

The Kulu Valley which forms with Spiti and Lahoul the easternmost portion of the Kangra District was formerly a great trade route to Central Asia. This important artery later lost its significance with the opening of the road through Kashmir towards Ladak. Huen Siang, the Chinese traveller, referred to Kulu in his "Narrative of Travels in India" and called it the Kingdom of Kuluta. He mentions that it was a Buddhist country containing upwards of 20 monasteries and an Ashoka pillar to mark the place where Lord Buddha used to preach.

This was in the seventh century, but nothing remains now and only tradition refers to Buddhist sites here and there. It is true no excavations have been undertaken so far, no systematic study, yet there could be no doubt that there existed a definite school of Buddhist Art which flourished here from the earliest periods.

Kulu is mentioned in the earliest Indian scriptures and such names as the name of Rishi Vyas have been associated with this Valley.

The earliest coins ^{found} have been in Kulu so all ^{are of} the first century, ^{A.D} i.e. in Karoshti inscriptions referring to the kingdom of ^{Kuluta} ~~Karuta~~.

A Sassanian vase was found in Lahoul and there are a number of Gupta images which have survived in some of the remote places of this district.

There could be no doubt that the proximity of the Indo-Greek culture and Kushan influences have penetrated ^{into} these Valleys.

The trade route through Central Asia, which also served for many an invasion, was a well established artery and over the Rotan ^g Pass that leads from Kulu to Lahoul we ^{can} still find stone steps which have been laid centuries past to facilitate the journey. Who has laid this stairway? It is difficult to say but it may have existed there from ~~the~~ earliest periods of contacts with Central Asia. The stairway, laid over thousands of feet of hillside, bespeaks of a great traffic. The Buddhist tradition has remained only in Lahoul and Spiti. In ~~Kulu~~ it has been completely superceded by Hindu religion and by local cults which show an affinity ^{with} of the ^{cults of the} indigenous inhabitants of those Valleys belonging to the Monh-Khmer group which you still find in some of the more remote and inaccessible valleys like for instance the Malana valley - ~~in~~ an off-shoot of the Kulu Valley.

One of the earliest figures which has been found in the district is the well known Buddha in the Lahore Museum found at ~~the~~ Fatehpur ^{FATEHPUR} village in Kangra and dated 578 A.D. The other Gupta figures which

I find in the district follow in general the pattern of the Fatehpur Buddha and it seems that there was a certain style which was typical of this region. This style, as I have already mentioned, was undoubtedly derived from the earlier ^{GN} ~~N~~adharma and Kushan styles and one common feature is the use of inlay work in metal which could have come with the Greek influence as it was a feature of some of the Egyptian and Greko-Roman bronzes, thus a use of silver for the eyes and a reddish gold copper for the mouth and parts of the dress or ornamentation is very typical of these figures. In some of them I have even found various shades of bronze and copper beaten in to form an indirect colour scheme somewhat similar to the work on the throne of Fatehpur Buddha. The bronze used for the figure itself was ^{usually} therefore a fairly pale bronze which forms a good background for the ^{inlay} work.

We have heard of workers of images in Mandi and Suket and I believe their tradition of art is very ancient.

A great deal remains to be done to link up the passing of the Gupta period into the Pala influences which have come to Kulu and the district from the East probably with the migration of some of the Pala ruling families who have come to settle in these hills. The tradition tells us that the present rulers of Mandi, whose surname is Sen, have come in the eleventh century from the East, and some other branches with the surname Pal had come from the South, i.e. Poona, where they had previously gone from Bengal. There are a number of sculptures of that period which clearly show a marked Pala influence. The beautiful sculptures of the Bajaura Temple in Kulu are typical examples of the consummate workmanship of the Pala craftsmen, worked in the hard black stone permitting a very fine finish. These sculptures are in a beautiful refined style with highly attenuated figures and must have been the work of highly accomplished artisans versed in all the intricacies of the Pala stone cutting.

There are many stone reliefs with floral designs, beautiful scrolls, probably of the same period, which can be found all the way up the Valley as far as Manali. *A few fragments showing the Pala influence are also known to exist.*

The latter periods are periods of complete decadence and loss of craftsmanship, whether it is due to invasions or some other reasons *as in the case of*

to say The latter centuries are characterised by very crude stone sculptures and bronze images quite unlike the beautiful bronze mask Munji Devi from the ^Nirmand Temple which dates back to the ninth or tenth century.

One of the typical features of Kulu and the nearby lying Hindu districts are the masks of Gods and Goddesses which ^{are} present hollow high reliefs of the God's face. These masks are usually presented to the temples by devotees and many of them carry inscriptions and are dated. These masks are the counterparts of the God in the temple and they are taken out on portable altars to the great fairs, to the various ^{functions} ~~stairs~~ and ceremonies, they are so-to-say representations of the Gods in the temple. It is of interest that these masks are usually inlaid with various metals and sometimes precious and semi-precious stones. ^{This} ~~It~~ may be the survival of a much earlier tradition of the inlaid bronze images.

The so called Guge school of Art which flourished in Spiti and spread out to the neighbouring districts was undoubtedly a descendent or adaptation of the Parla School which had come to the Valley from the East. These Buddhist pictorial records are the only so far known examples of painting which survived in this region. Very often in these paintings we have a Central Asian ^{Touch} type in the family of the donors being painted in at one of the lower corners of the image. This is a ^{feature} ~~tradition~~ which must have come together with other influences ~~from~~ over the great Central Asian route.

By tradition there existed an early school of painting indigenous to the regions of Kulu and Kangra and co-existent with the bronze and stone images. But nothing remains of that earlier Art. Perhaps we shall yet find some manuscripts which were usually written on birch bark and which by tradition have often been illustrated. Perhaps we may ^{even} find some fresco work, but up to now nothing has come to light. The ^{later} ~~latter~~, so called Kangra school of painting flourished throughout the lower reaches of the sub-division and it may even have ascended as far north as the upper reaches of the Kulu Valley, but the earliest known Art ^{is of} ~~of~~ the seventeenth century ⁱⁿ ~~of~~ the so-called Basholi and Gaddi ^{styles} ~~types~~. The Basholi type seems to be an evolution of a much earlier indigenous Art and is a sort of Rajput-Mogul interpretation of the local Gadi ^{culminating} ~~cults~~, ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ the Shepherd God. The Kangra Art reached a very great perfection in the 17th/18th and beginning of the 19th century. It is true that the latter examples have lost their spontaneity of the earlier schools, the primitive tradition and freshness having given way to technical perfection which usually destroys ^{by} its own limitations and impositions the real inspiration and feeling which were so freely expressed by the early artists

hampered by the thousand and one technical considerations and reforms of the moment. ^{Its} decadence is common to all the Arts, it has its parallel in practically every domain of life and may be a symbol of our ^{own} mechanical civilisation with all the burdens which our rapidly evolving technical perfection imposes upon us.

In this we see The complete cycle of a minor evolutionary period, the spiral descending in order to ascend again to carry us to yet greater achievements, greater heights of self expression.

The Kangra school has penetrated East as far as Tehri-Garhwal where the great artist ~~Maula~~ Ram flourished in the eighteenth century. Maula Ram first worked in the Mogul technique, but later he transmuted ^{it} to the traditional Kangra style and painted very beautiful and technically highly accomplished paintings. There are very few names of artists known to us, most of the Art remaining anonymous. There are other names like Manaku or Kishanchand and I confidently expect that many more names will come to light as our study of the Kangra school progresses. No one can deny the beautiful lyric quality of the Kangra paintings. They reflect the extraordinary rich natural beauties of those regions which help the artist to form those beautifully decorated compositions full of rich and colourful detail which nature so lavishly placed before the artists. The beautiful flowering trees, the meadows, the hill sides, the beautiful Kangra type, a type which ^{survives} ~~is true~~ even today. The beautiful lyric ^{as} mood and vividness of colours, all that went to build up that unique tradition which we know as the Kangra school. The freshness of the rural outlook influences ^{the building up of the} ~~us in keeping life to~~ Kangra tradition, but the changing mode of life and political changes in the country, as usual, brought to a close this mode of expression. ^{in the middle of last century} Let us hope that the new artists will follow ~~those~~ of the rich and beautiful tradition of Kangra and will make use of the beautiful composition and imagination which we find in these paintings.