CHAPTER: 4
Sacred Metal Sculptures
1. Introduction

It may be recalled that the Western Himachal Pradesh was strongly influenced by Kashmir, even Central Asia, economically and politically. Similarly, the Eastern part of Himachal showed various influences of Pratihar and Katyuri styles of Madhya Desh, Uttar Pradesh with sporadic influence from eastern India (Bengal and Magadh) iconological elements. This classical influence in metallic art must have started from the time of Guptas, especially Samudragupta and continued through the successive dynasties. The Central part of Himachal Pradesh which included Mandi, Kullu, Manali and CIS-Satluj, was developing its own style of art.

As already mentioned, the main influence in Chamba (H.P.) was from Kashmir. Geographically, Kashmir implies four regions. One is the plains of Srinagar (South of Kashmir) and second is the high plateau and valleys of North Kashmir, centred on the upper Indus where Buddhism was prominent with Central Asiatic and Turkish cultural features. The Western part of Kashmir was centered around Gilgit where Buddhism was well suited as an international trading infrastructure. The Eastern part of Kashmir was towards Ladakh, valleys of Janskar, Lahaul & Spiti and Chamba.

By the time of the Islamic conquest of western Asia and consequent downfall of Turkishahi kingdom in N-W Kashmir (due to the loss of connectivity with their roots through the western Asia), Kashmir (north) style of bronzes have spread through the western part of Himachal Pradesh and beyond.

Before we take up the aesthetic analysis of metal sculpture of Himachal Pradesh, it may be in order to briefly ponder over the salient features related to aesthetics.

1.1 Basics

Any artistic creation may be of any type, any style, representing any theme/idea, in any religious tradition or from any school of fine arts irrespective of the artisans (Shilpis) in any of the eras/periods. Indian concepts of aesthetics and its principles are capable of appreciating the art object element by element, through body, mind and soul. After all the creative art is an activity of the human mind guided by the wisdom of the Soul.
The roots of Himachal art are embodied in the belief that the universe is pervaded by an eternal stream of Life (Sat) or Consciousness (Cit), of which different forms and appearances in the external world are bubbles appearing and disappearing in pulsating rhythms and harmonies. With such rhythms of being and becoming, the Indian art plunges the human soul to its deepest levels of experience. This art has remarkably achieved a balanced and comprehensive vision and thus it oversteps the human dimension and viewpoint and their associated finite range of attractiveness, harmony and elegance.

At the same time, Himachal art unfolds the total reality by revealing dynamically, powerfully and majestically many moods and emotions other than the tranquility. Tranquility has been the characteristic predominant mood of Indian art, bronzes, and exhibiting silence with closed/ half- closed eyes.

Essentially, there are two types of linkages which may be found in Indian sculptures and these are religious and non-religious

1.2. Linkages
Social linkage: Today, most of the Indian sculptures are stored in a museum. In order to visualize the original architectural setting, religious motivation & social inspiration including the philosophical aspects, becomes difficult when the sculpture is removed from its original placement, for which one has to go back to the earlier space and time, the prehistoric period (c. 3000-1500 BC) or the beginning of the historic era (4th century B.C.). It may be recalled that the Indian sculpture had started developing prior to the Indus Valley civilization during the 4th- 3rd millennium BC.

At the beginning of the 4th century BC, there was a spread of the Buddhism and its teachings. During this period, about 85,000 monuments were constructed with the image of Buddha and the themes of his teachings were engraved on many rocks and pillars which can be seen in different monasteries. Buddha images were created showing halos and engravings on his palms and feet. Later, the focus was more on the details of facial expression & feelings rather than the body. The first century AD, saw a drastic change in the sculptures, when the human figure replaced the images of
Buddha and his teachings. These images became important in worship to emphasize immortality.

The **north Indian City of Mathura** was famous for sculptures dating prior to the Kushan period. (130 BC- 185 AD), which reveal the emergence of the anthropomorphich images of the Buddha, the predominance of a heterodox sect of Jainism, and the proliferation of cults of nature divinities. It certainly indicates the progress of the civilization that took place in India.

During the 4\textsuperscript{th} to the 6\textsuperscript{th} century AD, **Hinduism was well established in India**, resulting in the production of numerous images of Hindu **Gods and Goddesses**, most of which are found today in temples and museums throughout India.

**Linkage with Natural Forces and their Visualization:** In addition to the above linkage, a notable feature of **Indian sculpture** has been that diverse forces acting, at that time, on Indian psyche, religion and iconography are reflected through the sculptures in various media through various religions. It included the themes related with love of nature, sensuality, eternity, and divine omniscience and omnipotence.

**Natural forces** were attributed to five gross elements (earth, water, fire, wind and space) which were quite essential for sustaining the life of living beings on this planet. Above all, the Sun was having the supreme controlling power to run the dynamics of these gross elements. Therefore, these six life sustaining forces were offered homage and reverence by the earliest man through images and symbols which were the spontaneous **expression** of his personal conception of the almighty. As a result, these forces were personified as a token of friendship, love & respect and then later deified. These phenomena saved the nature from destruction. Thus, whole of the nature/environment remained integrated with the living style of the human race, as if they are made for each other.

These deities were assumed to have additional attributes like multiple heads/ hands with a belief that they would watch and provide protection with their supernatural powers. In today's context, it was a wonderful concept, free from exploitation of nature.
Another natural phenomenon of mutual attraction and procreation can also be understood similarly through the symbiotic relationship represented in the imagery of yaksha- yakshi. Natural spirits were represented by voluptuous female forms, and further, the mother goddess remained the major themes of early Indian sculpture. Likewise, the iconographical imagery of Hindu deities Ganesh, Vishnu, Shiva and Durga were developed representing the Wisdom, the Preservator, the Controller/Destroyer and the Shakti to keep a balance in the dynamic universe, mainly based on beliefs that rooted in the minds of people. Thus, Indian sculpture can be considered as the vehicle that strongly conveyed the idea of respect to these natural forces.

The real skills of the sculptor can be found in his imagination & visualization of the deities endowed with attributes, particularly the ideal proportions, youthful bodies and expressions to infuse life in the deity. Such sculptures & the images adorned the walls of the temples and their interiors. Further, the most remarkable development in the history of Indian sculpture was the use of colours in the sculptures to give a more visual impact. (Examples are Ajanta and Ellora caves).

2. Different Bronze Styles
Having discussed the philosophy behind important images of deities and their attributes, we come across various bronze styles of Himachal Pradesh which may be put mainly under five categories as follows.

Kashmir (South Kashmir) Style: One of the earliest discoveries of a Kashmiri style of bronze was made in Kangra valley (Himachal Pradesh) around the turn of the century (19th to 20th c). Although most of the Kashmiri style bronzes have come out of Tibet during 1950-1970. Similar bronzes have also been discovered in Kirghiz area of Soviet Russia and as far away as Scandinavia. The only bronze which may be regarded as Kashmiri was identified as that dedicated during the reign of the Colorful queen Didda (983-1003 AD). Nevertheless, The Kashmiri bronzes reflect certain peculiar and discernible characteristics, which distinguish them from the other contemporary bronzes. These are enumerated as follows:
A distinct preference for rather heavy, muscular and sturdy bodies which reflects an attempt at naturalistic modeling.

- As opposed to the oval faces of figures during either Gandhar or Gupta period, those in Kashmiri sculptures have a round and almost bloated shape. The cheeks appear to be stuffed and features are generally thick and fleshy. The nose is broad rather than being aquiline, and the lips are often summarily delineated, unlike the full and sensuous lips one encounters in other Indian figures. The eyes are at times disproportionately large and have a vacant expression, made particularly noticeable because of the silver inlay. In other instances, the eyes seem to be slanted and have the narrowness of Mongoloid eyes.

- In bronzes, the treatment of petals of lotus base is different often the petals are more reminiscent of those of artichoke than of a lotus. The peculiarity of lotus design seems to occur only in the bronzes from Kashmir and contiguous area.

- Most Kashmiri bronzes are brassy in comparison to that darker and more coppery bronzes created elsewhere in India. Kashmiri sculptors seem to be fond of using both copper and silver inlays- in the eyes and lips very frequently, but also often in garments- than their counterparts in eastern or south India.

- In matters of dress (Dhoti and Uttariya), jewelry, crown (with five moons) decoration on the head, flower garland were also typical to the Kashmiri style. Kings also used sometimes Scythian attire.

- Just as the Kings and the gods are frequently indistinguishable except for the additional attributes, so also the queens and goddesses are seen in like manner.

- The dress for the Kashmiri women consisted of a lower garment (kissing the ground) wrapped like a skirt, a blouse that emphasized the breast's curves and gossamer scarf flung across the shoulders.

- Often, similarity in bronzes used to indicate the sculptor responsible for its creation.

- The Kashmiri bronze styles appear to have been crystallized by the 8th century, before the Lalataditya period.

- It may be recalled that there was the kingdom of Guge (10th-16th c AD) in western Tibet, which had influence over a vast area including upper Kinnaur, and Spiti. Therefore, the Kashmiri artist were busy working for monasteries in western Tibet
and most of bronzes in Buddhist tradition, Bodhisattva, Maitreya, etc. must have been made in this style by the Kashmiri artists within or outside Kashmir. However, in a few cases relatively slimmer proportions indicate a greater awareness of **Gupta Style** and the treatment of the hair, particularly the fan shaped Jata, and peculiar manner of raising the right hand with the palm turned towards the body, may have come from the **Gandhar style**. Nevertheless, a few Vedic bronzes of Vishnu and Shiva, of prior to 8th century seems to be of Kashmiri origin.

- It may be mentioned that all the Kashmiri style bronzes may not actually have been produced in Kashmir. The examples are: Chamba bronzes like Mukhalinga (Chatrari) or Vishnu Chaturanana, which look like the work of Kashmiri artisans. However, despite certain similarity in **style**, there are significant differences even within a given period, in respect of **expression** and details.

**Kashmir bronzes** occupy a high place in Indian art. The reputation of these bronzes was so high that the same **style** was very often followed also in **Himachal Pradesh** and other neighboring regions.

**Buddhist (North Kashmir) Style:**
- Three-pointed crown studded with pearls.
- Long Uttariya.
- Round heads with puffy faces and Mangoloid eyes inlaid with electrum.
- Four pointed shoulder-cap with sun and moon symbols alongwith Central Asiatic dresses.
- Stylized rock as a plinth for the base.
- Seat supported by lions at the corners, ‘Greek’ pillars, and atlantes in the centre.
- Mandorlas and ogival-pointed *prabhavalis* with single or double studded inner arch, engraved with curling flames.
- The modeling of the torso is smoother than that in southern Kashmir.
- A rounded or squire fringed piece of brocade often hangs down from the seat.

**Chamba (West Himachal) Style:** Two striking features of the Chamba art are:
- A steady adherence to classical idioms and tastes in sculpture in different medium.
Main current of artistic influence from South & North Kashmir and Central Asia often alternated or even intermingled with various Deccani/ north Indian styles (like Vakataka, Kalacuri, Chalukya and Pratihara).

The various phases in Chamba art of metallic icons may be classified into four periods.

**Phase I:** Early Classical period (500-800 AD).

**Phase II:** Classical (Kashmir) Period: 800 to early 10th century): Just after Meruvarman, with the conquest of Chamba by Lalitaditya, Kashmiri influence and designs/ styles got a boost to such an extent that one could hardly distinguish between the arts of Kashmir and of Chamba.

- Vishnu is very commonly depicted (Phase II) assuming either of the three main forms.
- Vaikuntha with four heads, (Lion to the right and boar to the left), riding Garuda.
- Chaturanan (with four heads) standing between Chakra and Gada.
- Vasudeva with one head standing.
- In metal icons, the eyes are often inlaid with the electrum, an alloy of gold and silver.
- The pitha is occasionally provided with a nala (spout) projecting from the side.
- The mandorla is very often adorned with a rosette.
- The torso and belly are strongly modeled and the navel is often patterned in a deep cross-shaped motif.
- Shiv and Ganesh Generally wear a snake in place of sacrificial thread.
- Ganesha appears with one or even two lions as vehicle instead of the traditional rat. The shape of the ears (of Ganesha) is designed differently.
- The Prabhas in metal icons are of two elliptical shapes (the smaller one at the top intersecting the bigger one)

**Phase III:** Pratihar renewal (10th- 12th century), The above Kashmiri influence got diluted and replaced partially by a classical North Indian Pratihar current for about one century. Afterwards such a difference got minimized, and the style followed the Kashmiri artistic tradition.

**Phase IV:** Post–Classical Period (13th- 18th century), with the establishment of Islamic rule in North India, Chamba and the other valleys of Himachal were cut off
from its main cultural background, while Kashmir was still to remain Hindu for two more centuries under the Lohara dynasty (1101-1340). Its political power was, however, on the wane.

- 13th-14th century was a period of political and economic breakdown, during which the creatively in art was considerably dimmed. However, there was some artistic activity in the Cis Satluj, in respect of metallic mohras, a characteristic of central Himachal. This period also saw a little deviation in stylistic trend like ringed mace was abandoned, big almond-shaped eyes with thick eyebrows became common, crowns lost the sharp angularity by slightly curved shape, trefoil arch evolved into a flattened (precast-like) structure which could be placed above the figure with support, etc.

- At this stage, Hermann Goetz recognized two main stylistic trends.
  - A classical tradition or “imitative medieval style” (beginning in late 15th A.D.)
  - A folk style from 14th-16th century, with a ‘revival’ in second half of 17th century A.D.

- **Chamba (Himachal) Style** in metallic icons may be summarized as follows:
  - The ringed mace held by Vishnu and Durga remained typical of Chamba during Phase II and Phase III.
  - Garuda often bears a pot but always has his wings and tail patterned to look like a cross, with feathers so designed as to resemble fish bones.
  - A typical North-Western Kashmiri tri-pointed diadem came into common use from 9th century to the present day, with a slight modification.
  - Lions have a star-cum-spiral shaped design on both the fore and hind quarters, with the tail curling backward in elongated ‘S’ shape.
  - Style of feminine fashion may be summarized as follows:
    - The rear and top of the head are veiled by a long silken Uttariya (scarf) whose ends hang loosely beside the thighs.
    - The hair is bound in curled bun on the side, generally above the left shoulders.
    - The Vanmala (classical long garland) is always present, coming up to knees.
    - A long string of pearls (another necklace) hangs loosely on the chest and flows down between the breasts.
    - Sleeveless blouse with a pointed lower edge is often worn during Phase I and II.
The bracelets consist of large bangles bordering a sequence of smaller bangles decorated with a median of buttons.

Armbands are typical to Chamba.

Central Himachal Style- Mohras: The area of central Himachal Pradesh i.e. Mandi, Kullu, Manali and Cis Satluj, is very well known for Mohras of deities or devtas, mainly rishis of ancient times, great leader/protector of the area/village, which are made of different metals. The mohra of the main deity is made rarely of gold, usually of silver, The other mohras are made mostly of bronze and brass metals. Effectively, these are typical to this area of Himachal. Shivaratri fair of Mandi and Dassehra of Kullu is a witness to this phenomena. This style of metal art is also found in other areas of the state and beyond the state.

Traditional Folk Style: This style is prevalent in all the tribal areas of the state of Himachal Pradesh. One may identify two groups in folk style as follows:

The main characteristics of this group are elongated slender limbs and up-tilted heads with protruded eyes, a pointed chin and low forehead. This style is supposed to be quite recent, say 19th century.

An isolated group of brass icons, which might be from Kangra area, may be considered as folkish brasses, though classical in trend. It has the following typical features:

A round bald head, a thick nose, a big, fish shaped protruding eye balls; small rounded and prominent chin; large projecting ears with thick lobes, pierced with a neat, small and round hole; hands almost small with fingers appearing glued together; heavy limbs and torso large, rounded shoulders and chest and sparse and minimal accessories like ornaments, jewels and dress/garments.

The bronze images of Himachal Pradesh are known all over for elegance and delightful rendering of their contours. The early bronzes reveal the blending of Gandhara and Gupta elements in a remarkable manner, and those of later medieval period depict the art traditions blended with Gandhara, Kashmir and Pratihara elements. The Pratiharas had a vast empire during 8-11th century, therefore the bronzes executed during this period show many similarities with those from Vidisha (M.P.), Kannauj (U.P.), Abaneri & Amjhual (Rajasthan), Sirmaur (H.P.) and other centres of Pratihara art.
There are more than 200 ancient artistic bronze images and 100 mohras of important deities and devtas in Himachal Pradesh. The distribution of Vedic images in the main three categories is almost the same. However, maximum bronze images are found to belong to Lord Vishnu family followed by that of Lord Shiva and then the ferocious form of Shakti (Mahishasurmardini), the minimum being those of Lord Brahma, Lord Aditya and syncretic type. There are several beautiful Buddhist icons also belonging to Shakyamuni, Bodhisattva and Dhyani Buddha. Out of the famous images, we will focus only on a few bronze images in different categories, for their aesthetic analysis, as given below. However, the latest trend for the purpose of decoration or worship, remains in favor of beautiful and artistic bronze images.

3. Aesthetic Analysis

3.1 Vedic Images: These Vedic icons are described respectively in this order as follows:

Lord Shiva:
- Swachchand Bhairavi
- Gauri- Shankar

Devi:
- Lakshana Devi (Mahishasurmardini)
- Shakti Devi

Ganapati:

Vishnu:
- Vaikunthnath
- Narsimha
Fig. 1: Swachchand Bhairavi
- **Svachchanda- Bhairavi:**
  - **Bronze image:** Belongs to Kangra (H.P.)
  - **Height:** 37.7 cms
  - **Period:** 11th-12th century A.D.
  - **Inscriptions:** Sarda script are in five-lines at its base on the bronze.
  - **Courtesy:** In the National Museum, New Delhi. The beautiful bronze image, illustrated above, it comes from Kangra, (H.P.).

- It is at present in the possession of Shri P.D Kapoor, an antique dealer of Delhi, according to whom it is a recent find.

- It has a **five-line inscription** at its base, in Sarada characters of about the 12th century A.D. The inscription is partly preserved and is still under study for complete decipherment. The inscription, when completely deciphered and properly interpreted, is bound to shed considerable light on the problems besetting the explanation of the image the like of which is seldom met with.

- It begins with the mention of the **year 53**, which is common with similar inscriptions found in that part, and refers itself to the Laukika era. From the circumstance, that hundreds are usually omitted retaining the last two digits (in this estimate), it is difficult to determine the exact date as also its equivalent in the Christian era.

- The name of a ruling chief is mentioned, may be symbolically, that appears to be ‘Naranayaka’, yet to be exactly understood.

**Composition:** The main deity, goddess, heavily ornamented, with a bejeweled crown from which flames are shooting up, is seated on the shoulders of and supported by a four handed male figure, has five faces and ten arms. Four of the faces are in the cardinal directions and fifth one is at the top, which reflects a grinning, with a smile expression, and the other faces with closed eyes are tranquil in expression.

- Fourth of the five right hands is in **abhaya- mudra** (re-assurance), while the corresponding left hand is in the **varad- mudra** (munificence). The remaining eight hands beginning from the top right hand respectively hold the following eight emblems: Khadga (sword), Padma (lotus), Trisul (trident) or Chakra (discus) with a
trishul inside it, Kapal (skull cup), Ankush (elephant goad), Pasa (noose) and Pustaka (book) and Amritghata (jar of ambrosia).

- The goddess is seated in paryankasana or sukhasana with the right leg folded and the left one hanging down.
- The four handed god, serving as vahana of the goddess is shown in an attitude of adoration, with the front two hands clasped in front in the gesture of benediction (anjali-mudra), the back right hand lending support to the knee of the folded right leg of the goddess and the back left hand serving as the foot-stool for the foot of the hanging down left leg of the goddess. The face of the vahana god is turned to the proper left as if trying to look upward at the face of the goddess respectfully. He also wears crown, ornaments on the upper half of the body, and is poised on a lotus with his legs crossed at the ankles.
- Both figures are attractively framed within a flamed trefoil-shaped aureole.
- On top of the pedestal and on either side of the lotus are two figures, seated like yogis. One of them has his hands in dhyana-mudra in his lap, the hands of the other display the anjali-mudra.
- More prominent are the figures of Ganesa carrying a tooth, a rosary, an axe and a bowl of sweets and Karttikeya on either side of the base, carrying his emblems, both ride their mounts and strike a dancing posture. In front of Karttikeya is yet another figure seated reverentially, very much in the manner of the two on the pedestal.
- The whole composition is well balanced, graceful and beautiful with the ends of the scarf and the lower garment of the goddess flying out as streamers. The swelling breasts and deep in thought eyes let somebody have an air of sublimity and tranquility, the gorgeous garlands that of freshness and piety.
- The skilful depiction of each little detail goes to the credit of the artist who shaped this masterpiece of a bronze.

As to the identity of the main figure, the available literature is not of much help. However, according to B. Ch. Chhabra after consulting Pandit Sarvanand Shastri of the National Museum, New Delhi, who himself besides being a good Sanskrit scholar, belongs to Kashmir and is a fervent devotee of Sakti or Parvati, it is possible to identify the figure either.
• Through the strotara (Shankar’s Anandalahari, verse 8) describing Sakti seated on Parama-Siva in paryankasana:

‘Sivakare manche paramasiva- paryankailayam’

Form this we may identify the male four- handed figure as of Siva or Parama-siva serving as Vahana to the goddess ‘Shakti’ Or

• Svachchhanda- Bhairava, the same description of which applies to his female counterpart, otherwise known as Aghora Sakti.

The importance of this form has been described in terms of Success which may come quickly to the person who concentrates and meditates on the god “Svachchhanda- bhairava, the grantor of all desired objects, having five faces decorated with a flower garland and kapala- mala (garland of skulls), holding in hands, a sword, a book, a noose, a goad, a lotus, the pinaka (bow), showing one hand in varada (Boon- granting) mudra (attitude) and another in abhaya (re-assuring) attitude, holding in another hand an amrita- kalasa (jar of ambrosia), a discus and a trident.” This importance may be seen within the iconic philosophy similar to the one already described for five - faced Maheshwar.

In the absence of confirmation fi”om a different source one is inclined to identify this image with the Svachchhanda- Bhairavi aspect of the goddess Sakti.

• Nevertheless, Svachchhanda Bhairava is said to carry a Veena, a Damru and a Lotus, none of which is held by this goddess. Therefore, due to these discrepancies one may think of the goddess simply as Maha- Bhairavi (the Great Bhairavi.8).

It may be worth pointing out that in Saiva tradition9, (Rudra) Bhairavi is simply a counterpart of Rudra, one of the eight Bhairavas. Each Bhairava was having a corresponding Bhairavi and in certain traditions, Bhairava became the mount of his female counterpart.
In an article on Pahari bronzes by B.N. Sharma, the same figure has been described as that of the Consort of Sadashiv, with the depiction of Urdhva trinetra on the foreheads (which are rubbed off on the front faces). The mount of the goddess, has been identified as Nandi, the four-armed male figure. The place of origin of this image has been referred to Shimla district or the eastern part of Kullu district.

- **Lakshana Devi (Mahishasurmardini):**
  - **Bronze image:** Belongs to Lakshna Devi temple, Brahmaur, (Chamba)
  - **Height:** 1.25 m., 3 feet, 4 inches
  - **Period:** Circa second half of the 7th century A.D
  - **Inscriptions (9")**: King Meruvarman of Brahmapura
  - **Artist:** Gugga
  - **Courtesy:** Bharmaur, (Chamba, H.P.)

The famous Lakshana Devi temple at Brahmaur, in Chamba region of Himachal Pradesh, treasury a superb brass statue of goddess Mahishasurmardini, it is under worship as Lakshana. The inscription on the pedestal (9 inches in height), states that “the illustrious king Meruvarman has caused the holy image of the goddess Lakshana to be made by the workman Gugga.” It goes back to the second half of the seventh century. On stylistic grounds, it is of course, not plausible to assign this interesting Brahmaur bronze after the 8th century.

**Composition:** According to Goetz, the Brahmaur image follows the iconographic concept of the high Chalukya period (7th century) namely, the Goddess puts her right foot on the head of the killed buffalo demon, and with her left hand she catches the animal’s tail and lifts body up almost vertically. In every other respect, however, the Brahmaur image belongs to late Gupta Art, in the proportions of the figure, in the anatomical treatment, hair style, three pronged diadem, costume and emblems. In her four-armed form, she holds a fatally designed trident in upper right hand, sword in lower right positioned over the shoulder, a bell in upper left and the tail of Mahisha demon in lower left. Over all posture very forceful, reflecting Raudra Rasa, angerful open eyes with silver inlay, rounded face, decorated with beautiful traditional
ornaments, jewelry with coined necklace on the tri-circular linings (Shankh linings) on the neck, diamond shaped ear rings, armlets, bangles, navel surrounding unique waist- belt, The head covered long Uttariya is balancing and defining the whole composition.

The interesting iconography of this bronze calls for some remarks. Mahishasurmardini Durga is one of the most terrific aspects of Shakti and her worship was prevalent in India since very early times. The Devi- Mahatmya section of Markandeya- Purana, while describing the creation of this form of the goddess, narrates that every god gave her his most potent weapons so that she could combat and vanquish her formidable foe in the battlefield.

Shiva gave her the trident, Vishnu the Disc, Yama the spear, Agni a dart, Surya a quiver, Vayu a bow, Varuna a conch, Kala a sword and shield, Kubera a club, Indra a thunderbolt, Vishwakarma an axe while Himavan provided a ferocious lion as her mount.

As the vanquisher of Buffalo demon, the goddess has adopted different moods and poses with four-, eight-, ten- or even twelve arms. The bell in the left upper hand has been shown at most of the places in North and Central India and also in South India (Palladakal).

However, the above posture of the goddess was not found in the Kushana period. It was during the Gupta period that we come across the Devi in two forms:

a) **Udayagiri panel of 400 A. D.** bears a close resemblance with this image and with that given in the Vishnudharmottara- Purana which does associate a ‘bell’ with **ten-armed** Mahishamardini called as Katyayani\(^{12}\). The famous Gupta relief from Bhumara (M.P.) also bears close affinity with the Lakshana Devi bronze but for the presence of a shield in her upper left hand rather than a bell.

b) The **eight- armed** mediaeval statue of Mahishamardini in the Bajaura\(^ {13}\), Kullu, relief from Himachal and in the neighboring U.P. hills, and the famous statue from Baijnath\(^ {14}\), (Almora of Kumaon region), of 8-9\(^ {th}\) centuries A.D. exhibits the presence of this weapon (i.e. bell).
Fig. 2: Lakshana Devi, Bharmaur
It is equally interesting to come across the bell in the hands of Durga in the Pallava reliefs from south India, datable to the 7th century. The famous 8th century stone relief from Abaneri (Jaipur, Rajasthan) bears full affinity with the order of weapons of Lakshana devi image under reference, but for the fact that the head of buffalo demon is severed in the Abaneri statue. An early mediaeval life-size statue of Karel-Mata, four-armed devi, at Amjhara (Dungapur, Rajasthan), twisting the neck of Mahisha demon, she carries all the weapons including a bell, besides a trident and a sword. The same features are also available on the exterior niche of the Tirthodaka shrine of Ambika temple at Jagat, (Udaipur, Rajasthan). It is equally interesting to locate a parallel of Brahmor bronze in the early Pratihara (8-9th century) Mahishamardini from Kannauj itself. All these facts suggest that late Gupta and early Chalukyan traditions might have inspired the artists of Chamba region in carving their Mahishmardini images to some extent.

- **Shakti Devi (Chhatradi):**
  - **Bronze image:** Belongs to Chhatradi, Brahmaur, Chamba
  - **Height:** About 1.37 m
  - **Period:** 7th century A.D
  - **Inscriptions:** King Meruvarman of Brahmapura
  - **Artist:** Gugga
  - **Courtesy:** Chhatradi, Bharmaur, Chamba, H.P.

Chhatradi village is situated some 25 km. to the west of Brahmapura (present Bharmaur) where Musunavarman founded a kingdom long ago. It is located some 8 km away from the modern road linking Bharmaur with Chamba, 600-700 metres above the road level. In the village, there is an old wooden shrine of different plan than that of the Bharmaur temple, which enshrines a brass image of Shakti Devi, carrying inscription about the king Meruvarman and the artist Gugga of 7th century.

The wooden temple, its mukhmandapa, wooden pillars, the ceiling and the sanctum doorway are of the same type as those in Lakshana temple. However, it lacks the vitality of that Bharmaur temple. In age there may not be a big difference situated
Fig. 3: Shakti Devi (Bronze), Chamba
Fig. 4: Shakti Devi (full view)
within a short distance of each other but Bharmaur temple is relatively of little earlier period.

**Composition:** The sculpture of Shakti Devi (Goddess of Power) presents a smooth anatomy of the Indian plain. In Chatradi, in contrast, there is a strong Kashmiri influence which is revealed from the pectorals and the deep-set navel. More aesthetic facial feature including long fish-like eyes with high eye brows and tricircular linings (Shankh linings) on the neck enhances the beauty of the image. In her four hands the respective emblems are shown, lance in her one right hand, stylistically holding a lotus flower in the other right hand, snake in one of the left hands and bell in the second hand, symbolizing power, life force, death (time) and ether (space) respectively. Long flowing cloth is encircling the shoulders on the back falling upto the knees, long transparent beautifully designed garment below the ankles with anklet loops. The dignified and elegant bronze is in flexed posture (one bhang) which provides a better aesthetic and divine feelings. The Goddess is in rhythmic pose and peaceful mudra standing on the pedestal of inverted lotus flower.

Overall, the bronze with aesthetic features is beautifully decorated. The ornamentation patterns is also a little different in Chhatradi which seems more mechanistic in single poked fine jewel studded diadem, golden rounded ear-ring below and flower above it, two necklaces one larger and another smaller close to the neck, armlets, bangles and girdle with long silken scarf as compared to that in Bharmaur.

- **Gauri- Shankar:**
  - Brass image: Belongs to Lakshmi Narayan complex, Chamba
  - Height: Lord Shiva 1.60 m, Goddess Parvati 1.2 m.
  - Period: Circa 10th century A.D
  - Inscriptions: King Sahilavarman
  - Artist: Same as of Sujnidevi
  - Courtesy: Chamba, H.P.

In Chamba town, there is a huge and magnificent brass image of Gauri-Shankar under worship of the Lakshmi Narayan complex that has six temples. Out of which
Fig. 5: Gauri Shanker, Chamba
three are dedicated to Lord Shiva and three to Lord Vishnu. The fourth temple has this Gauri-Shankar group of image in the centre of sanctum. It is famous worldwide for its aesthetic art.

The group has until now generally been attributed to early ninth century as was believed to be linked to Sahilavarman (920-940), the founder of Chamba town. This work is very close to in comparison in both style and workmanship with the bust of Sujanidevi that was discovered at Nirmand. Dated 12 July 1026 seemingly made by the same artist who had cast the Gauri Shankar group. From this point of view, there could be a few years difference in the casting of these two images that implies the early eleventh century for its cast.

**Composition:** In Sthanak mudra, the figure is naturalistic with drapery of leopard skin. Lord Shiva is having four faces in cardinal directions, with triangular diadems out of which the front one seems little bigger than the other ones, four hands with the respective attributes of Trishul and akshamala with abhaya mudra and beejpurak (seeds full of life). The fifth face is facing the sky. The elbow of Shiva’s back arm is affectionately placed on the shoulder of the Parvati. The trishul in right hand is touching the horn (shring) of Nandi at the back of Lord Shiva looking towards his master. The lower left hand is shown on the right shoulder of Parvati.

The stylistic sumptuous way of ornamentation, diadem having designed conical form, ear-rings, hair-style, finger rings, armlets, bangles and wrist rings, long designed waist-belt, long beaded necklace and pendants, the central fold of Siva’s ardhoruka curling upwards without being attached to the belt, the way elaborate folds of Parvati’s Uttariya curl as if by a dynamic flow upto the anklets, the curious halo like design created by the upper part of the flowing Uttariya beyond the head of Parvati, holding a rosary and a Kalash, the big flower garland enhances grandeur of the Gauri- Shankar. The snake decorating Shiva, is present there in the form of yajnopavita. The cast is soft and classical with silver inlaid eyes and copper inlaid nails. The ornamental details favor an early 11th century date. **Expression:** Tranquility alongwith the abhaya mudra remains the important characteristics of this grand bronze.
• Vaikunthnatha (Hai Rai Temple):
  - Brass image: Belongs to Hari Rai Temple, Chamba
  - Height: 138 cm
  - Weight: 338 Kg
  - Period: Circa 8th-9th century A.D
  - Dynasty: Karkota (600-856 AD)
  - Courtesy: Hari Rai Temple, Chamba, H.P.

During this period it may be surmised that early in the 8th century a considerable part of Himachal Pradesh, including Chamba, Southern part of Lahaul and the Valleys of Kullu & Kangra came under the rule of the Kashmiri king of the Karkota dynasty. (600-856 AD) Kashmiri style images of Vishnu were found not only in Chamba but also in Kangra (Baijnath), Kullu (Bajaura) and in eastern Himachal- Nirath (satluj).

Most renowned of the Vaishnava icon is the huge brass Chaturanana Vaikunthnatha worshipped in Hari- Rai temple of Chamba. This Chaturanana form of Vishnu has been very popular in Chamba and Himachal. It has the appearance of genuine southern Kashmir style, may be because of the fact that the boundaries of the two states were common and the respective royal families were closely related. It might have triggered the idea of having artisans from Kashmir to create these bronzes for Chamba (Himachal). In particular, there is a feature of 'Khanjar' which is absent in this bronze, in contrast to those of purely Kashmiri creation. The fact of creating this bronze image locally may be confirmed by the fact that a marble statue of Chaturmukhi & Chaturbhuji Lord Vishnu can also be seen in Lakshmi- Narain temple of Chamba.

The importance of this bronze was noticed by the researchers and intelligentsia when it was stolen in May 1971, found in Mumbai in June 1971 and brought to Chamba again in July 1971 where it was reinstalled in the Sanctum Sanctorium of Hari- Rai temple.
Fig. 6: Vaikundh Nath, Hari Rai temple, Chamba
Other pieces of such bronzes (almost replicas) have also been found in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, even beyond the boundaries of the sub-continent, namely Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California (USA). The date of this artistic piece became again debatable. According to Pal and Gorakhnath, this image was created during Avantivarman’s period (855-883) whereas according to the historian Vogal, this bronze image is closely related with that Vaikuntha image installed in the Avantipur temple in Kashmir. Moreover, both the bronzes are supposed to belong to the period of 9th - 11th century.

**Composition:** A beautiful composition, the crown, arm-bands and the necklace unmistakably tallies with the local fashion. It is observed that the crown of this image is of triangular shape which along with leaf shape elements are the characteristics of the Buddhist-Kashmiri style tradition. The arm-bands in Chamba are provided either with a heavy squire or a triangular main motif. This image is quite attractive revealing most of the aesthetic elements almost in totality. The details of this beautiful bronze resemble the description of Chaturbhujadhari Vasudev given in the Vishnudharmottar purana, with a further addition of three more faces and thus making it Chaturmukhi.

Chaturbhuj Vaikundh nivasi God with three heads is with the two Devotees, Gada Devi and Chakrapurush respectively at right and left. In addition, well-garmented Bhoo devi is shown in between legs with samanpana bhav, she is touching His feet with hands. Vaikundh Nath is composed in two bhangs and devotees are in two bahangas, bending outside. This bhangas giving the whole composition a rhythmic movement and balance. This Composition is positioned of four stories pedestal which giving the importance to the whole composition.

Bhagwan Chaturbhuj is holding bloomed flower with two finger and thumb (like bhumi mudra) of first right hand positioned at parallel of chest, probably, abstract form of lotus, because He is Laxmipati, who is mostly seated on lotus and beautiful Straight standing conch in first left hand which is balanced only by the palm and peace mudra of the hand can be seen. Other two both sides hands are in blessing mudra for the devotees.
The good and realistic touch can be seen in flash/ skin of the thin waist and chest of the Vaikundh, which is placed in Hariray Temple. Shown in three heads, two heads seem in terrible Varaha and Narsingha faces respectively on the left and right. Main front face is of the Lord Vishnu with Shanta rasa.

Forehead with tilak, almond shaped, silver inlaid eyes, simple straight eyebrows with long thin nose, rose-petals like thin lips, small rounded chin which are placed on rounded face with long hair placing at shoulders, copper inlaid nails, appear marvelous. Facial expressions depicting peace and bliss.

**Outfit** is shown in Indian stylized folds with prominence which is long on the right side with the simple both side lined border, shown in high relief, short on the left side positioned at thigh. The transparency of the cloth is plainly visible with the glimpse of knee of the right leg, which is so touching, and showing the skill of the sculptor.

Pleats of this garment are *ornamented* so beautifully at the upper side of left knee and some following till the border of right leg. Each pleat is carrying the natural fine-looking folds at right side. This icon carrying a gorgeous floral design long jointed or without separation *patka/ vaijayanti Mala* from shoulder to little bit upper of ankles without touching (with distance of) the legs at sides. Which is coming from the insides of the hands and it is floating out at left side. This is giving the rhythm to composition.

**Ornamentation** of Vaikunthvesi is marvelous, these ornaments are geometrical designed tri-divided diadem and middle is like dome which ended with a circle, other faces having separate, flower design earrings, simple bud designed necklace with square pendant, beaded Ygyopaveet, leaf shaped bajuband, rounded bangles, simple finger rings, simple waist belt with designs alternatively, lower waist ornament is beautifully carved in lines. Both secondary figures are ornamented skillfully, female is with full of feminine beauty, with bangles, armlets, charming long necklaces, waist ornament, loops and triangular diadem with areole. Fatty Purush is smaller than other, he is with charming dress and ornaments like single shape diadem, diamond pendant necklace, big two folded garland, bangles, diamond studded armlets
big ear rings, loops. He is shown with goad in right hand and left is resting on the left thigh.

- **Lord Narsimha:**
  - **Brass image:** Belong to Bharmaur, Chamba
  - **Height:** 18 cm
  - **Period:** Circa 7-8\textsuperscript{th} century A.D
  - **Dynasty:** Meruvarman period
  - **Artisan:** Gugga
  - **Courtesy:** With Archeological Survey of India

The richly carved Lakshmi Narayan temple is the oldest structure, built in the shikhara style which dates back to 10th century AD and was built by Sahil Varman. The presiding deities of this temple are Lord Vishnu, Goddess Laxmi, Narasimha and Lord Krishna.

Narasimha\textsuperscript{22} is the fourth *avatara of Vishnu* described in the Puranas, Upanishads and other ancient religious texts of Hinduism, and one of Hinduism's most popular deities, as evidenced in early epics, iconography, and temple and festival worship for over a millennium.

**Composition:** He is often visualized as half-man/half-lion, having a human-like torso and lower body, having four arms with two folded hand under the chin, with a lion-like face and claws, wearing dhoti having pleats, with sacred thread, thick bangles and ring, armlets, sitting on the designed and decorated with two lions, stylized lower horizontal part of the door, and gazing ahead with open inlaid eyes and half open mouth with lion-like roaring pose with protruded tongue, making the environment awful. In sitting position is straight, alert, the legs are kept quite separated.

This image is widely worshiped in deity form, by a significant number of Vaishnava groups, at least in three dozen temples in various parts of India. He is believed as
Fig. 7. Narsimha, Bharaur, Chamba
the 'Great Protector' who specifically defends and protects his devotees (like Prahalad and Adi Sankara) in times of need.

In **ornamentation**, the jewels are distinctive of Chamba fashion but the crown is obviously of a distinct South Kashmir type, with waist- belt. The eyes are inlaid with electrum. The mustached grin of lion is a feature common to whole of H.P. The base of Narsimha depicts rows of mountains and peaks in schematic way common to Central Asia. The anatomical modeling tallies with that of Lakshana devi and Shakti Devi. Narshimha, being still aesthetically to Meruvarman time, can be dated to the early phase of probably the conquest by king Lalitaditya (8th c AD)

Narration\(^{23}\) of Lord Narasimha has been found in wide variety (about seventeen) of the Puranic scriptures, some in more detail than others. Earlier in Rig Veda also, one phrase appears to indicate an epithet that can be rightly attributed to the form of Vishnu as Narasimha as “like some wild beast, dread, prowling, mountain-roaming.”

The story of Narasimha as described in the **Bhagavata Purana** is as follows: In his previous avatara of Varaha, Vishnu killed a rakshasa known as Hiranyaksha. Hiranyaksha's brother Hiranyakashipu, greatly angered by this, started to abhor Vishnu and his followers, and decided to take revenge by killing Vishnu after gaining mystical powers, which he believes Brahma, the chief among the devas will award him if he undergoes many years of great austerity and penance. This initially seems to work as planned with Brahma becoming pleased by Hiranyakashipu's austerities. Brahma thus appears before Hiranyakashipu and offers him a boon that he will personally make true anything he wishes for.

He asked Lord Brahma for immortality as a reward for his years of penance. Brahma, however, declined, saying "*All living beings must face death Hiranyakashipu. You can, however, choose your death wish.*"

Hiranyakashipu then asked for three conditions, as his death wish, “O Brahma, let not death come to me either by man or beast, nor devil nor god shall cause my death by day or by night with weapon of steel or stone or wood, indoors or outdoors, or earth
or in sky. Grant me undisputed lordship over the world.” Brahma agreed and Hiranyakashipu got his death wishes granted. Thus, he became practically immortal.

After securing his death wishes, Hiranyakashipu conquered the worlds and became a demon tyrant. He banned all pujas to Lord Vishnu and declared himself a God. The devotees of Vishnu approached Lord Vishnu for help. Lord Vishnu asked them to be patient.

Hiranyakashipu's wife Kayadhu gave birth to Prahlad in the Ashrama of Narada. Prahlad grew up and became an ardent devotee of Vishnu. Hiranyakashipu, however, wanted his son to be a strong and ruthless King like himself. Realizing that Prahlad always prayed to Lord Vishnu, Hiranyakashipu tried to school his son against the influence of Lord Vishnu. All their efforts to influence Prahlad against Lord Vishnu failed and Prahlad was still as devoted as ever to Lord Vishnu.

Hiranyakashipu ordered his servants to kill Prahlad if he refused to accept the supremacy of his father. They tried to kill him by throwing down a mountain, drowning, poisoning, and burning him. They failed in all their attempts because Lord Vishnu was protecting his devotee. King Hiranyakashipu was very angry on hearing the reports on the failed attempts on the life of his son, Prahlad.

One day the king challenged his son in the open court:

"Prahlad! Is my enemy, whom you worship, present anywhere here?"

Prahlad replied, "Vishnu is omnipresent. There's not a single place where he's not found."

Hiranyakashipu's fury was at its climax. He got an iron pillar heated (redhot) and then asked Prahlad, "Can you embrace this pillar if your Vishnu is in it also?"

Prahlad did not hesitate for a moment but rushed towards the pillar and embraced it. The heated iron did not burn him. The king got up from his throne in fury and hit the pillar with his mace.
And, to his surprise! The pillar cracked with a thundering sound and Vishnu appeared there in the form of Narasimha. One-half of his body was of a lion and the other half of a man. He had matted hair on his head, large moustaches on the face and terrible teeth in the mouth. His paws had terrible nails on them. The ferocious form of the His face is itself an ornamentation in its absolute sense.

Hiranyakashipu remembered his first death wish, "To be killed by someone who is neither human nor beast." It was also the twilight hour, neither day nor night, the second death wish.

The demon king hit Narasimha with his mace but Narasimha brushed it aside swiftly. It was twilight and Narasimha caught hold of the demon Hiranyakashipu.

He sat on the threshold of the courtroom, placed the body of the demon on his thighs, and pierced his nails into the body of the demon and broke open his stomach. The demon was killed on the spot in a moment. The place was neither inside nor outside. This was Hiranyakashipu’s third death wish.

Lord Narasimha was furious and roared. However, he was pacified when Prahlad touched his feet and goddess Lakshmi also tried to cool him. Lord Narasimha then made Prahlad the King.

**Lord Ganesha:**

- **Brass image:** Belongs to Bharmaur, Chamba
- **Height:** 91.4 cms
- **Period:** Circa 7-8th century A.D
- **Courtesy:** Under worship, Bharmaur Temple

Lord Ganesha, also known as Ganapati, Vinayaka- knowledgeable and Vighneshvara- remover of obstacles, is one of the deities best-known and most widely worshipped in the Hindu pantheon. In fact, Ganesha is one of the five prime Hindu deities (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and Durga being the other four) whose idolatry is glorified as the panchayatana puja.
He is the Patron of arts and sciences, and the deva of intellect, wisdom and wealth. He is honored at the beginning of rituals and ceremonies and invoked as Patron of Letters during writing sessions. He is worshipped, or at least remembered, in the beginning of any auspicious performance for blessings and auspiciousness.

**Composition:** He has four hands, elephant's head and a big belly. His vehicle is a tiny mouse. In his hands he carries a lotus (to carry devotees to the truth), an axe (to cut devotees' attachments), and a sweet dessert ball -laddoo- (to reward devotees for spiritual activity). His fourth hand's palm is always extended to bless people trunk, but here fourth hand is showing the trunk. A unique combination of his elephant- like head and a quick moving tiny mouse vehicle represents tremendous wisdom, intelligence, and presence of mind. The icon with crown comprising three beautiful crescents. Beautiful Himachal traditional coined necklace increasing the aesthetics with the combination of diamond shaped tilak and decorated forehead with coins, waist belt, yagyaopaveet, bangles, ring are ornamented skillfully. Ganesha is placed with designed pedestal.

His image is found throughout India and also in Nepal. Hindu sects worship him regardless of affiliations. Devotion to Ganesha is widely diffused and extends to Jains, Buddhists, and beyond India.

Ganesha emerged as a distinct deity in clearly recognizable form in the 4th and 5th centuries CE, during the Gupta Period, although he inherited traits from Vedic and pre-Vedic precursors. His popularity rose quickly, and he was formally included among the five primary deities of Smartism (a Hindu denomination) in the 9th century. The principal scriptures dedicated to Ganesha are the *Ganesha Purana*, the *Mudgala Purana*, and the *Ganapati Atharvashirsa*.

Ganesha's head symbolizes the *Atman* or the soul, which is the ultimate supreme reality of human existence, and his human body signifies *Maya* or the earthly existence of human beings. The elephant head denotes wisdom and its trunk represents Om, the sound symbol of cosmic reality. In his upper right hand Ganesha holds a goad, which helps him propel mankind forward on the eternal path and
remove obstacles from the way. The noose in Ganesha's left hand is a gentle implement to capture all difficulties.

The broken tusk that Ganesha holds like a pen in his lower right hand is a symbol of sacrifice, which he broke for writing the *Mahabharata*. The rosary in his other hand suggests that the pursuit of knowledge should be continuous. The laddoo (sweet) he holds in his trunk indicates that one must discover the sweetness of the *Atman*. His fan-like ears convey that he is all ears to our petition. The snake that runs round his waist represents energy in all forms. Moreover, he is humble enough to ride the lowest of creatures, a mouse.

**How Ganesha Got His Head:** The story of the birth of this zoomorphic deity, as depicted in the *Shiva Purana*, goes like this: Once goddess Parvati, while bathing, created a boy out of the dirt of her body and assigned him the task of guarding the entrance to her bathroom. When Shiva, her husband returned, he was surprised to find a stranger denying him access, and struck off the boy's head in rage. Parvati broke down in utter grief and to soothe her, Shiva sent out his squad (*gana*) to fetch the head of any sleeping being who was facing the north. The company found a sleeping elephant and brought back its severed head, which was then attached to the body of the boy. Shiva restored its life and made him the leader (*pati*) of his troops. Hence his name 'Ganapati'. Shiva also bestowed a boon that people would worship him and invoke his name before undertaking any venture.
Fig. 8: Ganesha, Chamba
3.1. Mohras: These moharas are described, as given below:
- Sujnidevi
- Lord Virbhadra
- Lord Shiva
- Lord Surya

Metal images\textsuperscript{25} in the form of plaques showing a carefully modeled face and a summarily rendered bust are peculiar to some areas of western Himalayas. Such plaques represent Shiva (Shirigul in Sirmaur), gods (like Parashuram), Nagas, village devtas/devi or ancestors.

The earliest examples in this form are seen in temples of Sirmaur district and possibly in the adjoining hilly areas of Uttar Pradesh. The tradition seems to have traveled deep inside the hills of Himachal Pradesh, to the district of Shimla, Solan, Mandi and Kullu. There are two other well known examples outside the areas of their origin, which are in the museum of Berlin (of early medieval period, 8\textsuperscript{th} century, belonging originally to Sirmaur district, with the influence of Gangetic plains) and in New York (Col. Navin Kumar gallery). Several other works bearing the stylistic influence of gangetic plains and Kashmir, are also known.

The embossed mohras in silver and copper, are encountered exclusively in the eastern and central part of H.P. (around Middle Satluj and Beas), and they outnumber the cast ones in Kullu and Mandi fairs. Curiously, the cast mohras always depicted Shiva or male deity, while all the early embossed mohras were devis. It seems that the tradition of embossing followed a style of its own, rather different from that of cast mohras. The embossed mohras are stylistically far more conservative than the earlier cast mohras, in which it may be hard to infer any definite evolution trend. In the embossed mohras, the facial features such as eyes, lips, chin, and more particularly the profile are strong reminiscent of those of the early eight century faces of Chamba such as Lakshana and Shakti devis. The evolution of this particular style of embossed mohras, followed through seventeenth century and afterwards. Some of them are still worshipped in Nirmand area and around in the middle Satluj region.
The main characteristics of embossed mohras are as follows:

- The physiognomy resembled with a ruler of Kullu or of nearby states.
- Elongated oval shaped heads with small forehead and skull.
- Hairs style is integrated with the simple and typical diadem of head- like shape.
- Big, staring, almond- shaped eyes; sometimes with pupils chased with precious stones. The third eye almost of the same size as the other two often becomes a floral pattern. The big open eyes with high eye- brows along with the snake's raised face with two pronged tongue and skull shaped design on the flattened diadem makes it more furious.
- Eyebrows, eyelids, moustaches, and lips are sometimes gilded. Precious and semiprecious stones are sometimes chased in the sectarian mark on the forehead, in pendatives or even in eyes.
- Ears are decorated with big rings along with a pendent like object along with long sharp edged noses.
- The snake appears at the place of small necklace, parallel to the other bilinear necklace with a pendant at the center. Just above the pendent the curled tail and the front of snake looks interesting. In the following, a few well-known and typical mohras are described.

- **Sujni Devi:**
  - **Brass Bust of** Sujnidevi, Nirmand, Kullu
  - **Height:** 35 cm
  - **Period:** Dated 12 July, 1026 A.D
  - **Dynasty:** Around Meruvarman period
  - **Inscriptions:** Below the neck
  - **Artisan:** Gugga
  - **Courtesy:** Parasuram temple Nirmand, Kullu

Nirmand has been a commercial centre of some importance in eastern Himachal Pradesh long before small cities like Mandi, Rampur, Bilaspur and others gained fame. The historical and archeological evidence points to the fact that already in the sixth century Nirmand enjoyed a privileged status among the hills that became a center of both commercial and cultural exchanges from where newly imported
fashions and stylistic trends spread to neighboring places and feudal states. It is to Nirmand that bulk of Indian influence came from South east, mainly from Uttar Pradesh, before moving further westward to the Kullu valley where it encountered and mingled with western trends from Chamba, Lahaul and Kashmir. It may also be significant to point out that most of the classical and early folkish mohras, cast as well as embossed, are kept in Nirmand and various temples in neighboring villages like Bail, Behena and Kasholigarh. The famous Prasuram temple and its *bhandar* speaks of finest artistic bronze work which it has produced in the past. A sizable group of brass images are still in possession of Parasuram temple in Nirmand, mostly from three groups of deities namely Vishnu, Shiva & Ganesh and Mahishasurmardini. The famous bust of Sujnidevi was discovered by Shuttle worth at the Nirmand Bhunda festival of 1919. The inscription mentioned the name, and the date. In style and workmanship it appears to be directly linked to the brass Gauri- Shankar group of Lakshmi- Narain temple, Chamba, a group that was cast in early 11th century. It appears to be closely related to it in every minute detail.

Hence, one can assign both these works to the same time span of one generation and by the same artist. This bust could be the portrait of a deified queen ordered to be made by the queen (Priya) of the king Hemaprakasa.

Interestingly, such an artistic piece is also worshipped in Chamba area, contrary to other busts or mohras which are not to be worshipped.

**Composition:** This masterpiece of Indian art has indeed all the liveliness of an actual portrait. It is cast in brass, with traces of electrum inlay along the eyelids and 35 cm in height. It is an impressive work of art and a chronological milestone with a precise date 12 July 1026. The work bears all the characteristic features of explicit Chamba style in the triangular design of crown, big earrings, the hair bun on the left solder, three-lined beautiful neck, the long necklace with a crossed central motif and long string of pearls that fall between the breasts. It is revealing the *Shant* rasa, with diamond shaped tilak on forehead.
Fig. 9: Sujni Devi
• **Lord Virbhadra** (Destroyer of Daksha Prajapati):
  - **Embossed Silver Mohra** of Virbhadra, Nirmand, Mid- Satluj
  - **Height:** 22.5 cm
  - **Period:** Circa 10-11th century A.D
  - **Inscriptions:** At right side
  - **Courtesy:** Private collection

According to Hindu mythology, **Virabhadra** or **Veerabhadra** was a super-being created by the wrath of Rudra (Shiva), when he stepped in to destroy the Yagna (fire sacrifice) of Daksha, after his daughter Dakshayani (Sati)- consort of Shiva, self-immolated in yagna fire. His consort Bhadrakali, from the wrath of Devi was created along with him. After the destruction of Daksha yajna, they started destroying the entire creation, at this moment

Lord Shiva appeared and pacified them. Virabhadra is described as a warrior who eventually blinded and broke many countless gods.

Virabhadra is prominently worshiped today in South India, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamilnadu, where his statue/ mohra is placed in most of the temples of Lord Shiva. He is one of the primary Pancha-acharyas (gurus) for Lingayats mainly from Tamilnadu and Karnataka. There are more than twenty temples in India where Virbhadra is worshipped. A temple dedicated to him, is also situated in the town of Virbhadra, near Rishikesh in Uttarakhand.

**Composition:** In the embossed mohra the modeling of the face of **Virbhadra** is quite realistic and the crown of skulls flattened for technical reasons. The tongue is protruded, teeth visible from the open mouth, beard and big moustaches on the face with long curled hair and wide open big awful eyes. Neck is having encircled snake, beaded necklace with gorgeous pendant which matching with the earrings. **Facial features and ornamentations** at first recall the post Gupta and Pratihara tradition of North India for a propensity for a minute and florid workmanship that later evolved towards a stereotype. Such production seems to have concentrated in and around Nirmand.
Fig. 10: Lord Virbhadra
• Lord Shiva:

- **Bronze Bust of** Lord Shiva from mid Satluj
- **Height:** 28 cm, 36 cm
- **Period:** 9th century A.D, Late 11th-12th century
- **Courtesy:** Philadelphia Museum of Art

It may be interesting to consider the two mohras of Shiva, reflecting some features from different periods, classical to late classical group, and by different artists. The middle Satluj where these mohras are worshipped, implies Behena, Nirmand and Sarahan etc.

**Composition:** The late classical group is characterized by the following common features:

- A three eyed oval shaped face with a very small and protruding small chin. Protruding eyeballs and high bulging foreheads. Ears are strongly stylized and provided sometimes with a pearl-shaped or pointed tragus. The third eye evolves from an almond to a lozenge shape.
- An ogive (toran) shaped background.
- Embellished with bulbous-headed snakes.
- Crowns are of North-eastern Indian type with lily-shaped elements, the earrings are invariably of the circular studded type.
- The facial expression is of quite a feminine softness, In the case of Shiva a crescent (or a small lotus-shaped stupi) tops either the bun or the right part of the crown. A slightly V-shaped smile.

Within this framework, one can analyze these mohras easily as follows:

**In Fig.11,** It is Lord Shiva of Philadelphia Museum of Art, Published by Kramrisch, who dates it to the 6th-8th century and guesses to be from Chamba (H.P.), while according to von Schroder it is dated between 450-500 A.D. which could not be corroborated later by Pal. This mohra might be related to the Chamba valley so far as it resemblance with the one in Udaipur (H.P.) is concerned. However, its provenance seems more likely from the Eastern Himachal Pradesh or from the
Lakhmandal area of North-Western U.P. This seems evident from the ornamentation in the form of necklace and earrings. Increasing importance is given to torso with nipples and upper arms with armlets. The upper ends of the beaded necklace show its attachment to a triple foliated motif (like Datura flowers). Lateral locks of hair reach down to the shoulders to form the background, which became so typical the shape of the ear is designed as small bud or pearl, the nose, eyes and eyebrows and the heavy chasing of anatomical details support the above period. The eyes are almond shaped with slightly pointed extremities and a faint fleshy roll circles the protruding eyeballs. The third eye on the forehead later classical mohras. The mouth and lips with an emphasized winged design is reminiscent of the smile of Kashmiri bronzes of the late Utpal period as are also the eyes with the pupils half covered by the upper eyelids. The way the locks of hair adorn the forehead, the lateral falls of the locks of hair, the way and the crescent moon with a bindu in the locks of hair, typical of Lord Shiva, is conspicuous by its appearance. The other two important attributes of the goddess Ganges in the locks and the cobra/snake are not seen in this mohra. The triple lining on the neck reminds us of his name Neelkantha who swallowed halaahal (poison) and kept in his throat saving the humanity from its poisonous effects.

**Fig. 12** of Lord Shiva contains soft features in expression through the crescent against his hair-bun, schematization of ears, the temporal flowers having no coherent connection with the diadem, half closed eyes with downcast look, the necklace with pendent and the bulbous-headed snake, flower shaped earrings are appearing graceful. Armlets are depicted in a lower position. However, the dhyan mudra, the gesture of both hands and the diadem contains elements that are close to Buddhist iconography, which indicates towards the artist most likely from Kashmiri/Buddhist traditions.

**Shiva**

is a major Hindu deity, and the Destroyer or transformer of the Trimurti, the Hindu Trinity of the primary aspects of the divine. Shiva is usually worshipped in the abstract form of Shiva-linga. In images, he is generally represented as immersed in deep meditation (Yogeshwar) or dancing the Tandava upon Apasmara Purusha, the demon of ignorance in his manifestation of Nataraja, the lord of the dance. He is also depicted as the first householder with a family.
Fig. 11 Burst of Lord Shiva- a
Fig. 12: Burst of Lord Shiva-b
Shiva is 'shakti' or power; Shiva is the destroyer, the most powerful god of the Hindu pantheon and one of the godheads in the Hindu Trinity. Known by many names- Mahadeva, Mahayogi, Pashupati, Nataraja, Bhairava, Vishwanath, Neelkantha, Bhole- Nath - Lord Shiva is perhaps the most complex of Hindu deities. Hindus recognize this by putting his shrine in the temple separate from those of other deities.

Shiva as Linga
Shiva, in temples is usually found as 'Linga', which represents the unending divine light and at the same time energies necessary for life on both the microcosmic and the macrocosmic levels, that is, the world in which we live and the world which constitutes the whole of the universe. In a Shaivite temple, the 'Linga' is placed in the center underneath the spire, where it symbolizes the naval of the earth.

A Different Deity
The actual image of Shiva is also distinct from other deities. His hair piled high on the top of his head, with a crescent tucked into it and the river Ganges tumbling from his hairs. Around his neck is a coiled serpent representing Kundalini or the spiritual energy within life. He holds a trident in his right hand and his left hand plays the 'damroo' (small both sided leather drum). He sits on a tiger skin and on his right is a water pot. He wears the 'Rudraksha' beads and his whole body is smeared with ash.

The Destructive and Creative Force
Shiva is believed to be at the core of the centrifugal force of the universe, because of his responsibility for death and destruction. Unlike the godhead Brahma, the Creator, or Vishnu, the Preserver, Shiva is the dissolving force for a new creation, since death is the medium for rebirth into a new life. Thus, creation and destruction both reside in his character.

The Most Fascinating of Gods
He is also often portrayed as the supreme ascetic with a passive and composed disposition. Sometimes he is depicted riding a bull called Nandi decked in garlands.
Of all the Hindu gods, Shiva is one of the most fascinating, although a very complicated deity, but extremely simple to please.

The worship of Lord Shiva is quite widespread in the hills, in the form of Shiva-Linga (Ek- Mukha, Tri- Mukha or Panch- Mukha). One can see a bust of Shiva in front of Shiva-Linga, in brass, in the Shaktidevi temple at Chhatradi. An image of Shiva in this form, under worship in a temple in Sirmaur district, is of great interest. The image shows clear stylistic traits of Kashmir sculpture, probably made by an itinerant artist from Kashmir under the local patronage. The Kashmir style implies modeling of small mouth, well marked eyes & eyebrows, crown feature with a crescent enclosing a medallion, soft & fleshy face and pattern of wearing the necklace. In addition to this, some idioms and traits are from north India also, like the two ends of crescent of the crown and the medallion are surmounted by knob- like objects.

- **Lord Surya (The Sun):**
  - Mohara: Lord Surya, brass, from Kinnaur
  - **Height:** 23cms
  - **Period:** Contemporary
  - **Courtesey:** State Museum, Shimla

Surya has been in worship in India since the Vedic period with references in Vedas and Puranas, indicating the popularity of the Sun- worship. Lord Rama recited a prayer to Aditya known as ‘Aditya Hridaya Strotram’ in the Valmiki Ramayan before he became victorious by killing the king of Lanka, Ravana. Gayatri mantra, visualized by Vishwamitra and Sahasranama are also popularly recited in order to please the Lord.

Lord Surya is the source of life, light and all energy in the cosmos. There is no alternate to the life-giving rays of the Surya. He is the most powerful and majestic visible Devata. Surya Dev has also played role of Master-Guru for many Devatas, Seers, and Devotees. The three worlds have the sun as their source of origin. The entire universe including Devas, Asuras and human beings originate from him.

The brilliance of the deities, the splendor of the leading Brahmins & the heaven-dwellers of great refulgence, and of all the worlds, the soul of all, the lord of all Devas
as well as human beings, is the Sun. The sun alone is the root cause of three worlds. He alone is the greatest deity. There are large number of kings and rulers around the world, who represent Solar Dynasty. Lord Surya is the main deity in almost all the civilization all over the world. It has been mentioned in the Brahma Purana that everything is born of Lord Surya; everything is dissolved in him. He is the cause of origin and destruction of the universe. Various units of time are due to Surya, like moments, Muhurta, days, nights, fortnights, months, years, seasons and Yugas. The Sun god is the dispeller of darkness. The Surya acts as the pivot of the entire solar system. The whole nature exhibits different shades of colors due to sun only each day.

Various Indian treatises/ Puranas call Lord Surya by many different names like Aditya, Savita, Mihira, Arka, Prabhakara, Martanda, Bhaskara, Bhanu, Chitrabhanu, Divakara and Ravi, Vivasvan, Pusha, Mitra, Grahapati etc. each name of Surya Dev refers to a quality of consciousness. Devotees of Lord Surya enjoy fullness of energy, brilliance, inner light, perfect health and longevity and their life shines like golden hue.

**Lord Surya** is one of the Adityas, son of Kasyapa and one of his wives, Aditi. In general, Surya has hair and arms of gold. He is said to drive through the heaven in his triumphal chariot harnessed by seven horses or one horse with seven heads, which represent the seven colours of the rainbow or the seven chakras. He presides over Sunday. Not only that, because of Surya each of the five main planets of the solar system and the moon have been assigned a day Surya is known from Afghanistan that is in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which on stylistic ground is ascribed to 6th century.

There is another bronze image of Surya in the National museum, New Delhi that is considered from the Kangra area of Himachal Pradesh.
Fig. 13. Mohara of Lord Sun, Courtesy – State Museum Shimla
Interestingly, the place Jwalaji (Kangra) has yielded an impressive image of Surya of the early 9th century. Which follows the Indian iconographic traits in general along with several idioms from the north west e.g. the manner in which locks of hair and the flowing ends of ribbon are depicted, suspended dagger from the waist belt, the shape of ear ornaments, small lotus flower over the ear. The deity in this image is seen wearing a dhoti and the shape of the boots of soft leather is quite simple. Thus, the tradition of making Surya images must have existed in Kangra valley from a much earlier period.

The images of Surya under worship in the temple of Docha- Mocha at Gajan in the upper valley of Beas (Kullu area) belong to the period from 6th to 8th century, which carry some alien features from North-West India.

The Surya image from Bajaura exhibits the mixed style of Gupta and Kushana period.

The images seen in the Shiva temple at Jagatsukh (H.P.), and the one from village Nirmand (Kullu district) in Satluj valley, assigned to 8th - 9th century, show the development of the local style alongwith some alien features.

In this valley, stands a Surya- Narayan temple having three images of Surya one belonging to 8th- 9th century and the other two of 10th and 13th century exhibit the broad style of Pratihara period, i.e. a dagger is shown suspended horizontally from the waist belt.

Similar image in style of 10th century may be seen at Nirath in a Shiva temple at village Balag and Karsog in Shimla district.

An image of the deity with dagger was also discovered from Sirmaur area, which is now in Bhuri singh museum, Chamba.

The brass image of Surya, carrying a lotus flower with two buds in each hand, presently in Cleveland museum, is from the Kullu area of Himachal Pradesh.
Numerous images are known in which the figure of Surya is shown seated in a chariot drawn by horses with a miniature figure of the legless Aruna shown in front of the deity, driving the horses, along with arrow shooting goddesses.

Such an image (with the style of 7th century) can be seen in the village Gum in Ravi valley, also as far North West as Khairkhana in Afghanistan.

An altogether different image of Surya in *udicyavesa* (standing Surya wearing a tall cylindrical head-dress and dressed in a long coat with a scarf tied at the waist, legs covered with long boots of soft leather, holding two lotus buds, accompanied by two male figures clad almost in the same manner), is seen in Bhumara (Madhya Pradesh). This new appearance reveals an affinity with that seen at the statues of Kanishka and other Kushana monarchs. Such a change in iconography must have come from east Iran through ‘Magas’ (Sakadvipiya Brahman/ priests), where the Sun worship was very popular.

These priests influenced the style of worship, particularly in western part of India (Rajaputana area). With time these ‘Magas’ became known as ‘Bhojakas’. The priests of the temples of Vajrshwari (Kangra), Jwalaji and some other temples in the Shimla hills, belong to a class called ‘Bhojikis’.

One of the earliest Sun temples is said to have stood in Taxila area in North-West of India (Multan and Martand) long ago. A large number of sun temples were founded in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh (like the Surya Narayan temple already mentioned) and other hilly region of the Western Himalayas.
3.3. Buddhist Images: These are described respectively in this order as follows:

- Lord Buddha- Shakyamuni
- Bodhisattva Avalokiteshwar
- Bodhisattva Devi Tara
- Dhyani Buddha Akshobhya

‘If we could see the miracle of a single flower clearly, our whole life would change.’

Buddha

- Lord Buddha- Shakyamuni:
  - Bronze of Lord Budhha
  - Height: 29 cm
  - Period: 9th century (830-831) A.D, Patola dynasty
  - Inscription: On pedestal

The Buddha, whose original name was Siddhartha Gautama, was the founder of Buddhism, the religion and the philosophical system that produced a great culture throughout south-east Asia. Buddha, meaning "awakened one" or "enlightened one" is a title, not a name. In Hindu Dogma, the Buddha is viewed as being the 9th avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu.

He married at the age of 16 and lived in luxury and comfort sheltered from the harsh realities of life. When he was 29 he realized that men are subject to old age, sickness and death. He became aware of the suffering inherent in existence. He resolved to give up princely life and become a wandering ascetic in search for the Truth.

He attained mystical states of elevated consciousness but he failed to find the Truth. He continued his search and was joined by five ascetics in a grove near Uruvela, where he practiced sever austerities and self-mortification for six years. When he fainted away in weakness, he abandoned ascetic practices to seek his own path to Enlightenment. Discarding the teachings of his contemporaries, through meditation he achieved Enlightenment, or ultimate understanding. There after the Buddha instructed his followers in the dharma (truth) and the "Middle Way" a path between worldly life and extremes of self-denial. He left his body at the age of 80 at Kusinagara.
The essence of the Buddha’s early preaching was said to be the four Noble truths:

- Life is fundamentally disappointment and suffering.
- Suffering is a result of one’s desires for pleasure, power, and continued existence.
- To stop disappointment and suffering one must stop desiring.
- The way to stop desiring and thus suffering, is the Noble eight-fold path: right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right efforts, right awareness and right concentration. The realization of the truth of anatman (no eternal self) was taught as essential for the indescribable state of realization called Nirvana.

Shakyamuni Buddha was born on 563 B.C. at Lumbini, western part of Nepal, son of ‘Sakya’ ruler, king Suddhodana and queen Mayadevi. He was to stop disappointment and suffering one must stop desiring.

Different images of Buddha are most often seen in different mudra which make his presence more effective. Mudras constitute a highly stylized, magical art of body language and are a non-verbal mode of communication and self-expression, consisting mainly of hand gestures and finger-postures, though symbolic but retaining the efficacy of the spoken words, which are used to evoke internally the ideas representing divine power and its manifestation.

These mudras are also used by sadhaks/monks in their spiritual exercises of ritual meditation and concentration, and are believed to generate invisible forces that invoke the deity and operate on the earthly sphere. They have another interesting interpretation for sadhaks, revealing the secrets imbibed in the five fingers. According to which, each of the fingers, starting with the thumb, is identified with one of the five elements, namely the sky, wind, fire, water, and the earth. The contact of fingers with each other symbolizes the synthesis of these elements, which is quite significant because every form in this universe is said to be composed of a unique
Fig. 14: Lord Buddha- Sakyamuni, Himachal
combination of these elements and such a contact creates conditions favorable for invoking the deity at rites performed for securing some desired effects/ benefits.

Lord Buddha (Shakyamuni\textsuperscript{35}) is believed to have 550 incarnations. Maitreya is the future incarnation. In Buddhist tradition, there are five Dhyani Buddhas who are celestial Buddhas visualised during meditation, and considered to be great healers of the mind and soul. They are not historical figures, like Sakyamuni, but transcendent beings who symbolize universal divine principles or forces. Further, there are a few Bodhisatvas also.

It is universally and strongly believed that if one recites with strong faith the seed (\textit{beej}) \textit{matra} associated with a particular deity, the respective divine qualities are realized and enhanced in that person.

**Composition:** The decoration and the bronze style remains almost the same as described earlier as basic idioms, with a minor variation depending on the period and the artist.\textsuperscript{36} There are two figures, one from Himachal Pradesh\textsuperscript{37} and another from outside Himachal Pradesh. The former one has been ornamented profusely, hair is integrated with the diadem appears to be Kashmir-Chamba style, the crown is three pronged studded with pearls & ornamented, small necklace, armbelt and bracelet, ear rings on big ears, three beautiful linings on the neck, long eyes inlaid with electrum high eyebrows and a circular sign in between the eyebrows, pedestal on four lions, with one disciple/ probably Bodhisattva with a necklace in his left hand, (in ornamentation) on his right, in dhoti and with uttariya wrapped through left shoulder, in \textit{padmasana} and the pedestal on a lotus flower. Whereas, the latter bronze has no ornamentation except the unique hairstyle, dhoti and uttariya with beautiful wavy pattern in wearing, simple though artistic pedestal, with two disciples on each of his side. The \textbf{expressions} are with radiating tranquility, with almost half-closed eyes.
Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara:

- **Bronze of** Avalokiteshvara from Sarahan
- **Height:** 29 cm
- **Period:** 18th century A.D.
- **Coutesy:** State Museum, Shimla

Composition: Avalokiteshvara is an enlightened being who is manifestation of all Buddhas' compassion and therefore known as the 'Buddha of Compassion'. He usually appears white in color, with four arms. His first two hands are pressed together at his heart, symbolizing respect for his Spiritual Guide, Dhyani Buddha-Amitabha, who is on his crown and holding a jewel symbolizes his own enlightenment. His second left hand holds a white lotus flower showing that, because of the enlightenment, he is free from all obstacles, has a completely pure body, speech, and mind. The second right hand holds a crystal mala, symbolizing that he can lead all the living beings to liberation. The ornamentation has been only partial, hair integrated with the crown of Kashmir-Chamba style, beautiful flower-shaped earrings on big ears, and stylish necklaces in two parts (the closer having two lobes near the neck and another is long one decorating the front). He is having uttariya in
Fig. 16: Avalokiteswara, Sarahan, Courtesy State Museum, Shimla
Chamba style and wearing dhoti, sitting in Padmasana on a simple pedestal resting on a lotus flower. Facial expression is similar to that of Shakyamuni with half closed eyes reflecting tranquility.

Among the 108 forms of Lokeswara, Avalokiteswara is one who refuses to accept Nirvana since he considers such acceptance selfish in view of the ignorance of the great majority of the people who have not yet attained the higher stage towards realization. His sacrifice symbolizes infinite compassion (karuna), sharing of humankind’s misery, willingness to help those in distress.

Another significant Bodhisattva is Manjushri associated with transcendental wisdom (embodiment of prajna as per Prajnaparimita Sutras) in Mahayana tradition, and as a meditational deity in esoteric Buddhism. His consort, in some traditions, is Saraswati.

Manjushri is depicted as a male bodhisattva wielding a flaming sword in his right hand, representing the realization of transcendental wisdom, which cuts down ignorance and duality. The lotus held in his left hand is representing his attainment of ultimate realization. Manjushri is often depicted as riding on a blue ferocious lion, or sitting on the skin of a lion, representing the use of wisdom to tame the mind.

In Tibetan Buddhism Manjushri sometimes is depicted in a trinity with Avalokitesvara and Vajrapani. However, the other two great male Bodhisattvas are: Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha, and Bodhisattva Samantabhadra.
• Bodhisattva Devi Tara:
  - **Bronze:** Devi Tara from Sarahan
  - **Height:** 27 cm
  - **Period:** 16th century
  - **Courtesy:** State Museum, Shimla.

In Chatradi temple mention has been made by Postel, et al in his Antiquities of Himachal, of two bronzes of standing devis which are of 9th century, height 48 cm and 52 cm respectively, the latter one standing with a slight bend in her body, though full and stout, stem/ lotus flower in the right hand and a small fruit in left hand, hair is tied in around bun over her head, plain large ear ring, a necklace, armbands, waist girdle, a long scarf over her shoulders and a transparent fine skirt adorning her, long electrum eyes, large round face reflect Utpal style of art. These two bronzes with no round casting are of Devi Tara.

This figure of Devi Tara (from Sarahan, HP, placed in State Museum Shimla), in a sitting pose like a yogi in Padmasana on a pedestal of lotus flower with eighteen simple double lined petals.

Tara or Arya Tara is a female Bodhisattva in Mahayana tradition and a female Buddha in Vajrayana tradition. She is known as the "mother of liberation," representing the virtues of success in work achievements. With the rise of Tantric Buddhism in 8th century, she is also known as meditation deity for developing compassion and emptiness. Padmasambhav popularized this deity as mother goddess even outside India, in Tibet, Mangolia, Bhutan etc.

**Composition:** Devi Tara is the female aspect of Avalokitesvara and is believed to have come from his tears. She is considered to bring all goodness in women, and all famine inner values are visible through her features and gestures, with rounded face, in order to make it acceptable among women.

In the pose of Padmasana where thumb and sole of the right feet is glowing and curved. Varad mudra is revealed through left hand turned towards her body, this is
Fig. 17: Goddess Tara, Sarahan, 16th c, Courtesy of State Museum, Shimla
the gesture of Charity of conferring boon or grace of prosperity and health. According to yogic concept, it is a Gyan Mudra, where the index finger shows air element and thumb represents Brahma or the ultimate God. This exposes a massage to combine with ultimate energy through concentration by controlling the Prana. In this mudra, the tips of thumb and index finger touch each other, forming a circle. All the other fingers are extended upwards. According to Buddhist Chinese scholar J. B. Sakya, it is called Vitarka Mudra. Little finger of this hand turned inside the palm. This palm has some bold designs of lotus petals.

She has half closed long- big eyes, a third eye at the Agya Chakra (Middle of forehead) with thin nose, small lotus petals shaped lips, small chin and long ears with very big rounded flowered adorned earrings, coming up to shoulders. She puts up with). The third eye is signifying her long vision for the humanity and the world.

**Ornaments and Dress:** She puts on long Uttariya coming from her shoulders to arms, which turned outsides from thin waist and again come to wrap forehands with simple bordered Sari. The garments used has beautiful folds above the waist, it might be like a blouse for covering the upper body. Both garments are casted with stunning folds. She is ornamented with jewelry of simple design. Artist’s simplicity of that time is perceptible, whose glimpse is visible in this creation of Goddess Tara. Each ornament has similarity and simplicity in appearance and impact of Pratihar style is visible. The beautiful crown is five crescent decorated with flower, which is attached with broad flat strip. Middle crescent is bigger than the other remaining ones. Each of these parts is pointed with a long and round shape. The small necklace is double stringed, broad, with four simple rounded flower-patterned pendent. Similar design is visible in the waistband. There is a long geometrical shaped garland upto the level of her navel, which is comes over her breast, giving it more rhythmic feeling. Each hand is ornamented with plain rounded single bangle. There is a flower with long stem on the left side, slightly towards her back and other rhythmic forms on both sides of the figure are balancing the bronze. Beautiful, simple, sober, magnificent formation of Goddess Tara catches the attention of onlooker easily, which gives boon of grace and serenity. There is lot of appreciation for the artist who created such wonderful piece of art.
This bronze may be compared with the other one having sharper features and the Chamba style in diadem, ornamentation and in transparent garments.

Tara is a generic name and out of 21 forms, the most widely known eight forms are:

- Green Tara, known as the Buddha of enlightened activity.
- White Tara, (like moon) known for compassion, long life, healing and serenity; and also known as the Wish-fulfilling Wheel, (Cintachakra).
- Red Tara, a fierce aspect associated with magnetizing all good things.
- Black Tara, associated with power.
- Yellow Tara, associated with wealth and prosperity.
- Blue Tara, associated with transmutation of anger.
- Cittamani Tara, a form widely practiced at the level of Highest Yoga-Tantra, portrayed as green.
Khadiravani Tara, (Tara, of the teak forest, also known as 22nd Tara), who appeared to Nagaijuna in the Khadiravani forest of South India. This form is usually associated with protection from fear and the following eight obscurations: lions (pride), wild elephants (delusion/ignorance), fires (hatred and anger), snakes (jealousy), bandits and thieves (wrong views, including fanatical views), bondage (avarice and miserliness), floods (desire and attachment), and evil spirits and demons (deluded doubts). A text "In Praise of the 21 Tara", is recited during the morning in all four sects of Buddhism. The main Tara, mantra is the same as in Vedic tradition. ‘Om tare tuttare ture svaha’

According to Mallar Ghosh Tara is believed to have originated as a form of the goddess Durga of the Hindu Puranas. Today, she is worshipped both in Buddhism and in Shaktism as one of the ten Mahavidyas. It may be true that goddesses entered Buddhism from Shaktism. Possibly the oldest text to mention a Buddhist goddess is the Prajnaparamita Sutra, around the time that Mahayana was becoming the dominant school of thought in India and beyond.

Tara’s emergence as a Bodhisattva can be seen as a part of Mahayana tradition reaching out to women, even in 6th century C.E. in India. Another quality which she shares is playfulness (in magic dances). According to John Blofeld, Tara is frequently depicted as a young sixteen-year-old girlish woman. She often manifests in the lives of dharma practitioners when they take themselves, or spiritual path too seriously.

There are two ways to approach her. In one, common practitioners would simply directly appeal to her to ease some of the travails of worldly life. In the second, she became a Tantric deity to monks/ tantric yogis in order to have Enlightenment one of the important and mysterious concept remains that is Yidam (the Vedic ‘inner-dwelling ishta’). The principle of meditation (sadhana) remains almost the same as that in Vedic tradition, activating certain psychic centers of the body (chakras). This is necessary to be able to progress to more advanced and deeper stages of realization. Of course, the experiences may be many, differing from one to another individual
depending on the seed mantra, form and thought, concentration at the inner level leading to self-realization like an image in the mirror.

- **Dhyani Buddha- Akshobhya:**
  - **Bronze:** Akshobhya with his consort Mamaki
  - **Height:** 14.3 cm
  - **Period:** 9-10th century
  - **Courtesy:** Lahaul

In Vajrayana Buddhism, **Akshobhya** (Immovable one) is one of the Five Wisdom (Dhyani) Buddhas, the other ones being Amitabh, Vairochan, Amoghsiddhi, and Ratnasambhav; who represent consciousness as an aspect of reality. He has several emanations. By convention he is the lord of the Eastern Pure Land (a state of mind), Abhirati (The Joyous), although the Pure Land of Akshobhya's western counterpart Amitabha is far better known. His color is blue and his attributes include the bell, three robes, along with a jewel, lotus, prayer wheel, and sword.

**Composition:** His consort is Mamaki and he is resting on a decorated pedestal supported by four elephants facing the four quarters. Akshobhya posture is with half Padmasana. Both are wearing dhoti with uncovered upper part of the body. The crown of three crescent in which at the centre figure of lion face, the way Mamki sits on his left thigh and the scarf flowing from her head gear are typical to Western Himalayas, particularly of Chamba. To both hair is integrated with diadems, similar beaded necklace with pendant, three linings on the neck looking graceful, ear rings on big ears but they differ in design Mamaki’s being simple, jeweled uttariya or Vannala on Akshobhya, a pearled bracelets on Akshobhya whereas Mamki has a set of bangles and anklets on feet. Bajra and bell are in his hands respectively right and left. Those have symbolically meaning of male and female. Mamki’s hands are also occupied.

**Origin:** According to the scripture “Buddha- land of Akshobhya” (147 AD), a monk who wished to practice the Dharma in the eastern world of delight and made a vow to think no anger or malice towards any being until enlightenment, duly proved ‘immovable’ and when he succeeded, he became the Buddha Akshobhya.
Fig. 19: Dhyani Buddha Akshobhya
Recently, newly discovered Gandhar texts have been found to contain some of the early Mahayan sutras mentioning Aksobhya. (1st-2nd century AD).

Aksobhya is the embodiment of 'mirror knowledge' (real or illusion). Where the mirror is eternal mind itself- clear like the sky, empty yet luminous, holding all the images of space and time, yet untouched by them. The Vajra family is connected with reason and intellect that through the brilliance illuminates the darkness of ignorance, and its sharpness cuts through confusion.

The Vajra family to which Aksobhya belongs is associated with the element of water. This is why the two colors of Vajra are blue or white. Bright white like sun reflecting off water, and blue like the depths of the ocean.

Even if the surface of the ocean is blown into crashing waves, the depths remain undisturbed, imperturbable. Though water may seem ethereal and weightless, in truth it is extremely heavy. Water flows into the lowest place and settles there. It carves through solid rock, but calmly, without violence. When frozen, it is hard, sharp, and clear like the intellect, but to reach its full potential, it must also be fluid and adaptable like a flowing river. All these are the essential qualities of Aksobhya.

In Buddhist iconography, Aksobhya usually is blue, sometimes gold. He is most often shown in the earth-touching mudra, which is the gesture used by the historical Buddha when he asked the earth to bear witness to his enlightenment. In his left hand, Aksobhya holds a vajra, the symbol of shunyata -- an absolute reality.

At the end of the aesthetic analysis, a few points deserve some attention as given below.

There is no specific boundary line to distinguish between the Vedic and the Buddhist bronzes. Buddhist tradition came from the Vedic idioms with certain modifications depending on various influences like the place, the period and the artists. Later, the mutual interaction flourished with time. Buddhist antiquity goes back to 2nd c BC. However, it may be recalled from the Buddhist epigraphic material, that there were three phases in the development of Buddhist culture:
Institutional- the initial phase (3rd c BC to 6th c AD) flourished in the upper Kangra valley.

Ethical phase, during the same period, was evolved on the initiative of King Ashoka which became pan- Asiatic within a short span of time.

Esoteric (Tantric) phase appears to have evolved through the extensive and intensive receptivity in the interiors of the region between Satluj and Jamuna. The Nirmand copper plate (7th century AD) establishes the esoteric tradition of this region prior to 7th century AD. ‘Kapaleshwar’ is one of such tantric cults in the Nirmand region.

In fact, Buddhism was assimilated by the Shaiva and Shaktta cult at various times in the region of Himachal Pradesh. In Himachal Pradesh Vajreshwari Devi temple of Hatkoti; Bhimakali temple, Sarahan; Markula Devi temple, Udaipur in Pattan valley of Lahaul; Trilokinath temple at Tunda in Chandra Bhaga valley; Lashing Devi at Bharmaur have been regarded as the Budhhist Tantra- peethas. These temples are equally recognized and worshipped by the followers of Shakti and Shaiva in Vedic tradition. Tara Devi temple near Shimla is yet another example supporting this view.

The repeated use of Vajra by the Vedic deities, gods and goddesses, and a combination of 50-50 features in images from either of the traditions compel us to think about the positive mutual interaction among them.

Both types of bronzes are seen in the same temple at Chhatradi or at some other places like wise. It certainly reveals cordial interaction among the followers of respective religions.

In each of the icons, different features appearing reflect various influences over a period within the framework of Indian iconography.
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