya attendants from the western schools. The beautiful Surya bronze in the Lahore Museum which is of transitional period and in the Surya figure of the late Kushan period which is in my collection definitely shows a similarity and the existence of a common prototype. The Surya figure in my collection is an interesting figure inasmuch as it has characteristics of Greco/Kushan images such as the long Kushan coat and boots of the figures and the square short Greek sword strung in front the facial characteristics in some ways remind us of some Sassanian types. These facial characteristics led Dr. Goetz of the Baroda Museum to suspect that it was a Sassanian bronze rather than Kushan, but the other characteristics seem to take it to the other period. It is very difficult to draw a line between these influences but one can definitely feel the strong influence of the Greek craftsmen and artists who must have lived and worked throughout these regions.

We know that the Scythians were employing Greek craftsmen to fashion their remarkable bold reliefs and jewellery and it is very interesting to see how these foreign artists could adapt themselves to the local demands and styles. The mountain regions preserved their styles longer because of the inaccessibility of some of the valleys and isolated plateaus thus we know for instance that Tibet has become a repository for early Indian bronzes as well as for the writings of early Buddhist philosophers and scholars. Texts which have been lost in India have been preserved in the Tibetan monasteries and I believe that many a missing link will be found on further exploration in these inaccessible sanctuaries. Various parts of Tibet have not been explored at all and there is only tradition and folk lore legends telling us what may be found in some of the mountain ranges where no habitation is known to exist at present but where habitation is possible and could have been at some time or other. This vast region which we call Tibet will undoubtedly yield a great deal of most important data as it is one of the few regions which has escaped exploration on account of its inaccessibility. There is a whole area in the north western central Tibet which has hardly been visited at all, yet indications are that it may prove to be a most interesting area. With the development of aerial photography many of the regions and countless valleys of this mountainous plateau may be mapped, but how far this mapping will reveal details one cannot tell at the present moment.

I always felt that a series of excavations should be undertaken along the Kangra and Kulu Valleys to explore the earlier civilizations of those regions as I am certain a great deal of important data will come from these parts. It would be of great interest to make further research in the so-called Guge School or Art of the Spiti region as this school being the direct outcome of Pala traditions may have preserved certain characteristics of the then prevailing local art of these regions. Comparing the Guge School to the Pala prototype we may be able to glean many of these influences that have modified the

Pala School and by induction reconstruct the local tradition. There is no reason to doubt that at the time when the cave temples of Tuen Huang were built and decorated with sculptures and frescoes there was a definite contact between Central Asia and India and this contact could have been maintained through one of the several arteries such as the Kulu Valley route opening out on to Hoshiapur through Kangra and Mandi.

The Kulu Shawl with its woven designs presents a rather interesting development of a geometric pattern which can be found both in the north-west as well as in the East, thus among the Assam tribes one finds the same type of design and it is of interest that some of these designs are found often in the Pala manuscript illustrations. Whether these designs were common to all these regions at a certain period of history or whether these designs had been introduced in the course of migration it is difficult to say, but there is no doubt the textile designs are usually very conservative and very slow in their evolution. Hence, these patterns must have survived long centuries and the slight variation which is often introduced in the course of time usually expresses itself in different colouring rather than in the change of the basic pattern. The Kulu design is of bright colours which are so characteristic of this region, characteristic of its flowers, of blossoming trees and bright clearly defined seasons. The inherent love for colour in the local people is emphasised by the brilliant hues they like to wear, by the flowers which they always wear either in garlands or stuck in their hair, both men and women, and this love for colour naturally found an expression in the patterns. The Rainbow colouring used in the patterns is very characteristic. We also find the Rainbow effect very often used in Central Asian paintings and whether it is just local development or a survival of ancient tradition only further research can prove.

The designs used in Kulu textiles are mostly of geometric patterns, but occasionally one finds more elaborate floral work which may be a later evolution.