CHAPTER: 8

Contemporary Traditional Craftsmen
1. Introduction

"It has only been when the craftsman has had the right to work faithfully, a right to the due reward of this labour, and at the same time a conscious or subconscious faith in a social and spiritual significance of his work, that his art has possessed the elements of real greatness.

The craftsman is not an individual expressing individual whims, but a part of the universe, giving expression ideals of eternal beauty and unchanging laws, even as do the trees and flowers whose natural and less ordered beauty is no less God given"

Ananda K. Coomarasawami

In the post Indus- Saraswati civilization, the other high standards were reached by the craftsmen in the field of metal working, bronze sculptures till the recent times. The art in general and the metallic art in particular flourished along with the religious feelings inspired by Vedic, Jain, Buddha or folk traditions, conveying parallel messages of unity in diversity. It is described in the first Chapter.

These artisans were known, with due respect, as Sutradhaar, Sthapati, Karmic, Kalavid, Shilpi, Chitrakaar, Roopkaar, Roopdaksha or Vigyanin due to their special skills with a long experience and their utmost relevance & usefulness in social and religious context. It seems that Sutradhaar used to be the main person coordinating the big art project in totality guiding different groups meticulously. They had an important and respectable place in the society for establishing the beautiful, inspiring and useful art which, most of the times, was aesthetically very sound, shaking the imagination of the viewer. Vishwakarma was known as one of the best skilled metal-worker in Vedic literature. Panini’s Ashtaddhyayi gives a narration of village- metal-artisan and state- metal- artisan. Such narrations with specific names of artisans were found to be very common in earlier inscriptions in Gandhar, Satvahana kingdom and other kingdom/dynasties. These Shilpa-daksha artisans used to get the patronage of rulers of the respective kingdom, to serve the kingdom through the ‘Anveshan Shilpishala’. Where they used to get full support along with the facilities for their experimentation and training.
Some of the Shilpis had the expertise to work on any medium like wood, marble, precious metals etc. At the same time they used to be good at other trades like music (classical or folk), playing musical instruments, engraving inscriptions. It was hereditary as the family trade. A complete artist had to be imaginative having knowledge of various salient aspects of ‘Shilpshastra’ like performing art, visual art, different gestures of various body parts reflecting suitable moods, movements in dances, aesthetics and relevant science & technology.

It may be further interesting to point out that many a kings were very knowledgeable in most of Shilpas/ workmanship. There are many (at least 18 referred in Matsyapurana and Shilpa-prakash, Vishnudharmottar-purana) Rishis who were Shilpacharyas, like Bhrigu, Atri, Vashishtha, Vishwakarma, Maya, Narad, Nagnajit, Vishalaksha, Brahma, Kumar, Shiva, Shaunak, Garga, Vasudeva, Aniruddha, Shukrachraya, Brihaspati etc. Till recent times also there have been many temple priests, as mentioned earlier, who were the experts in fine arts and used to work hard to create excellent art pieces, images and paintings in both the Vedic and Buddhist traditions. Interesting observation has been that the craftmanship was not restricted to some particular caste only, rather other communities from higher caste were also engaged in this endeavor due to economic compulsions. It is also true that the nature of Shilpa-work was divided among various artisans for convenience and efficiency.

The metal craftsmen are more in the upper areas of Himachal Pradesh, Kinnaur, Lahaul & Spiti, who make delicate silver jewelry, brass images of worship, silver ritual items, attractive brass utensils for the kitchen, intricate locks that are sculpturesque in form. Metal craft has been practiced in this region for centuries by native metal-smiths, called by different names, who invariably trace their origin to the Lord Vishvakarma.

In the lower areas of Kullu, Chamba, Kangra, Mahasu and Sirmaur, specialized craftsmen work on attractive gold & silver jewelry, metal casting and engraving. Their designs are influenced by local traditions, prevalent in the plains.

These craftsmen discharge their duty to fulfill the ritualistic needs of the religious people of Himachal Pradesh. As a consequence, the best places where one can find metal images are normally the temples. The other important group of bronzes are
Mohras, which are metal plaques representing a deity. The craftsmen creating these Mohras are mostly found in Kullu and Chamba. The main theme remains centered around Lord Shiva His serpents, Sheshnaag, Goddess Mother Parvati, Lord Narayan and Goddess Mother Laksmi. In other cases the Mohras represent the famous sages, Ved Vyas, Saptarshi, from the ancient past, few important characters from Mahabharat period like Devi Hidimba, and Ghatotkach. Other than these, the brave persons who became the saviors of the society in a particular local area are also worshipped through their Mohras. All these Gods/ Goddesses are brought in palanquins in a celebration who give their presence at the time of Shiv Ratri fair at Mandi or Dassehra fair at Kullu. These Deities have a good meeting with all the other Deities on those occasions. It also happens in Minjar fair (Chamba) and other local fairs in respective areas. Nevertheless, the craftsmen aspire to make the images/ icons so as to realize the following.

As for the aesthetics of the image, a sculptor is aided by poetic allegories in the verses. The head is to resemble a hen's egg; the eye-brow is to be carved like a neem leaf; the eye shall be patterned on a fast swimming small fish; the ear is defined by the edges of a lily bloom; the nose shall remind you of a sesame flower; the upper lip, a bow; the lower, a ripe tinda; the chin, a small mango pit; the neck, the flutes of a shell; the torso, a cow's head; arm, the fall of an elephant's trunk; thighs, the lower trunk of a banana plant; knee, a crab and leg, a large fish.

This is not to mean that there is no freedom for the artist. Devasenapathy Sthapathy says, "An artist sits and moulds the wax meditating on his subject. He remembers legends and deeds, prescriptions and rules but finally it is a unique piece. No two images are ever identical. There may even be delightful little errors of detail but never one that inhibits affection and veneration."

Traditional economy system that had prevailed from ancient times was largely self-sufficient. For the manufacture of most articles, locally available material was used.

Certain raw materials were brought from outside the local area, and were made into necessary implements by the artisans. This self-reliant economy system was prevalent all over the world before the revolution brought about by the invention of machines of
mass production. The production capacity of the self-reliant economy increased in ratio to the demand in that society.

The largest plus point of this system was that it eliminated unemployment largely. The craftsmen were trained as apprentices of master craftsman, to learn the trades. This system of apprenticeship was also prevalent everywhere in the self-reliant economy system. In Europe, the craftsmen’s guilds regulated each trade, while in India it took the form which looked like the cast-based clan system in the society that regulated the craft manufacturing and trade. The European guild system appeared to allow much greater social freedom in Europe than that by the caste based production system in India. However, the prevalent system in India that percolated through the better family norms and traditions produced superb works of art and craft as a continuous flow of better and better art & craft for centuries. It is a rare pleasure to visit an artisan’s studio/workshop and see the craftsmen at work.

Only when the basic needs of a society are fulfilled, people of that society could think of spending money on decoration pieces and luxury items. The prevalence of such varied types of items with a lot of artistic value in the traditional style in any given place implied the existence of a wealthy class of people in that area for many centuries. Not only, wealth, refined sophisticated tastes were witnessed to patronize artistic works which. Successfully survived in Himachal Pradesh for hundreds of years. It proved that traditionally the people of Himachal Pradesh had very refined tastes, understood and appreciated the need and value of art in life.

2. Role of Craftsmen

For centuries, craftsmen and their traditions provided the glow of local and national pride and at the same time they ensured employment opportunities to innumerable persons. Unfortunately, foreign rule, its policies, the machine age and industrialization weakened the craftsmen and the artisans by making their skills obsolete and rendered them unemployed, paralyzing the centuries old craft industry.

Historically, the craft may be seen as the parents of modern industry and the craftsmen as the predecessors to the modern industrial engineer/technologist. Earlier, the degree of development of crafts was dependent on the development of agriculture.
Today, India is heading towards a vast industrial and agriculture development. It may be justifiably hoped that, these crafts will play a significant role in building up a strong and stable national economy along with the development of rural areas as crafts normally flourish in rural areas under joint family system.

In order to encourage craftsmen to play their effective role, in independent India, the welfare state has taken a few steps to protect and develop crafts and craftsmen, contributing to the sustained development of rural economy, and consequently few institutions/organizations have come up for their promotion like:

- The State Industries Department,
- The Cooperative Societies,
- The Handicrafts and Handloom Export Corporation of India,
- The All India Handicrafts Board and the State Department of Art and Culture.

Some of the crafts that were practiced in olden times are not practiced now a days much due to the lack of availability of the raw material, machine driven industrialization and the market potential. However, with the aid of modern technology, the trend can be revived and the market can be created.

**Traditional Crafts:** There are more than twelve traditional crafts (like leather chappals, rumals, shawls, woodcarving, jewelry pottery etc) for which Himachal Pradesh, particularly Chamba, has remained famous since olden times. The traditional metal crafts viz. icons, decoration pieces, wall hangings, metallic musical instruments by artisans and jewelry by goldsmiths are made using the standard techniques of casting, repoussé and relief work. Iron as the base metal has been in use with ironsmiths for a very long time.

**Cast metalwork** must have been done in Chamba area from the Bronze age period. The presence of minor copper mines in Chamba district helped to obtain the necessary raw material. The brass is commonly used for casting metal- ware. Small and medium size sculpture pieces are cast in stylized forms in small studios which also serve as their shops. The furnace for larger casting work is kept away from the shops.
These metalworkers make sheet metal articles too. Beautiful plaques (Repousse) by relief method are made quite efficiently which, shaped like huge plates, are used for wall decoration. Quite often designs from Chamba miniatures are used to make the relief work on the plaques. Decorations for temple cupolas are made in copper and brass. The old temples have golden kalasha or vessel on top.

Chamba had not only rich tradition in visual arts but also in traditional performing arts, which are being maintained even today. For the latter, musical instruments like metallic horns (‘Singhas’ both straight and curved), kettle drums (‘Nagaras’) are made. The bells of bell metal and brass cymbals of different types are cast, decorated with beautiful engravings, in Chamba by skilled craftsmen in their small studios.

The gold and silver jewelry in style is also made by goldsmiths in Chamba. The designs are traditional in nature and must have been handed down from olden times. It is quite possible that jewelry designs have been influenced by different cultures as people migrated from various communities from different parts of the country to this area of Chamba at different stages of history.

3. Face to Face with Craftsmen

“The hand of an artisan is always pure”

Ananda K. Coomaraswami

On the basis of the record available with the Department of Language and Art, Himachal Pradesh, Department of Handicraft and Handloom, Himachal Pradesh, Himachal Art Academy, State Museum, Shimla, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba and Kangra Museum, Dharamshala, including the Language Officers of all the 12 districts of the state, who are supposed to be knowledgeable looking after the art activity in whole of their respective area. A list of some important metal craftsmen was prepared and given towards the end of this Chapter, as Table 3. This Table reveals a few important facts as given below.

- That there are only five out of twelve districts of the state, where the activity of metal art has been going on. These are Shimla, Chamba, Mandi, Kullu and Kinnaur.
- Geographically, Shimla lies toward the south of Himachal, Mandi and Kullu are located in the central Himachal, Chamba is located in North-West of Himachal. Kinnaur is situated towards the eastern Himachal Pradesh.

- That only a few eminent craftsmen from Chamba and Shimla districts are recognized at the state level and national level and were awarded for their work.

- Out of these five districts, first four have been more famous historically, which has been reflected through their metal art and metal craftsmen.

On the basis of these conclusions and as guided by the above mentioned departments and officers, the field work was undertaken with the intention of interviewing the most eminent traditional craftsmen from all these districts, in several phases, throughout the period of study. Meetings with those craftsmen are portrayed below.

**Visit to Chamba:** On 10th October 2010, I paid a visit to Chamba. In the afternoon I went to Bhuri Singh museum where I was lucky to meet Mr. Vijay Sharma who took introduced me to Dr. Rajesh Sahgal, technical Assistant in the museum, a knowledgeable person in art in general. Dr. Rajesh did his Ph.D. work on the topic of Vyas River from Garhwal University. I took a round of the museum along with Dr. Rajesh who kept on explaining various items of art including their history. Dr. Rajesh also provided an album with the permission of the curator. During this visit, I also happened to meet the former curator Shri Surinder Singh Sethi, author of several books/catalogs, the present lady curator of the museum, Mrs Ritu Malkotia, who was kind enough and cooperative to offer all the possible help by providing some related books and literature.

Shri Vijay Sharma guided me about various famous metal artists of Chamba, introduced me to an eminent artist Sardar Bhupinder Singh to whom I approached in the evening for an interview as a part of survey of metallic in Chamba. Next day I could contact five eminent artisans of Chamba. These artisans were Shri Prakash Anand, Hakam Singh Kaushal, Bhupender Singh, Harminder Mehta, Devi Prasad Tandan and Mukesh Anand, Following is a brief description of meetings with them.

- **Shri Prakash Anand:** President awardee Prakash Singh Anand having Himachal outlook, Khatri by caste, Kurta-trousers, green Himachal Cap on lean body, was born on 25th Dec. 1937 in Chamba. Chamba has been the place of his maternal side
(Nanka). Originally, his ancestors belonged to Pakistan. His father came to Chamba for family sake, because his wife was a schoolteacher in Chamba. Later they permanently settled in Chamba, where his ancestors had been working in temples as metal craftsmen following family traditions for the last six-seven generations.

Prakash finished his fifth class from Chamba. He inherited the skill of metal art, refined it during his childhood while observing his father working in the workshop and temples. He married Suresh, a girl from Amritsar, in 1967. He has no other source of income for earning for his family.

Before Vijaya Dashami 2010, I was fortunate to meet Prakash Anand at Chamba and found him a personification of simplicity, laden with much practical knowledge and experience, using some English words during conversation. However, in the middle he interrupted me in Hindi, “I don’t know English, I am illiterate.”

Prakash is the oldest metal craftsman in Chamba area. He is very popular in this area. People love to preserve his art and demand for his skill. His old body does not allow him to work hard. Nevertheless, even after his 73 years of age, still he loves to work with a lot of enthusiasm using his will power. His determination gets reflected through his dedication and zeal for perfection towards his art, who believes in ‘work is worship’. The work done by him indicated honesty and pure heartedness as a sign of real worship.

Prakash is having a big workshop where he works with his 5 assistants as apprentice, Rajesh Anand (his son, 40 yrs, class 10), Himanshu (grandson, 16 yrs, class 10), Harish (26 yrs, PGDCA), Jai Ram (33 yrs, class 8) and Manoj (27 yrs, class 8), among whom he used to distribute jobs related to metal art. He has his separate cabin in the workshop with two entrances, one towards the roadside and the other inside the workshop for overseeing the activities within the workshop. There were three framed photographs hanging on one wall, in respect of his recognition as an eminent artist on the occasion of receiving the award. One calendar of the year 2004, was hanging on the other wall, containing the photograph of his silver work on the inner Garbhgraha gate of Bhalai temple. Full natural light entering at an angle from the main gate was giving aesthetic importance to these photographs. In other words, these photographs
were beautifully unveiling the appreciation of his metal artisanship at the national level.

At the time of arriving at the workshop to study the life and work of Mr. Prakash Anand, he was helping his assistant, Harish, in drawing the figure of a loin for the repousse work, on the other side of the workshop. In this first interaction, while introducing myself, at the outset, he declined to respond even without seeing me, without paying any attention towards me and asked me to visit at a later free time, right then he was busy.

On my repeated requests, particularly in view of my research interests, he finally agreed to talk to me only for a couple of minutes, as he was extremely busy with his artwork. He indicated me to move towards his cabin which was four steps away. He came to the cabin with the drawing of lion in his hand, and took seat on his Gaddi which was just on the floor. He also pointed me to take seat on a sette which was placed near the inner wall below the calendar. While talking, he remained continuously absorbed in improving the anatomy of the drawing he was holding. One of his old friends was also seated nearby facing the road, who begged his permission to leave. On this, Prakash Ji asked him to sit for some more time. Still he remained busy beating a small ritual silver bowl to give it a good finish.

While his hands were fully occupied in the art work, Prakash Ji expressed his views towards the art scholars and critics, how they were helped out by him in the past, like Coomaraswamy, Khandalwala, Ohri, writers of ‘The Antiquities of Himachal and also a German lady Ph.D. scholar who was helped, used to click at every moment a question was posed to him. They used to spend a lot of time (weeks and sometime months) with him for knowing more and more about the metal art. He was bitterly critical of those scholars who had no time, but still want to learn all on the subject only in a couple of minutes. According to him, now days, nobody is pursuing the metal art seriously. In order to draw his attention, I tried to sit on the floor and took out my camera for clicking his snaps for which he very kindly faced towards my camera and gave a first smiling look towards me.

Mr. Harish was asked by Phupha ji (Prakash) to bring the photo album of his artwork, who showed me the photographs of the album. On this, Prakash Ji told Harish to leave
me alone with the album and attend to his artwork which was suffering. At this moment, Mr. Prakash drew some money from under the mattress he was sitting on, and gave that to his friend for which he was waiting. All this showed that he is honest and truthful towards his life and work, and expected the same from his assistants and others.

On being asked about the awards, he pointed towards the wall where photographs were hanging in which scenes of award ceremony were captured. One was the President Award by His Excellency V.V. Giri in 1974. The second was the State award given by Shri Virbhadra Singh, then Chief Minister, Himachal Pradesh, in 2002 on ‘Harirai’ icon of lord Vishnu. Another was related to the award ‘Third Tulsi Samman’ given by M.P. Government in 2004-5 on the icon of ‘Chatrani’.

Mr. Prakash is a very skilled person, down to earth which could be observed from his words after being asked about his Guru, “I am zero and nothing in front of the old master craftsmen, who were so much skilled.” These words were showing that this eminent skilled person could not compare himself with the ancestors. When asked about the training he underwent, Prakash expressed that the art ought to be in blood and as a passion. Now a day, nobody is interested in learning the art and to carry forward the art accomplishments of old masters rather they would work only for money, if they get any job, they would take not even a minute to say goodbye to their twenty years experience in this profession. Government should take initiative in the form of encouragement and creating jobs in this field for retaining these professionals and preserving the Metal Art. His wife Mrs. Suresh used to render her help to him in his work. She looked very young and active than he did. In view of this, there was some hesitation in asking how he was related to her. However, he introduced his wife to me and both of them posed for a photograph. He also told me, with pleasing smile, to take her to Shimla. With this, it appeared that he was tired and wanted to relax, he stretched his legs, took out a cigarette, lit it and started smoking. At the same time, he was watching the progress which was going on in the workshop as was clear from his gazes towards the sound of beating from two or three sides.

Out of his two sons, the elder one Rajesh Anand is flourishing in his art studio (the same workshop), with three assistants who are getting training and earning. One of the metal works created by Rajesh has been taken to U.S.A, his father told me.
Harish is an expert exclusively in carving, the repousse and Jai Ram does embossing, Manoj is an expert in making folk metal musical instruments. His assistants were not so much satisfied with their work and do not want to allow their children to follow this profession, which does not pay them according to their toil. They want their children to be in jobs after their studies. Many disciples have been trained under his guidance and some are pursuing the work in his own individual studio like Bhupinder Singh, and Hakam Singh.

Any type of metal creation is no more impossible for him, using the traditional methods. His work can be found and appreciated at many places. Prakash made the silver embossed door (in two parts left and right) of the Temple at Bhalai village in Chamba, which are divided into eight parts. The lowest two parts are embossed figures of saints in the surrender position, rest of the parts contain different forms of Maa Bhagwati. From the top, first two parts are presenting Maa Parvati’s back who is peeping towards the other side of mountains and on the other side, Goddess Parvati is with lord Shiva in sitting position on the Himalaya. Next row from the top, third and fourth parts, reveals Mahisasurmardini. Then the next row, fifth and sixth parts are presenting one Devi among flowers and another six armed deity seated on a body. He also made Mandapa for the same temple in 2003.

Two traditional Mohras of goddess created by Prakash Anand are already in the State Museum, Shimla and Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba. He has plated the Kalash with gold for Lakshmi Narayana Temple, in 2005. He also made Kalash of 2-quintal, and of 25 feet high for the temple of Bhadarva in Jammu and Kashmir in 2008.
Fig. 1: Metal skilled artisan Prakash Anand with his creation of Shakti Devi Chhatrarhi’s replica

Fig. 2: Artisan Prakash Anand with his wife- Mrs. Suresh
Fig. 3: Mandap of Bhalai Temple made by Prakash Anand in 2003

Fig. 4: Assistants of Prakash Anand in his studio, Harish, Jai Ram and Manoj
Fig. 5: Silver Plated embossed doors of Bhalai Temple, made by Artisan Prakash in 2003-4
**Hakam Singh**: Hakam Singh, son of late Sadhu Singh and was born on January 26, 1956. He acquired the skills and adopted family craftsmanship of an artist. In his sixteen, he started his career as a dentist in Delhi, Chamba, Sundemagar as his family profession. After some time he identified metal art as his hobby in his blood, that was acquired through training under National awardee, guru Shri Prakash Chand Anand. Now, he is going ahead by pursuing his main traditional artistic metalwork of the Chamba area since 1982 as well as another family profession as a dentist. Both professions are followed by generation to generation.

Some 600 years ago, his ancestors came to Chamba on the request of King of Chamba, who used to dye clothes of kings, and to make their ornaments and ritual articles, with renovation having different designs on each festival. His grandfather late Sardar Gyan Singh was commissioned for all temple metal works. These were called print maker (Chhapere) who used to paint on stone, clothes etc. and do all work in gold metal. Three brothers of his father were all following the skill with gold metal. His father who saw his 100 years, also took dental training by a British in Lahore where his father learned to cast gold teeth, this is lost wax technique. This training was given to get skills under the ‘Guru- Shishya parampara’. This type of Tradition is followed for making miniature painting and, Chamba rumals, Metalwork and other skills where learners are given the money in Himachal Pradesh.

He was blessed with three sons, Surender Singh is expert in woodcarving, and running his show room, late Yashwant Singh was skilled dentist and metal craftsman whose one son is dentist and another metal craftsman.

Mr. Hakam Singh took interest in making metal images instead of stone carving. Usually, he also does writing work engraving on stone slabs. Just at the beginning of the interview, he continued engraving on the painted written stone slab that can be seen in the picture here.

He is having another passion as a source of earning that is from the manufacturing of orchids of Apples, Guava and Grapes.
He deals in both dental and metal professions from his two rooms cum studio where his metalwork is visible from the distance. On the other side, a big queue can be seen of dental patients who are attended with enthusiastic care and love in pleasant way. Every patient wants to see the doctor to show his/her teeth. After listening to their problems, examining them with much engrossment, understanding them, he starts solving their problems using different tools at his command, and finally giving prescriptions to them. Over all he is a well-known and expert dentist. His son Rahul also is following his footsteps as a dentist.

He gets all raw materials from the local market of Chamba and Delhi. He usually makes any piece of metalwork on orders. According to him, he does not have any time to create new things/ideas as these items have no market. He doesn’t make traditional jewelry now a days, because people are interested in modern designs, for which it needs more hard work, and there are few customers. His father used to do work on jewelry, sometimes he used machines for making wires etc. and Meenakari, Kundan work in Pratapgarh Style. Because of expensiveness of precious metal this tradition of jewelry was not followed for long. Mostly, he was commissioned to make traditional work like one ‘Gauri- Shankar’ statue was commissioned by the owner of Minarva Store, another one he is making for Delhi businessperson. His work is sold to National and International customers like Chamba, Delhi, California, Switzerland, Jurikh etc.

He normally casts using lost wax method, both solid and hollow, traditional famous deities’ icons in brass and Mohras in Chamba and Kashmiri style, including other deities like Kali Maa, Lord Shiva, Kartikeya, saints and rishies. The casting of Chattras, Hookha etc. and trophies with different style using sheet work is also done on orders.

The Government of Himachal Pradesh has recognized and awarded Sardar Hakam Singh for his traditional (Chamba style) creation of Lord Ganesha in 1982. He also received the National Award (Rashrtapati Award) for his excellence in metal casting replica of Gauri- Shankar of Chamba, which is now preserved in California.
Fig. 6: Artisan Hakam Singh reforming the teeth in his workshop

Fig. 7: Arisan Hakam Singh engraving the slab

Fig. 8: Hakam Singh making wax model of Gaurī Shankar with his son Rahul

Fig. 9: Casted Devi Mohara in Kashmiri
He is not getting any government support, maybe it is not needed also for him. Still one’s artistic work will be recognized easily when government will support. He wants, some efforts should be made to preserve metal tradition of Himachal.

Aligarh and Meerut are the places where much reproduction of same piece is going on through machinery and are sold at cheap rate. So that, main value of the craft and artisans is decreasing day by day. Government should provide market for exhibiting every artisan’s work, and the raw material at cheaper rate. Government should increase the training period from 6 months to a minimum 2 years for ‘Guru- Shisya Parampara’ program. Therefore, more persons can learn this skill with preciseness.

- **Sardar Bhupinder Singh:** Mr. Singh son of shri Gurdit Singh who was a technician, is basically an electric technician, expert in repairs of machines and electric gadgets, quite cooperative, has a pleasant personality. He is also having a metal workshop at home at Hatnala, Chamba. Bhupinder was born on 7th April 1954 in Chamba in a Sikh family, studied upto class 10.

At the time of interview at the residence of Bhupinder Singh, his wife Mr. Satnam Kaur was also present. She used to assist him a lot in his Metalwork. Both of them were quite cooperative during the interview. It appeared in this meeting that they are leading a very happy family life. Their son Mr. Kunwar Pal Singh (23 yrs) is pursuing his MCA, at the same time he used to assist his father. They have a daughter Dipika pursuing her graduation.

His maternal Uncle Mr. Prem Dhiman was his teacher, who was known as an eminent metal sculptor and painter who expired 30 years back. His style was based on folk, Kashmiri and Kangra tradition and casted ancient renowned icons with innovative way. He was awarded for his innovative creation. He used to give training to real learner without any cost for the sake of flourishing metal art. Some of his disciples have established themselves as a metal artisan. Three of his children, Amichand, Prakash and Hanshraj are pursuing art as profession, one of them is involved in Metalwork and other two in painting.
Since his childhood, Sardar Bhupinder Singh has been inspired by his Mamaji and Chamba metal traditions, which led him to do more and more innovative work. Initially he started his training under his Mamaji.

He has been pursuing his profession independently and established as an eminent skilled craftsman, since 1980. He was invited to exhibit his Metal Art in Punjab-by-Punjab Government. He had spent his time as an artisan in Jalandhar for five years from May, 1994 to March, 1998, where he had installed statues of Sardar Udham Singh, Subhash Chand Bose, Sardar Patel etc. in the market of Jalandhar. He was selected by the Department of Handloom and Handicraft, Rang Mahal, Chamba, as a metal craftsman to teach the students, under the ‘Guru- Shisya Parampara’ in Silaghrat, Chamba, where he trained seven disciples from August, 2006 to April, 2007, under the banner of Northern Cultural Centre of Patiala.

There are two lists of disciples who took training under ‘Guru- Shishya Parampara’ by Sardar Bhupinder Singh, given in the following tables.

Table 1: Silladhrat Metal Art Training Centre, Chamba (2006-07)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. N.</th>
<th>Disciple</th>
<th>Father’s Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Guddu Devi</td>
<td>Maan Singh</td>
<td>Laluhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Sheela Devi</td>
<td>Karma Chand</td>
<td>Bhati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Kamal</td>
<td>Chand Ram</td>
<td>Badot</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Bittu</td>
<td>Shakti Prasad</td>
<td>Badot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Chino Devi</td>
<td>Jai Sigh</td>
<td>Badot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Gappu</td>
<td>Vishwa Nath</td>
<td>Badot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Pyar Singh</td>
<td>Chandra Ram</td>
<td>Lahuli</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Trainees from Northern Area Cultural Centre, Patiala (2007-08)

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<thead>
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<th>S. N.</th>
<th>Disciple</th>
<th>Father Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Tej Singh</td>
<td>Nurad Ram</td>
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<td>Mohari Ram</td>
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<td>Hajar Singh</td>
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<td>Yograj Dhiman</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Rinki Devi</td>
<td>Satveer Singh</td>
<td>Charpat, Chamba</td>
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</table>
Fig. 10: Sardar Bhupinder Singh is giving final touches to the casting icons

He starts his creative metalwork with the worship of Lord VishwaKarma and Maa Kali. He is expert of each technique such as solid and hollow casting process of 'Lost wax', engraving and repousse technique.

The raw material is brought from the local market from Nawa Shahar, and Jalandhar. His art has a big market for the statues of deities at the State, the National and the International level, particularly during Nav Ratri festival.

His traditional craftsmanship is clearly visible through traditional items. One can observe it in Fig. 9, 10, and 11. He also likes to do some innovative additions in Mohras, Fig. 11. His work can be seen in Monasteries (Dharamsala), Shakti Mata in Pangi temple and Batalua Chamb
Fig. 11: Casted Gauri - Shankar

Fig. 12: Casted Devi Mohara

Fig. 13: Mr. and Mrs. Bhupinder Singh
Mr. Harminder Mehta (Alias Bittu): He is running his metal studio in Hatnala Bajar, Chamba, where he does some petty art work. The real workshop is on a 20'x20' plot where all sort of metal art is pursued. Mr. Harmder was born in 1972 in Thathiar, in Khatri family. He received his education upto fifth class. He inherited the skill of Creating metallic art from his father and started following his family tradition. However, he developed skill on his own also as an accomplished artisan of Chamba.

I visited Harminder’s studio with the intention of interviewing him in the afternoon, where one of his friends told me to come some other time as he was not available. I came back to the studio after one hour, when it was found difficult to meet him inspite of his presence right there in the studio. On the request of Dr. Rajesh Sahgal, Mr Harminder agreed to talk to me and give a feed back to the questionnaire. He offered a chair to me, took his seat. He was happy to spare some of his precious time for me and started answering to my queries.

Harminder could make any of the metallic artistic items in his workshop. However, he used to create regularly Mohras, statues of Deities, all types of folk Musical Instruments, ritual Chamba thaals and vessels in every possible metallic medium in traditional ways. In addition, he also procured ritual items from Haridwar, for sale.

Although he inherited the metal art profession from his father Mr. Heera Nath Mehta and grand father Mr. Moti Ram Mehta, still he underwent a formal training from one of his cousins (from Bua Ji side), son of Mr. Prakash Anand (his Phupha Ji), the oldest and renouned metal artisan of Chamba, Himachal Pradesh.

Spiritual Harminder is a contended person, has no other source of income, other than the metal art. Before any creation is started, he invariably performed worship of Lord Vishwakarma and Maa Kali.

He was assisted by his 37 years old brother, Praveen Mehta (class 10) who has also been running a Pansari shop. Another assistant cum friend, Sanjeev Singh (40 yrs) is also assisting him, who is primarily a carpenter. During Navratri festival many stalls are organised by various vendors in Chaugan field. The metallic art work of
Fig. 14: Casted Maa Lakshmi

Fig. 15: Artisan Harminder is beating metal item, studio

Fig. 16: Tamak in iron metal

Fig. 17: Kartikey in copper

Fig. 18: Main body of Dhakuli in Brass
Harminder was also on display in one of the stalls, which has a lot of market at the national level.

- **Mukesh Anand (alias Gaurav):** Shri Mukesh Anand belongs to Chamba, born in Khatri family in 1982. His father was J.E. in Government service. His grand father was Shri Sunder Lal. His education is BCA. For most of the time he is a road contractor. He is worshipper of goddess Kali.

![Fig. 19: Mukesh Anand washing the icons with chemicals](image)

So far as the metallic artisanship is concerned, it seems for him as a part time profession but at the same time he is eager to continue this profession for future. Being educated though he seems reluctant to carry on the tradition, however, for the sake of prestige he is pulling on the work. He knows the skill and techniques very well. He feels confident and claims that he can do wonders in metallic art by keeping more than two dozens workers in this profession.

He strongly feels that only the traditional work sells and not the new and innovative work which he tried in the past.
He inherited the profession of making statues (using casting method), thal/tray (using reposse technique) from his father and grandfather, which has been going on as family tradition for the last four generations, for which he has engaged two workers. Balbir (48 yrs), Devi Prasad Tandan (50 yrs, class 5) in the workshop divided in two parts. One is expert in casting and the other one is expert in reposse technique. He wants to pursue the profession for preserving the art as this is the best way to have good earning for livelihood. His ambition is to mix the traditional and modern methods in this direction.

- **Devi Prasad Tandan**: Originally he works for Mukesh Anand in his workshop where he is able to create only the reposse work for making Chamba thals.

![Fig 20: Devi Prasad Tandan with his work](image_url)

He was born to Shri Amar Singh Tandan, in Pukhari village (Chamba) 1960, got education upto class 5. Basically he is from Kumbhkar family in which he could not find any future. Finally, he made Shri Prakash Anand his guru. For four the so many years, he is an expert in lost wax method and reposse technique. But as per the demand he limited his work to reposse technique.
He is a good craftsman but as a subordinate to some one he feels little suffocated. As a result he is able to earn only to meet the bread and butter for his family. Financially he does not feel confident and satisfied that his children (three completed plus two) would pursue this profession rather he would prefer not to compel them to come to this profession, however, encourage them to become educated first then decide about their future.

We found him so good that in our opinion he deserved some award from some quarters. On the question of award, he felt demoralized inspite of the fact that the competition remains open to all, a talented person can always participate in it and compete. However, talent, confidence, zeal are the pre-requisites for participating in such contest.

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Visit to Shiv Ratri Fair Mandi: It was on February 24, 2009, that I visited Mandi Shiv Ratri fair. It was a pleasant view to see all the Deities, Goddesses, Rishis and local devis and devtas worshipped in the area of Kullu and Mandi, positioned and decorated in palinquins alongwith the respective colourful processions with Himachali band containing different type of traditional musical instruments. Most of the these gods and goddesses, devi and devtas came to the main ground of the Governement College Mandi by the noon. After some time, among them the process of introduction and embracing started which was a marvellous show. Normally, two palinquins with deities used to come dancing rhythmically towards each other, and after picturesque embrace used to depart from the meeting place. This process continued till evening, after which the people alongwith deities in palinquins retired to their places of stay. This way more than 250 deities in respective palinquins must have visted the fain on the second day. I took snaps of most of important deities
present in the fair, with my camera. I was also on the lookout of the craftsmanship. While visiting the stalls two craftsmen were encountered, Shri Narpat Ram and Shri Labh Singh. They used to work in different teams. The interview with them is described as follows.

• Mr. Narpat Ram: It was in the afternoon on the Shiv Ratri fair in Mandi that we could meet Shri Narpat Ram and the members of his team. They had displayed their artistic metallic articles at a stall in that fair, particularly the musical instruments to which we got attracted and interacted with them.

Narpat Ram belongs to a blacksmith family of Chauri, Mandi, was born in 1952. He received his education up to class 8. He started his work with musical instruments, mohras, Chad, Kalash for temples and jewelry. As a family tradition for the last five generations, he inherited an expertise in articles made of iron and steel, like axe, sickle, tong etc. He is also an expert carpenter, making quiltas for carrying agriculture products for his own use as well as for villagers. Naturally he has having animal stock also. At the same time he is an agriculturist too. He also owns a small orchard. His father was Narpat Ram, and grand father was Sevak Ram.

He furthered the parental profession into a new direction of creating better artistic works using the metallic media other than iron and steel. For which he uses all the techniques like casting, repousse, beating in making various articles. He is determined to pursue metal art as a noble profession.

His technical team consists of 12 artists out of those two are his sons Mahaur Singh, (34 yrs studied up to 5th class) and Chandra Mani, (32 yrs young. class 5). There are nine other people who are working with him, as assistants. They are divided in two groups. One group is working in Kullu. and another in Mandi. These assistants are Nauk Singh, (24 yrs, 6th class pass), Hukum Ram (24 yrs, class 10), Dhani Ram (28 yrs, class 8), Megh Singh (48 yrs, class 5), Churu Ram (30 yr class 5), Mast Ram (26 yrs class 8), Lal Chand (21 yrs, class8), Taj Ram (43 yrs, class 3), Khyali ram (27 yrs, class 7) and another Nauk Singh (18 yrs, class 12). A few persons have been assigned different jobs of blacksmith’s work, brass work specially statues, mohras and vessels, wind blown musical instruments specially Ransingha and Karnal along with
percussion instruments (Dhol, Nagara group etc). It takes reasonable time for molding and casting (12 days), embossing needs at least two days.

They have tried hands on jewelry also. According to Shri Narpal Ram, this group has also made a statue of former Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh. While pursuing his profession, he faces difficulties in procuring raw material, normally locally available, which makes the articles expensive. Sometimes on the demand one may have to compromise the quality of the products. On demand he may also create mohras in wooden media and stone media.

This group has created metallic works, Kalash for the Bhunath temple and the Lord Rama temple, Mandi and temple at Manikaran. They have studio cum workshop at Dharaut, Kullu. One precaution is invariably taken while creating the artistic work for the temples, particularly the statues and mohras, one seeks blessings and permission of the respective deity before they undertake that work through Havan and worship, so as to satisfy the deity. It makes the creation aesthetically appealing and beautiful.

He received award from the Department of Art, Language and Culture, Himachal Pradesh in Lavi fair, Rampur Bushahar in 2008, for his creation of musical instruments.

- **Labh Singh**: Labh Singh was an artisan with whom we interacted in the evening almost after the day activity had calmed down, when he was packing his art work.

  Labh Singh Somany was born in 1965, in a blacksmith family, in village Lughagi (Didar) Mandi. His education was upto class 10. Initially, he inherited the profession from his father, then from his guru Shri Dola Ram (59 yrs), Thachi, Mandi. The musical instrument were their speciality, They were good at Mohras using reposse technique, statues of deities by casting method, jewelry and decorative items, in different media. They get the raw material locally.

  It is two member team with Shri Roshan Lal (24 yrs, class 10). They had also exhibited their artistic work in Pragati Maidan, New Delhi on the invitation of the organisers from New Delhi. In Himachal Pradesh, they exhibited and sold their art work in Kullu, Mandi, Sundernagar and Rampur Bushahar.
Labh Singh wants to continue the traditional work professionally along with some innovations in the work using the modern techniques. He is a worshipper of Sage Markandeya and Ghatotkchha. Before starting the creation he also seeks permission and blessing from them for his success in the endeavour.

He was awarded in Lavi fair a few years ago for his creative work of 9 Kg mohra, by the Department of Art, Language and Culture.

**Face to Face with Shimla Artists:** I contacted the Director, Department of Handloom and Handicraft, Himachal Pradesh, on 21 April 2008, for a few names of metal artists from Shimla area. He suggested me to contact two artists from the nearby village Kelti, namely, **Urgyan Lotte Bodhi**, **Mrs Sunita Negi**, to whom I went promptly. This meeting was quite unusual and amazing in respect of unconfined art and environment, illustrated as follows.

- **Urgyan Lotte Bodhi:** Shri Urgyan Bodh is of 81 yrs age, born in Lahaul is a resident of village Kelti, about four km. from Longwood, Shimla. He got his early education upto class 8 from Lahaul school. His wife is Shakuntala (63 yrs) got married in 1963. He is blessed with three sons and one daughter. All the three boys are in service, two in Shimla and one in U.P. None of them is interested in pursuing the paternal profession. However, his brother in law and his wife are practicing this art.

  His father-in-law was Shri Ram Singh, goldsmith by profession. Once he visited Delhi, met a resident from Pakistan who used to work in metal art and taught the art to Shri Ram Singh. Later, Ram Singh taught that art to his son-in-law, Urgyan, at the age of 34 yrs, just after marriage. Earlier Urgyan was a class four employee (peon) in employment exchange in Shimla. After marriage he continued to be in the same office. He picked up the art and started devoting some time to this new hobby after the office hours.

  His wife used to encourage him in this artistic hobby and got interested in that new excitement sharing her artistic hand. This is how this art has been named as ‘Shakuntala Art’. In this art, metal pieces from various category, of different are shapes, pasted on the metal/ wooden/ plastic/ clay base. Further decoration is
accomplished using shining wires of different metals. On the base having some design, the small metallic pieces are pasted so as give a particular aesthetic shape.

Fig. 21: Decorated elephant by Urgyan Singh

Overall it comes out as a beautiful and unique artwork, developing his own style which may be seen as a mixture of various backgrounds for example he picks up a mohra, pastes the small metallic pieces indifferent design with a unique result. Sometimes, semi-precious stones are also inlaid in the work.

He retired from the office in the year 1988 after which it was a full time for him. He was awarded by several agencies for decorating ornamental stupas ten years ago, for decorating a table lamp 15 years ago. He organised exhibitions in Calcutta, Gauhati, Kurukshetra, Delhi and Shimla at the national level. His creative art became popular among tourists from foreign and metropolitan cities.
Fig 22: Awarded Stupa decorated by Urgyan Singh
Fig. 23: Artisan Urgyan Singh and wife Shakuntala

Fig. 24:

Fig. 25: Decorated Different items by Urgyan Singh

Fig. 26:
• Mrs Sunita Negi: Mrs Sunita Negi (age 54 yrs), wife of Shri Prem Singh Negi, learned the Shakuntala art from his father in law Shri Ram Singh. Both husband and wife used to propagate this art in the village Kilti, Near Shimla. She did her class 5 from Kinnaur, class 7 from St. Thomas, Shimla. She got married in 1970.

Fig. 27: Awarded Guitar decorative by Sunita Negi
Fig. 28: Artisan Sunita Negi Decorating tray

Fig. 29: Flower Pot

Fig. 30: Jewelry Box

Fig. 31: Tray
They have a daughter, Asha who has completed Diploma in Hotel Management and graduation from Shimla. Even after her education she has been helping her parents in propagating the art.

They are expert in the same art trade in which his sister Shakuntala has been an expert. Her mother Sheela Devi also used to help her in this style of art, till 2008. Her sister residing in Sanjauli is also pursuing similar art work independently.

They have given training to at least ten ladies in this style of art without any help from the Government about which they are feeling sad. According to Sunita one needs at least ten yrs to perfect the art. For decoration of jewlery, jewlery box, musical instrument guitar, mask, fruit tray and wall hanging and lecture stand whole of the team has been working. They received second national award from new Delhi for decorating guitar. They have exhibited their work in exhibition in New Delhi haat, jaipur, Mumbai.

According to them it is a good metal art work worth pusuing to make good money.

- **Contact with Kinnaur Artist:** In the last phase, a contact was established with the Kinnaur artist, Shri Mangal Kirti, National awardee from Sunnan, Pooh, Kinnaur, born in 1968, studied upto class 10 from Kinnaur. He inherited the metal profession in Budhhist tradition from his father Shri Urjan Negi, and grandfather Shri Vidyapur Negi. He did not receive any formal training from any other school. His father was his real Guru, who passed away in 2000. For the last 5-6 generation this profession is being practiced.

Mangal Kirti married Teshi in 1996. His wife Mrs. Teshi used to help in his profession. They have been blessed with four children, three sons and one daughter, studying in class +2, 10, 9 respectively. The daughter has completed class 10. Shri Mangal Kirti, being agriculturist and orchardist, also has the related profession. In his orchards almonds and apples are produced.

It was in 1992 that a team from the Department of Industry, Himachal Pradesh, visited Kinnaur. They came in contact with Shri Mangal Kirti and other craftsmen of that area. On seeing their creations, the team suggested and encouraged Shri Mangal Kirti,
to participate in the exhibitions and fairs organized at the state level and at the national level. Shri Mangal Kirti appeared reluctant to the team to the idea given by them. In view of this scenario, the team took the initiative and requested for one beautiful artistic piece of Lord Buddha for exhibiting in the national level exhibition. To which Mangal Kirti fortunately agreed and handed over his one of the best metallic creations to the team. It was placed in the National level exhibition in New Delhi, which was picked up for the national award, which was announced just after that. Shri Mangal Kirti learned about the announcement just like unexpectedly. He received the National Level Award in March, 1994 in Delhi for the same statue of Lord Buddha.

Shri Mangal Kirti is a dedicated skilled craftsman following Buddhist tradition from the very beginning. He has been creating the statues of Lord Buddha (Shakya Muni) and other forms of Lord Buddha, including the ritual articles used in the tradition, the domestic vessels and decorative items and ornamental pieces are also made by him on order in advance. He is having expertise in all the techniques used in this profession. The items are created in any of the medium, gold, silver, copper, brass or bronze. The raw material is brought from the market of Rampur and Delhi.

Without any help from the Government, Shri Mangal Kirti, in his residential house cum workshop, has created the market for his metallic items, statues vessels, ornaments and musical instruments, but extending only to Kinnaur area. He has a team of four persons with Chhimitwa (48, class 10) in a government job in Peo, Gyan (40 yrs, passed primary) a carpenter and agriculturist has been working for the last 10 years and Amit Kumar (19 yrs, class 9). Most of the families in this profession have been practicing the metallic art for the last several generations.

He expressed from his heart that Government should come forward to help and encourage the crafts and the craftsmen from Kinnaur and Lahaul & Spiti area, and thus to save the Buddhist culture and traditions of Himachal Pradesh. Otherwise, the young craftsmen may not stay in this profession any longer. However, he is in favor of pursuing the traditional metallic sincerely, but at the same time one should not hesitate in using the modern technology to make a good earning to sustain one’s family.
4. List of Craftsmen
Many other implements, inscriptions and weapons must have been made by metal-artists in olden times. Now-a-days, with the availability and use of factory made stuff, these crafts though still existing, are holding a lower position of importance in society.

A list of 33 reputed metal craftsmen from 5 out of 12 districts of the state of Himachal Pradesh is given below in Table 1, out of these several metal shilpis are award-winners at the State and National level, for their beautiful artistic creations. The point to be noted is that the main activity in metal craft was pursued in these areas which were famous historically.

**Table 3: Metal Shilpis of Himachal Pradesh**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.N.</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Name and Address</th>
<th>Awards</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chamba</td>
<td>Parkash Chand Anand (Charpat)</td>
<td>P. Govt. &amp; H.P. Govt (Metal President, M.shilp)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ramesh Kumar (s/o Prakash) (Hatnala Bzr)</td>
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<td>Mukesh Anand (Hatnala)</td>
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<td>Harminder Mehta (Hatnala)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Praveen Mehta (b/o Harminder) (Hatnala)</td>
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<td>Tilak Raj (Chamsani)</td>
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<td>Hakam Singh</td>
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<td>Balbeer Singh (Hatnala)</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>Bhupinder Singh</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>Chandra Mani (Chopai) (s/o Roshan Lal)</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>Ratan Das (Sarivasa, Devidhar, Chidgaon)</td>
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<td>Tingu Ram (Kansakoti, Rohru)</td>
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<td>Mrs. Shakuntala</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>19.</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>Kinnaur Mangal Kirti (Sunnan, Pooh)</td>
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<td>Daulat Ram (Chaubachha, Rampur Bushahar)</td>
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<td>Sanjay Kumar (123/13, Paddul)</td>
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<td>33.</td>
<td>Dhani Ram (Chauri, Thachi)</td>
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Reference

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