CHAPTER 8: SCULPTURES IN WOOD

The ancient tradition of carving sculptures out of wood has been preserved by the carpenters of the western Himalaya, especially Himachal Pradesh, till now. In fact, next to south India, the latter province is the only area where fashioning the wooden sculptures is a living tradition. The varied qualities of wood unfolded vast possibilities to the pahari carver whose innate skill manifests itself in a wide array of sculptures. The main stimulant to his genius was provided by religious zeal, his own as well as that of his community. All the wooden sculptures are a product of religious beliefs and customs, that is, they were created specifically to fulfil a religious need, for worship in the local shrine. Before going on to a detailed study of these sculptures, it may be mentioned that almost all of them are fashioned out of deodar wood — in areas like Ladakh where deodar wood was not easily procurable, teak was used. In spite of the durability of this wood, very ancient specimens are not available, the earliest extant sculptures being mainly of Buddhist inspiration and dating from post-Gupta period to the 10th-11th centuries A.D.

References to Wooden Sculptures by foreigners:

We come across quite a few references to wooden sculptures in the works of European travellers and writers who visited the diverse regions of the western Himalaya in the past one hundred
years. Harcourt writing in the late 1860's has left us the following lines:

"There are many evidences that wooden sculptures and carving were once generally cultivated and there are a few instances which evince considerable skill both in the manipulation and pose of the figures to be seen in the numerous temples."

Moorcroft and Trebeck have alluded to a remarkable sculpture of Sakyamuni in wood "carved and handsomely gilt and painted", in the chapter on Spiti.

Francke has left us the following description of a wooden sculpture in a monastery in Ladakh:

"The middle one contains a wooden image of a Buddha seated in the earth-touching attitude, the one to the right (of the spectator) the green Tara (sGrol-ma) and the one to the left Vajrasattva (rdo-rje-sems-dpa). I am of opinion that these two statues were inserted later on in the place of two more ancient ones. All the woodwork is painted red, except the arch of the green Tara which is blue."

Elsewhere the same author has alluded to an "ancient and beautiful woodcarving of teak wood representing the Buddha surrounded by Bodhisattvas who are of primitive and simple type" in the bkra-shis-lhum-grub monastery of Li. Tucci writes that he had seen many idols in bronze and wood crowded into the last chapel of Dhankar (or Drangkhar) monastery in Spiti. Elsewhere he mentions that he saw an old wooden image of the Buddha in meditation in Lha-lung temple in Spiti which he describes as being of Indian make "perhaps contemporaneous with the foundation of the temple brought from India by some devout pilgrim... thrown away in a corner, blackened by age, made filthy with a thick coating of consecrated butter, this precious work of art which ought to be studied with the greatest care fills us with vexation."

In none
of these passages, Tucci has given any description of the images nor has he reproduced their illustrations. So it is difficult to form any idea about their style or iconography. He, however, gives a very brief description of a wooden image of a goddess whom he could not identify. One of her arms, he writes, is broken while in the other she holds the end of the scarf thrown over her shoulders. A kalasa resting on the back of a horse separated the lotus pedestal from the animal. The figure is carved in the round and a pointed stela forms an aureole around her. Originally from Alchi monastery in Ladakh, it is now preserved in the Bonardi collection.

We come across two types of wooden sculptures here - three-dimensional free standing images and two-dimensional panels carved in relief. Sculptures of the first type are mostly found preserved in the Buddhist monasteries of Ladakh, Spiti and Kinnaur, and depict the Buddha or the Bodhisattvas. Apart from these, we have not come across free-standing sculptures of any of the Hindu deities carved in classical style so far. This should not lead us to surmise that such images were not made at all. They must have been made for worship in the temples, but have not survived due to vandalism of all kinds. Another reason for the non-availability of such images is that, in most cases, they were commissioned by royal patrons in times of peace and prosperity which were few and far between, as shall have become evident from the chapter on historical background. Free standing sculptures in folk style are available, but they are very few in number, for very often
they were installed in the open, within or without the temple enclosure, and they perish due to exposure to the elements. Relief panels in folk style are still available in Chamba, Simla hills, Mandi and Kulu, and sometimes in Kangra also.

**Sculptures in Classical Style:**

The few free-standing wooden sculptures in the round that have come down to us date from the post-Gupta and medieval periods, i.e. 8th to 11th centuries A.D. One may question why we use the term classical for medieval period sculptures. One reason for using this term is to distinguish these images from sculpture in folk style which present a sharp contrast to them. Another is that almost all the wooden sculptures dating from this period are the work of Kasmiri artisans who had been patronised by the rulers of the western Tibetan empire. And in Kashmir, the traditions of Gupta and post-Gupta sculpture continued well into the 9th-10th A.D. In fact, very little change was effected in the sculptural style in the course of these centuries. And if we compare the stone sculptures of Martand (8th century A.D.) with the Avantiswami temple (9th century A.D.) with those of our wooden sculptures, we do not perceive much difference. Besides, our wooden sculptures have retained most of the qualities of Gupta and post-Gupta period sculptures; the classical spirit of these eras does not seem to have extinguished till then. This will be amply clear if we analyse the characteristic features of classical Gupta sculpture.
The Gupta sculpture is called classical (to use the words of K. de Codrington) "insomuch as refinement and clear definition are its outstanding qualities. The epithet may be accepted in this limited sense, but the use of the word can not be allowed to suggest that there is any break between Gupta sculptures and the work of succeeding centuries. The same motifs persist in the same context and the development thenceforward is complete without a break."\(^9\)

According to C.L. Fabri\(^10\), the outstanding traits of classical sculptures are harmony, balance and peace. The classical style means not only "perfect mastery of the subject, but turning all this skill and knowledge to the noble purpose of creating beauty: everything is idealised, realism is only known and used in order to create things of beauty and perfection. There is a dignity and nobility in classical art that allows no exaggeration, no excess, no overstatement...."\(^11\)

Our wooden sculptures share most of the qualities enumerated above. Besides, all scholars of Indian art history unanimously agree that the Gupta art traditions continued well upto 750 A.D.\(^12\) when they became merged with diverse regional styles and each province developed them further, more or less on the same lines. The classical ideal in art was not entirely lost sight of. This is amply clear not only from the wooden sculptures that form the subject of our study in the present chapter, but also from bronze images and wall paintings.
embellishing the interiors of the Buddhist monasteries of Ladakh, Lahul, Spiti, Kinnaur and Tibet, that are not only comparable to, but are an echo of the masterpieces of Ajanta frescoes and sculpture. A closer study of these sculptures makes it amply evident that the Kasmiri artists who fashioned them had not only inherited but also evolved a canon that asked for dignity, nobility, all typical traits of classical art. They created images of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas having an idealised human form, their faces with a smooth polish. The carving of their bodies is masterly with a sensitivity for the flesh, especially on the face; the arms are excellently chiselled, the hands and feet are handsome, their faces breathe serenity and calmness; the details of their drapery are delicate yet not excessive—all these qualities characterise all classical art in India can be discerned in our wooden sculptures.

A wealth of wooden sculptures lies preserved in the Buddhist temples and monasteries of the above-mentioned regions of the western Himalaya, which have not yet received the attention they deserve. In fact, these preserves of Buddhism abound in rich material for the study of Buddhist iconography and are a valuable storehouse of images in wood and metal, some of which date from very ancient times. The wooden sculptures mainly represent the Buddha or the Buddhist deities worshipped in the Vajrayana (the adamantine vehicle) cult which had originated in India and introduced in the diverse parts of the western
Tibetan empire by the Buddhist monks from Odantapuri and Vikramasila, among whom the name of Atisa is the most outstanding. This cult gained popularity in this area for it (to quote Benoytosh Bhattacharya) "included in its purview all the varieties of attractive tenets, notations, dogmas, theories, rites and practices, and incorporated all that was best in Buddhism and probably in Hinduism also, and owing to this circumstance the Vajrayana attained great fame and popularity. It satisfied everybody, the cultured and the uncultured, the pious and the sinner, the lower and the higher ranks of the people and devotees. The Vajrayana catered to all tastes with equal efficiency, and it had something useful for everybody. Its universal popularity became an established fact." 

In the Vajrayana, the Adi Buddha is regarded as the highest deity of the Buddhist pantheon, the originator even of the five dhyani Buddhas, and in art he is represented as a personification of the Ultimate Truth, an incarnation of Cosmic Enlightenment. The Buddha images were the focus of every Buddhist temple and suggestive of the state of enlightenment to which every individual should aspire. The attendant Bodhisattvas, dressed in gay clothes and ornaments, represented the essence of compassion, for they symbolise beings who have taken the vow not to attain nirvana until they have drawn all earthly creatures in the universe out of suffering and helped them attain salvation. The Buddhist art in these areas, as it developed down the centuries, concentrated mainly on these two types of images - the Buddha and the compassionate
Bodhisattvas. A large number of icons were made in different media, the purpose being to help transmit that infinite insight and infinite compassion which are the aim of Buddhism. In later ages, the different orders of monks and nuns, i.e. the Ge-lug-pa sect, the Ka-dam-pa sect, the Sa-skya-pa sect, the rNying-ma-pa sect, etc. were responsible for the continuity of Buddhist preaching, while their temples and monasteries became permanent centres of learning and pilgrimage. The great stimulus for wooden sculptures was provided by the lamas as well as rich and powerful kings and noblemen who patronised the artisans and commissioned them to produce fine images of the Buddhist deities. Sometimes, rich pilgrims and devotees got the sculptures carved and placed them at the altars of Buddhist temples. In the course of centuries, the images got accumulated. Naturally they differ a great deal in style from one another, having been chiselled according to the iconographic tenets in vogue at the time of the carving.

The Buddhist texts preserved in the various monasteries in the areas mentioned above have been studied by A.H. Francke, Giuseppe Tucci, and David Snellgrove and Tadeuze Skorupski. The researches of these scholars inform us that Buddhism experienced two resurgences here - first in the 8th century A.D. when Padmasambhava reorganised and popularised Buddhism, and then in the 10th-11th centuries A.D., when a great Tibetan monk named lotsava (meaning the translator) Rinchen-bzang-po arrived on the scene. We have already spoken about his
contribution to the dissemination of Buddhism in our previous chapters. The wooden sculptures made in or before the 8th century A.D. have not survived, understandably due to the heavy destruction of the Buddhist temples caused by Langdarma in the subsequent century. In the 10-11th centuries A.D., followed the second phase of revival of Buddhism as is testified to by a fairly large number of monasteries and temples ascribed by local traditions to have been erected by Rinchen-bzang-po, the moving spirit behind all artistic activity. It was he who had invited 75 artisans from Kasmir and entrusted them with the task of painting of the walls of Buddhist temples and monasteries erected by him as well as with carving images of Buddhist deities in addition to chiselling the architectural portions in wood. A few wooden sculptures of this period have survived. That they are the work of Kasmiri sculptors is evident from their style of execution which bears a striking resemblance to that of the stone sculptures and bronze images collected from the sites of ancient stone temples in Kasmir. In addition to that, the paintings on the walls of some of the temples and monasteries betray the same style which suggests that the same artisans worked in wood as well as painted on the walls.

It is an accepted fact that the regions falling within the territory of western Tibetan empire owed most of their artistic and cultural activities to Kasmir. The researches of some scholars have revealed that around 950 A.D., a Hindu
Sahi king of Kabul received as a gift a sculpture of Visnu vaikuntha in Kasmiri style from a Bhota (Tibetan) king who had acquired it from Kailasa region. Scholars such as Francke, Tucci, Goetz and Snellgrove and Richardson unanimously agree that the wooden sculptures of the Buddhist deities preserved in the Buddhist monasteries of Alchi in Ladakh, Tabo in Spiti, parts of Lahul and the Poo tehsil of Kinnaur district, in addition to a number of ancient sites in Tibet such as Tsaparang, Tholing, Mangnang, etc., are the works of Kasmiri artisans of the 10th-11th centuries A.D. This can be established by a comparison between our wooden sculptures with the bronzes, ivory and stone sculptures of Kasmiri provenance and dating from the 8th-10th centuries A.D., which can be easily distinguished by heavy ovaloid faces with plump cheeks, summarily delineated lips unlike the full sensuous lips of the Gupta sculptures with a gentle smile eternally stamped around them, delicate treatment of bodies, free gliding movements of the limbs, naturalistic modelling, an emphasis on belly modelled pronouncedly, attenuated waists, heads sporting a three-pointed pearl-studded tiara, a long stylish scarf reaching down to the floor or flying across the shoulders, etc. All these features can be discerned in some of the wooden sculptures we have selected for our study here, viz. the Buddha flanked by two female figures from Ladakh or Lahul (pl.167), the relief sculptures depicting the Buddha in standing posture from Tabo monastery in Spiti (pl.169) and three-dimensional image of Vajrapani from Rang-rik-tsuma monastery in Charang village in Poo tehsil, Kinnaur district (pl.168).
First we shall study the relief sculptures of the standing Buddha from Tabo monastery in Spiti. Francke was the first to notice them but did not say much except that they were examples of ancient woodcarving of the Buddha in Kasmini style. Next scholar to study them was Tucci who expressed his opinion in the following passage:

"Of even greater significance are...the two fragments from Tabo published by Francke and later by myself, the style of which leaves no doubt about their Kasmini origin. Western Tibet had, of course, trading and cultural connections with Kashmir over a long period."  

I have already shown in an earlier chapter how much the western Tibetan empire owed to Kashmir in the mediaeval period (8th to 13th century A.D.) and how it was linked with the latter region through trade routes. I do not think it appropriate to repeat all those observations here again.

Hermann Goetz included one of these sculptural reliefs in his study of mediaeval sculpture in Kashmir where he expressed his opinion in the following words:

"Good examples of genuine Kasmini work are two wooden panels discovered in Tabo monastery in Spiti representing the Buddha in a rich Kasmini chapel surrounded by monks, Siddhas and goddesses respectively. The Buddha still is of the Gupta type (probably some Gupta statue held in high veneration), but of excessively slim body and thin limbs, the goddesses are veritable fashionable dolls, and the other figures have lost all sense of proportion. The panels are in fact meant to be pure ornamental work, like late Pala, Western Chalukya or Hoy-sala art."  

These sculptural reliefs depict the Buddha standing on a lotus pedestal in a completely frontal view. In one panel, he is flanked by two female figures and in the other the Bodhisattvas: as mentioned by Tucci. They seem to have formed
part of the doorway or some architectural portion of Tabo monastery in my opinion. The identical treatment of both the panels supports my view. The Buddha is standing in a slightly flexed posture, his one hand raised in abhaya mudra and the other holding one end of his drapey.

Goetz is not entirely correct in using the word "dolls" for accompanying female figures. Perhaps he thinks so due to their decayed condition. Both the figures are well proportioned, slim, graceful, and lithe with attenuated waists, slightly, slight ally pronouncedly modelled belly, well-modelled shapely legs poised delicately on a lotus pedestal, well-shaped breasts and crowned with a three-pointed tiara. They exude a lively mobility and elegance. These qualities are common to Kasmiri sculptures in metal and stone, the sculptural reliefs decorating the doorway of the Markula Devi temple in Udaipur village in Lahul as well as to a wooden image of a goddess alluded to as being a specimen of Kasmiri sculpture but not identified by Tucci. We shall revert to a description of the last image after completing our analysis of the Tabo image.

All the three figures are framed by a gabled shrine similar to Kasmiri architecture of the stone temples, i.e. a triangular gable enclosing a trefoliated arch, on the cusps of which rest very small square pilasters supporting the triangular arch. The two birds carved in the corners of the triangle and the vessel (kalasa) in the centre of the trefoliated arch are almost linked with the apex of the triangle — all
these motifs and features recall the exactly identical niche enclosing the figure of the Surya in the Sun temple of Martand (pl. 114) and those of the river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna flanking the doorway to the Markula Devi temple in Lahul. All these stylistic affinities make me arrive at the conclusion that these architectural fragments must have been carved by the Kasmiri artisans working in the employ of Ye-she-od in the 10th-11th centuries A.D.

Another superb example of the Buddha image (ht. 2½ ft.) was discovered by J. Ph. Vogel probably from Lahul or Ladakh (pl. 167) which has been preserved in the Bhuri Singh Museum of Chamba since then. This is a deeply carved image of the meditating Buddha seated in the padmasana posture. One of his hands and part of his knee are broken. His left hand with open palm is resting in his lap. His right arm, unfortunately missing, must have been in bhumisparsa mudra (the gesture of touching the earth and calling her to witness his victory over the evil forces of Mara, the Buddhist god of desire) as can be guessed by the damaged knee. This mudra symbolises the moment of enlightenment at Bodhgaya. Both the feet are extremely sensitively carved. The large oval face of the Buddha with half-closed contemplative eyes, a serene expression of blissful meditation on his face lit up by a smile of beatitude around his lips, stylised distended earlobes, schematic curly hair arched on both sides of the forehead covering the head and reaching down to the ears, rhythmic folds of the sanghati conveyed by striations and covering only the left
shoulder and leaving the right shoulder bare, its folds disposed in a collar-like manner, neck marked with the conventional triple line, well-modelled broad chest—all these features make it one of the finest of all the Buddha images. Shaded from above by the Bodhi tree whose stylised leaves seem to form an arch-like curve above his head, he represents a sitting posture with a supple and graceful bodily form. He is flanked by two female figures standing on lotus pedestals in full feminine grace. They are the daughters of Mara, trying to disturb the Buddha's meditation by their sensuality. They surpass all celestial nymphs in seductive charm. They have sensually rounded limbs and vigorous yet restrained poses. Special care seems to have been expended on the delineation of their smooth and tapering limbs. Their expressive postures and intricate coiffures vibrate with something akin to the voluptuous charm of the Ajanta female figures. Their elaborate ornaments, globular breasts, narrow waists, earlobes elongated with the weight of large circular earrings and heavy decoration with pearl strings are reminiscent of the sculptural figures from post-Gupta period. It is not understandable why they should be placed on lotus pedestals which is meant only for divine beings.

On the semi-circular aureole rising above these female figures and around the tree we notice grotesque, pot-bellied and animal-headed figures playing on pipes and drums, evidently the army of Mara trying to distract the Buddha. Identical figures are seen on the ivory statue of the Buddha from Kasmir
now in Cleveland Museum of Arts (USA). These figures are more or less damaged - in some cases heads are damaged, while others have broken hands and feet.

On the pedestal below the lotus throne (padmasana) of the Buddha, are carved seated figures of the devotees in an attitude of adoration. They are reminiscent of similar figures in Ajanta sculptures. The figures of male devotees with folded hands also flank the Buddha, but they are considerably damaged and only their busts remain. The figures on the pedestal sport wigs of curly hair. By the subtleness of attitude, grace and elegance of their form, they recall the post-Gupta sculptures. This wooden image taken as a whole is remarkable for its delicate and perfectly proportioned figures.

There are certain points about the date and provenance of this sculpture which require our attention. Vogel who collected it during his archaeological expeditions in Lahul has not tried to date it nor said anything about its provenance. Unfortunately there is no comparable wooden sculpture to help us in coming to a satisfactory conclusion. The only course open to us is to search for parallels in contemporary sculpture in other materials.

Stylistically, this sculpture is almost identical to a bronze image of the Buddha reproduced by P. Pal in his book "The Bronzes of Kashmir" and two ivory statues, one in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the other in Prince Wales of Museum in Bombay. There are striking stylistic similarities between these four images - smiling mouth, schematic
treatment of curls on the head, distended earlobes, lotus-shaped half-closed eyes with deeply curved eyebrows, very squat neck marked with three lines, well-modelled broad chest, powerful shoulders, leonine torso, and the folds of the saṅghati falling in parallel courses carved as string ridges. All these features suggest a striking family resemblance, although the shape of the Buddha's face in our sculpture is very oval which lends him almost a Mongoloid appearance. In fact, this feature makes me think that this image might have been carved in Ladakh or some Ladakhi Buddhist pilgrim offered it at the Lahul monastery.

Dr. Motichandra has assigned the ivory image from the Bombay museum a 5th century A.D. date, for it bears a close resemblance to the stucco figures from Jaulian and Taxila which have been placed in the 5th century A.D. by Sir John Marshall. P. Pal and V. P. Dwivedi have assigned an 8th century A.D. date for the bronze and ivory images referred to above on the ground that they share all the features of Kasmiri sculptures in stone dating from the 8th century A.D. such as: "ovaloid face, arched eyebrows, aquiline nose, slightly open lips with a gentle smile, full cheeks, fleshy chin etc." On the basis of these similar stylistic features with Kasmiri sculptures in bronze, stone and ivory, I may assert that our wooden sculpture also dates from the 8th century A.D. Its striking affinities with Gupta and post-Gupta sculptures make me think that it might have been carved by a master craftsman from Ladakh settled in Kasmir and trained
in classical Gupta sculptural traditions (to use Motichandra's words)" not watered down in the course of the long journey westward, but closely watched and studied in his homeland." Whatever its origins or its date, it is one of the greatest achievements of Kasmiri sculptor and also occupies a unique position as one of the few surviving works from one of the pivotal periods in the long history of Indian sculpture.

In recent years, one more example of a wooden sculpture in Kasmiri style has come to light. This image is preserved in the Rang-rik-tsuma monastery in Charang village. This monastery, according to tradition, is said to have been founded by lotsava Rinchen-bzang-po, for this portion of Kinnaur district formed a part of the western Tibetan empire in the 10-11th centuries A.D. Two-and-a-half feet in height, it is a masterpiece of wooden sculptures in the round. It is an image of Vajrapani in seated posture. It is not provided by an aureole and shares all the characteristic features of the wooden images of Buddhist deities fashioned by Kasmiri sculptors in the employ of Guge monarch in the mediaeval period, viz. frontal depiction, serene expression on the graceful mien, ovaloid face crowned by a three-pointed tiara, muscular treatment of the chest modeled with remarkable finesse, long tapering arms, elongated lower torso, etc. (pl. 168). His physiognomy has all the features common to stone sculptures and bronze images from Kasmir of the 9th-10th centuries A.D. enumerated above.
There must be a number of wooden sculptures still preserved in some corner of the Buddhist monasteries in Ladakh which are in Kasmiri style and date from 10-11th centuries A.D. Unfortunately, the monasteries are not very well known or are located in remote villages, access to which is possible only by walking on foot for days together.

**Folk style sculptures**

In almost all the districts of Himachal Pradesh we come across innumerable wooden sculptures in folk style. When we use the term "folk style", we mean sculptures carved by rural craftsmen in the local style of the area. Free standing sculptures in this style are very few in number, while those carved in relief on the wooden planks are fairly numerous. Both the varieties are marked by an expressive quality that results from direct carving.

These sculptures evoke a number of questions in our mind - what do they mean? What do they represent? Who made them? What purpose do they serve? Like the wooden sculptures in classical style discussed above, these images are also an instrument by which the rural Himachalis are able to satisfy their religious needs. They are meant for worship. Very often we find them enshrined in a shack-like structure near a big temple, viz. the Taradevi temple near Simla and hutment near the Jubbal palace. These sculptures are religious and their significance for the pahari villagers is that they have faith in them. Their forms are not symbolic but representational. Each sculpture represents a wellknown deity and is
carved in strict conformity with iconographic tenets for immediate recognition. This adherence imposed a powerful discipline on them and also strengthened the hold of tradition. The carvers fashioned these images out of wood. The idea of beauty or ugliness did not bother them nor did it bother the devotees who placed implicit faith in them after the observance of the rituals of prana-pratistha. Much of the mystery and power of these folk sculptures derive from the fact that during the rhythm of creation shaped by his religious beliefs, the rural carver projects his deep faith into them. It is on account of this deep faith that they impress us.

It is not possible to trace the development of folk sculptures in a chronological sequence, for no dated images are to be found. Nor is it possible to date them on the basis of their style that has continued more or less unchanged over the centuries, and that has bestowed a timeless quality on them. In fact, these sculptures can not be said to have a history, but they certainly have a tradition. There are strong indications that this style had been handed down from generation to generation for centuries. The anonymous craftsmen who, at the genesis of pahari folk art, invented and produced the original style which has since influenced many generations, must have had a remarkable creative genius.

One wonders how it was possible for such a strong tradition to be produced by the pahari carpenters. One answer is the overwhelming unity of religious feeling and purpose through
the centuries. The carvers shared the religious feelings of their village community as well as their ancestors. Secondly, the pahari rural areas have a closed society, impervious to change and outside influences. In this society the traditional values are more compelling for the villagers who are convinced that the traditional manner is good for it has persisted for centuries and stood the test of time, so it must be accepted and continued. Social stability, conformity on the part of the carpenters to socio-religio-cultural patterns of life, his adherence to local conventions strengthened the hold of tradition and the folk style continued unchanged. Besides, illiteracy played a significant role in preserving the age-old traditions. The carvers carried their mythologies, legends and folklore in their heads. These wooden sculptures served as an instrument for preserving their religious beliefs in powerful shapes. And therein lies their significance.

First we shall study the three-dimensional free standing sculptures. They are hewn out of a single block of wood, and generally efforts are made by the carvers to keep the grain of wood intact. What strikes one most about these images is that they are cylindrical. In fact, this cylindrical form derives from the shape of the log and lends the sculptures a wonderful three-dimensional quality. For example, the statue of the goddess Kali (pl. 170) which is standing in a desolate corner of Kusumti near Simla. It is placed in the midst of stones in such a way that only the torso of the goddess is visible. Due to continual exposure to elements, it has acquired a rugged appearance. The goddess's arms are
broken from the shoulders and there is a mere suggestion of breasts. Her body is roughly carved and executed with great simplicity in rounded forms. On her drawn face she has a weird expression, long grotesque nose, circular eyes arched by thick brows, a protruding tongue and small ears that project slightly from both the sides. She is wearing a round cap closely fitting her skull. Her facial features and expression, frontal and erect posture inspire as much awe as the encircling mountains. It is an exciting piece of sculpture and I did not come across its equal through the length and breadth of Himachal Pradesh during my research tours.

Then there are the two statuettes of Siva and Parvati (pl. 171) discovered from Nirth village in the Simla hills. They are also cylindrical in treatment. Siva is riding on Nandi, his sacred bull. The animal figure is chiselled in a remarkably skillful manner. The solid full body and sturdy legs firmly planted on the flat wooden pedestal reminds me of the horse-rider bronze images in folk style from Rajasthan. It is highly probable that the carver of these images was a Raja- sthani and might have been inspired by the folk bronzes as well as the wooden figurines of Issarji and Parvati worshipped on the occasion of gangaur festival in Mewar. Siva has a beard very similar to that of Issarji and is wearing a cap or turban and circular earrings. Considerable pains seem to have been expended in chiselling his facial features - arched eyebrows, eyes, sharp nose, thin lips and full cheeks. In contrast, his body is roughly carved; his two arms are broken and his feet
are vestigial. He is wearing a loin-cloth indicated by oblique stripes. Parvati has a broad face, prominent jawline and tightly-combed hair. She is wearing a long skirt hemmed by a zigzag pattern and the pleats are suggested by long vertical lines. She is wearing a full sleeved blouse as is commonly worn by women in the Simla hills. Her arms are positioned close to her body and her hands joined in front hold a water-vessel. This artistic device of joining arms close to the body produces an effect of columnarity. This quality combined with the wonderful symmetry that this statue has lent its remarkable majesty. The goddess is provided with a circular pedestal. The facial expressions of both Siva and Parvati manifest calm dignity.

The two dimensional wooden panels carved in relief vary a great deal in size - from one foot in width to five feet. The smaller panels are generally fixed on the wooden pillars of the temples as shown in pls. 172 & 174, and the bigger ones are placed in the veranda running around the temple or in the courtyard by the villagers as a token of thanksgiving on the fulfilment of their wishes - on the birth of a son, for good harvest, for the well-being and protection of their cattle, for recovery from some disease, etc. The pahari villagers have unflinching faith in their deities to whom they turn in adverse times for protection and help. Once their problems are solved and their wishes granted, they get the image of their deity carved on a wooden plank and leave it in the temple precinct. This gesture is accompanied by appropriate sacrificial offerings.
These panels are often worshipped by all those villagers who visit the temple. Often we come across red daubs on the forehead of the deity.

The most fascinating specimens of relief carving are square panels depicting the worship of Siva; on account of which they have been termed Sivaite panels by Stella Kramrisch. She believes them to have been from Kangra. I beg to differ from the great scholar, for similar panels have been collected by me from some villages in the Simla hills which I shall study here below. Kramrisch has reproduced one such panel in her catalogue and her description is as follows:

"There are three horizontal panels, the topmost one showing sixteen women holding hands; two figures are enthroned next to a tree on the right; three priests hold water vessels; a sivalinga on the left and four figures above the sun and the moon. There are Rosettes on both ends. Between them there are various symbols which are based on the number four. Below we see a cow and a calf, a square enclosure (pitha) where a coiled shape emerges and seems to pass behind the steps which divided this scene from the figure of a warrior riding on an elephant."

This description is applicable to a number of carved panels from Simla hills, although some of them do not depict the worship of Sivalinga. It is highly probable that the above mentioned panel is from Simla hills, not from Kangra. The latter district was never a centre of woodcarving because of non-availability of good wood; stone carving and metalwork attained a high degree of perfection here. Besides, during my ramblings in Kangra valley I did not come across such panels in any of the temples.
The wooden panels collected by me from Simla hills also show 12 or 16 female figures holding hands on the topmost horizontal strip; animal motifs such as cows, elephants and also a coiled snake (pl. 173). The female figures are the pahari folk dancers. The central portion is occupied by a pahari dwelling house with three storeys— the lowermost one showing a granary suggested by pestle and mortar, and a cattleshed suggested by a cow being milked. The two upper storeys are occupied by members of the family. Two notched ladders are placed in a slanting position on both sides of the house. Around the house are farms suggested by rectangular shapes, mountains indicated by triangular forms, while the two circles are not sun and moon as mentioned by Kramrisch but circular space in front of most rural houses meant for threshing grain. A highly stylised tree looms large over the village fields on the left side of the panel.

These panels display an imaginative blending of the actuality of living where everyday contributes some novelty to be absorbed by the stream of tradition and integrated into its style. The whole surface of the panels is part of the composition and there is no distinction between the relief and the groundplan. It depends for all its effect on the use of incised lines and an extreme subtlety in its surface modelling. In the delineation of figures, there is a great deal of simplification. The human figures are carved without any anatomical detail and with little indication of clothes.
The relief panels depicting Durga mahisamardini or Durga simhavahini can still be seen in a shack-like structure on the Taradevi hill near Simla. These panels are not very old. All of them are executed in the same style which suggests the work of the same carver. Iconographically, the figure of the Great Goddess is conceived accurately. In most panels, she is shown as having eight arms and wielding her usual emblems - a trident, a sword, a rosary, a bell, a drum etc. The wire-shaped arms, the round mask-like face, short torso encased from the waist downwards in an ornamental skirt that looks like an inflated balloon are some of the features common to all the panels. The figure of Durga carved along the vertical axis is forcefully executed.

All over Himachal Pradesh, especially in Chamba district, we come across wooden panels on which are carved crude figures of human beings looking very much like effigies. The local name for them is "auttara" (corruption of "aputra") meaning without a son. Such panels are installed by the relatives of the deceased who does not leave behind male issues to perform certain rites for the appeasement of his or her soul. This custom is closely linked with ancestor worship, the idea behind it being that the dead acquire merit (punya) from the pious acts of the living. In some areas, these panels are also called "pitra" meaning ancestor. The common practice is to place them in a small hut by the side of a spring. Sometimes a hole is perforated in the carved panel to which is attached
a spout for water; it is then set up in the course of a stream. These panels are deemed to be the medium through which the soul of the dead ancestor is reinstalled among the living. For the rural Himachalis, the ancestor figures embody the spirit of the dead and contain their vital force. They fear evil spirits more than anything else, so all efforts are made to appease them.

It may be mentioned here that unlike the African ancestor sculptures in wood, our images are always foursided in conception. Till now I have not come across a single ancestor image carved in the round. Like African sculptures, they also reflect the Himachali villagers’ inner world in which they crave fatherly protection. They are not products of aesthetic intention. They are works of art only to us; for the villagers they are objects of use necessary for the successful performance of rituals.

It is unfortunate that due to the rapid changes in the socio-economic life of the Himachalis, the centuries-old tradition of carving wooden sculptures is dying a slow death.
REFERENCES

2. ibid
4. ibid, p. 31
5. Tucci, Giuseppe and Ghersi, Capt. E. : Secrets of Tibet, p. 52
6. ibid, pp. 46-47
7. See Tucci, Giuseppe : The ancient Civilisation of the Transhimalaya, pl. 150.
8. ibid.
11. ibid, p. 24.
12. Dehejia, Vidya : The Early Stone Temples of Orissa, p. 5
13. Bhattacharya, Benoytosh : Indian Buddhist Iconography, p. 41. The same author writes : "After the 7th century, secrecy was no longer necessary, as the principles of Vajrayana were then fully established and widely spread through the teachings and mystic songs of the Siddhas and Mahasiddhas. The beautiful images produced by the priests and artists made the teachings doubly attractive. Great men came forward to advocate the cause of Vajrayana."
16. ibid, p. 43
17. The monasteries of Tabo, Dhankar and Ki belong to the Ge-lug-pa sect.
18. The Kaza monastery belongs to the Sa-skya-pa sect.
19. The Pyin monastery belongs to the rNying-ma-pa sect.
21. Tucci, Giuseppe : Transhimalaya, op. cit., p. 91
23. See Chap. 2 of the present dissertation, p. 36
Here I cite a passage from the above-quoted work Transhimalaya (pp.92-93):

"Rinchen-bzang-po-brought in many artists from Kashmir to work on the building and decoration of the chapels which he founded and the names of some of them are recorded in the Tibetan sources, in more or less garbled form. Mangnang is not the only place where we can identify work by these artists. There is, for example, a statue of Hevajra made from the wood of the "tree of illumination" of which the biography speaks".

Earlier in the same passage, he had written: "Works such as the ivory statue of a Bodhisattva from Mangnang provides indisputable evidence of Kasmiri influence in Tibet in the 10th-11th centuries and similar examples from a later period have been found at Alchi in Ladakh. The wooden figure of a goddess from this monastery is also the work of a Kasmiri artists."

26. ibid

28. ibid
29. Francke, A.H.: op. cit., p. 40; pl.18, fig.3
33. Goetz, Hermann: Studies, op. cit., "Kashmir art began to expand over Ladakh, Spiti and Western Tibet, thanks to the activities of the Kashmiri Lotsavas at Tabo, Tholing, Lhalun, Tsaparang, Alchi etc." (p.73)
Roerich, G. has also expressed the same opinion. He writes that the woodcarving in different parts of the ancient western Tibetan Empire was strongly influenced by avantipura school of sculpture of the 9th century A.D. Marg, Vol.9, No.2, p.109
34. Francke, A.H.: op. cit., p. 19
35. Tucci, Giuseppe: Transhimalaya, op. cit., p. 47.
37. Tucci, Giuseppe: Transhimalaya, op. cit., p. 89.
38. ibid
39. See Dwivedi, V.P. Indian Ivories, Delhi, 1972; pl. 85
41. Vogel, J. Ph.: Catalogue of the Bhuri Singh Museum, Calcutta, 1909, p. 34
42. Pal, P: The Bronzes of Kashmir, New Delhi, 1975, pls. 22, a & b.
43. Dwivedi, V.P.: Op. cit., pls. 76 & 77
44. Dwivedi, V.P.: Op. cit., pl. 74
45. ibid, p. 42
46. ibid
49. ibid.
52. ibid.
53. ibid
55. ibid.