PREFACE

Art as an imaginative expression of human being- has been closely associated with all the civilizations around the Globe. In visual art, metal has been a more durable medium for creating aesthetically finished marvelous sculptures, musical instruments, jewelry, decorative house- wares and ritual items, as compared to those in other medium. At the same time, they are easily portable items because of which the existing visual traditional art could be saved from total destruction by the foreign invaders and plunderers in the guise of businessmen.

Metal implies pure noble metals like gold, silver, copper and other pure metals such as tin, zinc, iron and aluminum or their alloys. The ‘Art is Divine’ and therefore the precious noble metals occupy a very special place in the Periodic Table and the world of metallurgy and have been in use, traditionally, for creating divine images and jewelry. The alloys were mainly used for other items including folk Musical Instruments, decorative and household articles.

Himachal Pradesh is known for the best of metal Art, especially sculptures, aesthetically laden, at the national and International level. Chamba, Mandi, Kullu, Kinnaur and Shimla have been the centers of major activity using casting, embossing, engraving, enameling and inlaying. Nirmand (Kullu) has been one of the important ancient places for the metal sculptures. Himachal is indebted to the skilled artisans and Shilpis of the area particularly from the rural and tribal belt, who carried on the profession preserving the traditional cultural heritage of the country, through their creation in the traditional form of Mohras, Statues, Folk Musical instruments, Domestic and decorative items with or without the patronage of erstwhile rulers.
My love has been to portray sacred objects, sculptures and mohras related to Gods, Goddesses, deities and devtas accompanied with musical instruments of Himachal Pradesh, on my canvas. My experience in painting continuously refined my work aesthetically. In the process, I was unconsciously drawn closer to explore the metal art of Himachal Pradesh from the aesthetic point of view. I really did not know that my earlier interest in sacred icons was creating a background for my higher studies, at the doctoral level. However, my preference was for some topic transmitting spiritual energy and activity which remains connected with Divinity, at the same time relevant in the context of Himachal Pradesh. I shared my liking with my supervisor Dr. Him Chatterjee, Chairman, Department of Visual Arts, Himachal Pradesh University, Summer Hill, Shimla. He very kindly and lovingly discussed the theme of Metallic Art of Sacred Sculptures and Mohras alongwith the Musical Instruments, in Himachal Pradesh. I found the theme very enthralling. However, when he told me about the complications and difficulties one may face during the fieldwork, I confidently accepted it as a challenge.

In the backdrop, a flash appeared that during my childhood, I enjoyed being with the artistically made metallic deities surrounded by ritual items, almost every day, celebrated Ramnavmi, Janmasthami with them, Deepvali with the Goddess Lakshmi, Ganesh and Saraswati alongwith decoration everywhere, using well lighted chandelier hanging from the ceiling of the hall, Holi with Lord Vishnu and Prahlad, I was already exposed to some artistic decorative items like beetle box (paan daan) and nut cutter which were specially used at the time of festivals to offer beetles and finely-cut beetle nuts to be offered to the guests by the youngsters in the family. I also
happened to see with curiosity the musical instruments and beautifully engraved weapons.

Anyway, it seems to have been the Will of Almighty that the topic 'Metal Art in Himachal Pradesh' was chosen for my Ph.D. program, purposely. Initially, I felt that, as an artist, I am watching every artistic metallic work aesthetically, without finding any reason for why? Of course, the veiled reason seems to have been expressed through colours on the canvas, which was appreciated by my supervisor and the lovers of art.

The study material on Metal Art in Himachal Pradesh, in respect of imaginative sacred sculptures from different traditions, musical instruments, jewelry, decorative domestic and ritual items, coins, inscriptions, weapons, was collected from different museums, temples, monasteries, fairs and private collections of art enthusiasts and the traditional craftsmen. The material on 'Method and Techniques' to create metal art was collected from the main library of the University, the State Museum and the Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla. The information about the contemporary traditional craftsmen was obtained in general from the Department of Language, Art and Culture, Himachal Pradesh, and specifically from the field work undertaken in different phases supplemented by the personal interviews with the eminent skilled craftsmen some of whom from all the five districts of Himachal Pradesh, happened to be the National Awardee. The other related material was surfed from the internet web sites.
I eagerly hope that the ‘Metal Art in Dev Bhumi Himachal’ would reach the art lovers in right perspective.