In the previous chapters, we have seen that a wide variety of decorative elements invest the wooden structures of the western Himalaya with endless beauty. A close study of these decorative designs, motifs and symbols adorning the wooden temples and residential structures reveals that the carvers of the western Himalaya did not evolve new motifs, that is, motifs that can be said to be peculiar only to this region. They form an integral part of the repertoire of ornamental patterns and are closely linked with the main-stream of Indian classical art traditions. Some of them are architectural motifs dating from the Gupta and post-Gupta periods such as the river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna standing on their vehicles, attendant figures (pratihari), dwarfish figures (pramathas), mithunas, navagrahas, kirttimukhas, purnakumbha (pot-and-foliage), flying geese, foliated scrolls (patralata), lotus rosettes (phullavalli), etc. Some motifs trace their origin to the Vedic period, while others figuring commonly in later carvings executed in folk style such as horseriders are derived from Rajput art. Apart from figural motifs, there are ornamental patterns composed by an ingenious combination of flowers, foliage and creepers. Extremely elegant and impressive ornamentation of this kind can be seen on the doorways to the earliest temples, while some structures display geometrical patterns. In addition, there are birds and animals delineated with perfect mastery. Here below we study each of them individually.
Floral Designs:

The floral patterns are composed by infinite curves, twists and intertwining tendrils, rising and falling like a wave and moving forth with exquisite grace like a sinuous scroll. The undulating stems of the creepers with profuse intertwining foliage (patravalli) present extremely graceful curves, while an artistic rhythm is presented by the continuity of the design over the jambs and lintels of the doorways of most wooden temples in our area, especially the earliest ones of Laksana Devi (Brahmaur), Sakti Devi (Chhatrarhi) and Markula Devi (Lahul). They are similar to the deep-cut foliage and creeper decorations treated with luxuriance adorning the stone temples of Deogarh, Bhumara, Masrur, etc.

The top niches on the doorway of Markula Devi temple end in foliage scrolls; the frieze is composed of flowers strung up in a wreath. Another border is carved with flame or lotus petal design. Four niches end in scrollwork arches. The richly carved round medallions and a frieze are decorated with a winding creeper. The inner jambs are divided by floral scrolls into four, each framing the figure of a dancing apsara. A frieze of foliated scrollwork frames the door of the sanctuary proper. Highly stylised leaf scrolls arranged in long medallions adorn the innermost frame. A rich and uniform decoration of leaf scrolls can be seen on the innermost frieze.

The friezes in most wooden temples have a uniform decoration of leaf scrolls. The temple of Laksana Devi, for example,
has a semi-circular moulding carved with rich floral scrollwork (pl. 8). There are rounded mouldings of vegetative scrolls from which emerge the kirttimukhas.

The pillars of Sakti Devi temple are carved with stylised floral scrolls around the figures of gods and goddesses in the central niche panels (pls. 11 & 17). The innermost frame of the lintel is decorated with highly stylised scrollwork sprouting from long drawn creeper forming a kind of spiral pattern and issuing forth from the mouths of two sitting yaksas at the bottom. On the sridhara brackets, stylised flower capitals alternate with the deities of the central niche panels.

In later temples, scrollwork patterns continue to figure prominently on the jambs and lintels. The carving is mostly conventional and stylised. The most superb example of floral designs is to be met with in the Hidimba Devi temple of Dhungri, where the innermost jambs of the doorway and the frames of the side windows display ingeniously carved perforated patterns (pls. 58 & 54). The patterns are composed of wave-like curves, tendrils, leaves and flowers. There is a tendency towards stylisation. Stylised convolutions, involutions, twists, flows sometimes resembling rhombuses or circles form the fundamentals of the design. The floral and foliated motifs are intermittently woven in it, that enhance the overall impression of the ornamentation. The effect of this exquisite carving is extremely graceful and impressive and excels any other temple in our area.
Among the floral designs, the lotus holds undisputed sway. In fact, everywhere we have countless variations of this motif. One of the most ancient motifs, it is the symbol of universal manifestation according to the Visnu-dharmottara Purana, it represents the principle of growth and denotes life floating on the surface of creative waters. Most of the deities in these carvings are shown standing or sitting on a padmasana. This has a religio-philosophical background. Padmasana means born from the waters as well as of divine birth:

"Lotus is the symbol of the waters, the lotus leaf which lies on the back of the waters is specifically a symbol of the earth; the waters are the support of all things."

As everywhere else in India, here also the pride of place has been accorded to full-blown lotus with petals arranged radially. It is the commonest decorative motif to be found not only on the wooden temples throughout Himachal Pradesh, but also on the ceiling, balcony panels, doors and windows of residential houses as well as palaces. In fact, there is not a single structure in the entire region where lotus rosettes are not carved. The most notable examples are the ceiling panels of the Laksana Devi (pl.9), Sakti Devi and Markula Devi temples, all of which are adorned with exquisitely delineated full-blown lotuses. In these panels, the central block is carved with an immense lotus rosette whose various rows of petals are partly treated in a naturalistic manner and partly they dissolve into various other ornaments. The most marvellous portion of Markula Devi temple is the central panel of the ceiling which has an immense lotus
rosette carved in the same manner as in Laksana Devi and Sakti Devi temples. The centre of the ceiling carved into a gigantic lotus rosette in very high relief is a masterpiece of woodcarving. The tradition of decorating ceilings with full-blown lotuses dates from the Gupta period, as is evident from the Siva temple in Darra (Malwa), cave temples of Udayagiri and painted ceilings in Ajanta caves.

On the lintel of Laksana Devi temple, four couples of flying godlings are shown carrying garlands to a lotus in the centre (pl. 6). Here this flower probably is intended to be the symbol of the goddess enshrined within the temple. The open lotus flower corresponds to the yoni and double triangle as a yantra or diagram of the Mother Goddess (sakti), the female cosmic principle. In most wooden temples, lotus is generally shown as a full-blown flower on the ceiling panels and doors. Used as a flowing pattern it is combined with curvilinear leaves, delicate buds and semi-circular pods. These are also used as a continuous border pattern as well as an asymmetrical flowing overall pattern worked on the entire surface. The ceiling of Khajinaga temple of Khajiar near Chamba, for example, with its lotus rosettes, follows the old style though the carving is much flatter than that in the early temples.

The tradition of carving full-blown lotus rosettes on the ceiling panels continued from the 7th-8th centuries A.D. onwards till the end of the 19th century, as is evident from Camunda Devi temple above Chamba town and quite a few wooden temples in other districts. The most remarkable specimen of the late 19th century workmanship exists in the Narasingha temple
(not a wooden temple) in Rampur where the wooden ceiling panels of the mandapa are covered with this motif chiselled in a variety of ways.

The door-leaves to the sanctum sanctorum of Trigaresvara Devata temple in Janog (pl. 37), Kotesvara Mahadeva temple in Koti (pl. 89) and Bijjata Devata temple in Chaupal (all in Simla hills) are carved with large lotus rosettes with elongated petals pointing radially in all directions.

Bands of lotus petals, at times overripe and inverted, figure commonly both in horizontal and vertical alignments, that is, on the outermost jambs and lintels of the doorways of some temples, for example, the Daksinesvara temple in Nirmand and Hidimba Devi temple in Manali.

The tradition of carving lotus roundels similar to those of Sanchi and Bharhut seems to have continued uninterrupted through the centuries, for we see them commonly on the fountain stones of Chamba. Similar roundels can be seen even now on the balcony panels of residential houses of Brahmaur. Lotuses with petals varying from four, six to eight figure on the doors, windows and ventilators.

In Brahmaur State Kothi and residential houses of Chamba, we come across cypress tree motif carved on vertical panels. It is of Persian origin and must have been introduced in Chamba by some painter familiar with Mughal miniatures, for it was commonly depicted on the wall paintings, painted doors, embroideries, etc. in the 18th-19th centuries. It was used purely
for ornamental purpose. It is conspicuous by its absence outside Chamba.

**Geometrical Patterns:**

The geometrical patterns in woodcarving are few, though some of them such as zigzag bands, frets, triangles, various types of crosses are very frequent. They are almost universal and do not necessarily indicate any historical relation between the several arts in which they occur. In decorative designs, peculiar patterns are predominant, of which the commonest are the triangles and the octagonals (astakona).

The triangular arches are a common and characteristic feature of Kasmiri temples, both in stone and wood. But ancient wooden temples have not survived in Kasmir. The use of triangular arches is to be seen in the only surviving specimen of Kasmiri style woodcarving in the Markula Devi temple in Lahul (pl. 102 to 104), where the deities, especially the river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna are depicted as standing within niches capped by triangular arches, very similar to the ones enclosing the figure of Surya in the Sun temple of Martand (pl. 114). A peculiarity of these triangular gables is that they enclose trefoliated arches (pl. 116). Similar wooden arches occur commonly in the Buddhist monasteries in Ladakh dating from the 10th-11th centuries A.D. where the Kasmiri craftsmen are said to have worked. In the du-khang and the Three-tiered temple at Alchi, we come across the same triangular gables capping trefoliated arches and
enclosing the figures of the Buddha, Vairocana, etc. Foreign scholars such as Goetz have stressed that these arches were introduced in Kashmir by Syrian and Byzantine artisans working in the employ of Lalitaditya Muktapida. The same view has been repeated by some Indian writers. But this view is not acceptable. In Indian art, most decorative symbols, motifs and designs have a religio-philosophical background, and much of it is derived from tantrika literature. A study of this literature informs us that for the Hindus, a triangle is not merely a geometrical figure but a symbol of Siva as well as Sakti. In the sriyantra, for example, there are two sets of triangles, the ones pointing upwards represent Siva and the ones pointing downwards represent Sakti. This clearly explains the reason of their representation on all stone temples of Kashmir as well as on the facade of the Laksana Devi temple (Brahmaur).

The same is true of satkona (hexagon) and astakona (octagon), both of which are symbols of Sakti. While the latter occurs in architectural woodcarving, the former symbol is confined to craft objects and is more commonly used only in Chamba where it is known as "chhih-satara".

The Astakona formed by two intersecting squares is also a typical Hindu symbol and not borrowed from Mughal architecture as repeatedly mentioned by Goetz. He appears to have been ignorant about its symbolical connotations. The popularity of Durga worship in the western Himalaya accounts for the common use of this symbol not only in woodcarving but also on mudwalls
and craft objects. In the temples, octagonal shaped (atthakoni) chaukis meant for ritual purposes and richly inlaid with ivory are very common. This symbol of Sakti is derived from an ancient Sanskrit text Bhairavayamala Tantra and Saundarya-Lahari, wherein it is mentioned that "astakona (octagonal shape), like Trikona (triangle), Antaradasara, Bahirdasara and Caturadasara, are representative of Sakti," (see illustration on the opposite page). Its eight angles are occupied by eight goddesses, viz. Vasini, Kamesi, Modini, Vimala, Aruna, Jayini, Sarvesi and Kaulini. The original yantra was shorn of tridents placed in the eight corners when it came to be used as a decorative motif. This symbol is commonly carved on the panels from Brahmaur State Kothi, Camunda Devi temple of Devi-ri-kothi, Camunda Devi temple above Chamba town, Hirma temple of Mehla, quite a few wooden temples in Kulu district and on the doors and balconies of residential houses in Jammu and Kangra.

Birds and Animals:

Hamsa, swan, goose or gander in English, is regarded as the noble bird par excellence for possessing moral virtues of the highest order. Philosophically, it is the symbol of soul, mind or Ego. It is the vahana of Brahma and is depicted as such on one of the niches of the doorjambs of Sakti Devi temple (Chhatrarhi). It has been an essential element of decoration in ancient Indian art from Mauryan period onwards. On the lintel of the outer doorway to the Laksana Devi temple, two exquisitely carved hamsas are depicted face to face with each
other having boldly foliated tail feathers which seem to be issuing out of the profuse scrollwork covering the innermost jambs and the lintel (pl.6). This is probably on account of their association with water and lotus ponds, for they love to feed on the lotus. The same motif is repeated in the central arched niche of the capital of one of the wooden pillars in Sakti Devi temple (pl.11). Here the confronting birds are shown flanking a palmette-like plant and their tails dissolve into ornamental foliage.

The hamsas do not figure very commonly in the woodcarving of our area. The friezes running all around the sides of the Mananesvar temple in Manana village (Simla hills) have stylised hamsas with strings of pearls in their beaks forming a kind of garland. The same motif is repeatedly carved in Markula temple (Lahul) where the frieze decorated with this motif is continued over the capitals of the middle jambs. In later wooden temples, this motif completely disappears. Its place seems to have been taken over by the peacock.

Peacock is the vahana of Karttikeya, and in Hindu mythology it is also regarded as the sun bird. In the epics, this bird is referred to as "sarpabhuja" (snake-eater). It is the most commonly carved motif on the wooden temples, especially on the pillar capitals where we often see two confronting peacocks flanking a kalasa. In my opinion, the motif of confronting hamsas that we have seen in the temples of Laksana Devi and Sakti Devi was gradually transformed into this motif. The earliest example of confronting peacocks is a stone relief from Mathura (2nd cen. A.D.).
depicting Sri Lakshmi on the front side and the peacock motif on
the reverse. After this, we come across this motif in the 8th
century A.D. stone temple of Surya at Martand, and in the 8th -
9th century A.D., we see two gracefully delineated peacocks with
turned heads flanking a kalasa and occupying the corners of the
triangular arch capping the niche enclosing the figures of the
river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna on both sides of the doorway to
the Markula Devi temple. In the panel depicting the assault of
Mara on the Buddha which forms part of the ceiling of the same
temple, two confronting peacocks are shown, their elongated
bodies forming a kind of arch above the Buddha's head (pl.113).

The confronting peacocks flanking a kalasa surmount the
wooden pillars of Parasara Rsi temple (Mandi) dating from the 14th
century A.D. Thereafter, this motif seems to have gained currency,
for we see it carved everywhere - on the windows of Hidimba Devi
temple, on the doorjambs of Gautama Rsi temple, Devi temple in
Prini, and wooden pillars in each and every temple all over Kulu
(pls.60 & 61), Simla hills (pls.36, 45, 47, 49), Kinnaur and Mandi.
In my opinion, this motif was purely an ornamental device, for the
graceful body of the peacock with its flowing lines and luxuriant
feathers lends itself admirably to decoration.

Lion is also one of the motifs figuring most commonly
in the woodcarving of our area. It can be seen often on the lintel
corners of the doorways and roof ends of our wooden temples, as well
as on the residential houses. Nowhere in this region does this animal
figure on the lowermost portions of the pillars as in the Pallava
temples, as brackets as in Chalukyan shrines, or as capital brackets
in the mandapas as in the Chandella temples.
It may be mentioned here that sometimes the lion figures are related to sardula or vyala (leogryph) in shape. The vyalas were used for ornamentation being regarded as an auspicious symbol in the reliefs of Sanchi, Bharhut, Bodhagaya, Mathura, Amaravati and continued to figure in the subsequent centuries in the Gupta, post-Gupta and medieval sculptures. The earliest depiction of stylised leogryphs rearing vertically is seen on the lintel corners of the doorway to the Laksana Devi temple (Brahmaur) (pl. 6).

The popularity of this motif is mainly due to the predominance of Durga worship in Himachal Pradesh, the lion being Durga's vahana. This animal symbolises "Durga's warlike wrath, her invincible valour and presages her ultimate victory over the demon enemy. The lion is an emanation of that disastrous, terrific aspect of the goddess's omnipotent presence which, when aroused, results inevitably in the annihilation of whatever foes she melts" 26.

The tradition of carving similar heraldic lions has been preserved in the Brahmaur tehsil until recently. Also found on the Ganesa temple, they appear as balcony supports on the residential houses of Khani village. At times, they are represented with human heads.

In Sakti Devi temple (Chhatrarhi), the lion figures alternate with flying gandharvas on the sridhara brackets. The outermost frieze of the entrance to the sanctum sanctorum projects to the right and left lintel corners and enclose two leogryphs. The same motif is repeated on the doorway to the Daksinesvara temple (Nirmand) (pl. 81). It seems that after the 10th century, the leogryphs were replaced by lions who are seen in bas relief on the
doorway friezes of Hidimba Devi temple\(^{(pl.62 \& 63)}\), Sandhya Gayatri temple and many a wooden temples of Kulu and Kinnaur districts. Everywhere, the lion is represented as roaring, engaged in a fight or ready to attack.

In the Tripurasundari temple (Naggar), Mahesura temple of Sungra (pl.87) and a few others, many gable beams or roofs end in three-dimensional figures of lions. Sometimes lion heads (at times replaced by ram or makara heads) with gaping mouths are installed to function as waterspouts or gargoyles, the purpose being to drain off the rainwater. The carvers were also guided by another belief that such heads would protect the temple structure from evil spirits.

The lion is not sacred to Durga worshippers alone. This animal is held in high regard by the Buddhists who believe that it symbolises the "power of the seekers of liberation from all bonds of Nature (prakriti) and ignorance (Avidya) which, according to Buddhism, is the primary cause of all 'causal nexus' (pratityasamutpada).\(^{27}\) Another reason for the common depiction of lion figures in Buddhist art is that the Buddha is regarded as sakyasimha, the lion of the sakyä dynasty.\(^{28}\) It is as such that the lions figure\(^{4}\) on the architectural woodcarvings of the du-khang and the sum-stek temple in the Alchi monastic complex in Ladakh (pl.116 \& 119).

Elephant, the symbol of the life-giving force of nature\(^{29}\) has been one of the favourite decorative motifs in Indian art since the Indus period. In the earliest architectural woodcarvings of our area, it is represented as the vahana of Indra on the interior doorjambs of Sakti Devi temple (chhatrarhi) (pl.15), but in
later ones, it almost always has a rider on its back, e.g. in Hidimba Devi temple, Sandhya Gayatri temple, and a number of other temples which suggests that it had been borrowed from Rajput art, the elephant-rider and horse-rider figures reflecting chivalry, valour and heroism of the Rajputs. It also figures on the balcony panels of the residential houses in Brahmaur. In all these carvings, it is delineated with great vigour and expressiveness; each figure has its distinctive character. In some temples, e.g. in Tripurasundari temple (Naggar), the trunks of two elephants are joined to form an ornamental arch above the entrance to the sanctum sanctorum (pl. 69). It seems that such representations were thought to be auspicious, for the elephant through its association with goddess Laksmi is a symbol of wealth and prosperity and is regarded as bestower of good luck through its association with Ganesa.

Snake is also one of the frequently figuring motifs in woodcarving of our area. This is so probably on account of the popularity of the naga cult here. It may be mentioned here, however, that snakes figure commonly not only on the doorways and pillars of naga shrines, but also on the temples dedicated to Siva and Durga.

This motif figured as early as the 2nd century A.D. on the coins of Audumbras. In spite of the popularity of the naga cult, we do not come across frequent depiction of the naga deities in woodcarving, the only exception being one of the niches on the right jambs of the interior doorway of Sakti Devi temple (Chhatrarhi), where the Naga devata is depicted wholly in human form, three serpent hoods shading his crowned head and covering his shoulders.
Apart from this, nowhere do we come across the depiction of the naga deity in human form nor in the form of a multi-cephalic cobra. In all wooden temples, snakes are carved in their natural form, their rhythmic sinuous bodies make them an admirable decorative motif of great charm and elegance. An auspicious symbol of plenty, it figures often on the doorjambs and lintels covering the entire length and breadth. On the wooden pillars of the Bijli Mahadeva temple (Kulu, pl.39), on the friezes of Sandhya-Gayatri temple (pl.32) on the architraves of Mananesvara temple (pl.99) and innumerable other temples, the snakes in their animal form lend themselves to fascinating patterns composed of intriguing convolutions. In the successively receding jambs of the doorways to the Triga-revara temple in Janog, the snakes intertwine with arabesque patterns like creepers forming a kind of garland (pl.37). On the lintel of the doorway to the sanctum sanctorum of Devi temple in Prini, a male figure probably Garuda is shown in the centre of the lintel holding two snakes in his hands.

The most interesting depiction is that of intertwined snakes forming a kind of loop. This motif has been wrongly termed as plaitwork ornamentation by Goetz. This is a very ancient motif handed down from Gupta, post-Gupta and Pratihara art, for we see it on the pillar shaft of Rajivalocana temple of Rajim, Kachhapaghata temples of north-east Rajasthan, Gwalior, Jagesvara (Kumaon), Gujarat, Malwa, Orissa and South India. In the western Himalaya, it is carved around the doorway to the Markula Devi temple, Parasara-Rsi temple (Mandi) which resembles those around the green chlorite doorways at Konarka, Brahma temple at Khokhan, and
numerous other temples. Here the snake is probably used as a symbol of the beneficent forces of life and growth, with obvious phallic undertones, and its symbolic power is often accentuated by the portrayal of two interlinked snakes. In fact, the snake is regarded as a symbol of fertility of the vegetable world because it comes out shortly before the rainy season\textsuperscript{33}. The same view has been expressed by Vogel in the following passage:

"From the fact that the snakes regularly make their appearance at the commencement of the rainy season it may have been due to the magical powers of these reptiles"\textsuperscript{34}

It was probably on account of this belief that the naga deities came to be associated with water and rains, and are propitiated for better rains.

In some Kulu temples such as Hidimba Devi temple, Gautama Rsi temple, Devi Prini temple, etc., a deer is carved on both sides of the doorjambs with its head turned back and spouting forth leaves from its mouth (pl. 61). It seems to be fleeing in terror as if being chased by a hunter. In the Hidimba temple, the depiction is neither decorative nor symbolic, for it is intended to be Marici, the golden deer, being chased by Rama and Laksmana who are carved in the panel of the panel below. And it seems that the carvers of the other two temples borrowed it from this temple. We do not see the deer motif carved anywhere else.

Horses appear frequently in later woodcarvings. The reason for this is the association of this animal with the feudal Rajputs, warriors and folk heroes. Horserider figures are commonly carved on the friezes and eaves of Hidimba temple (pls. 62-68), Bahena
Mahadeva temple (pl.95), Sandhya Gayatri temple, etc. They often figure along with elephant riders. It is rare to find stylised horse-heads instead of makara, lion or ram heads, at the bottom of each of the corners of the second and third tiered roofs of the wooden temples, the only exception as far as I know is the Adi Brahma temple in Khokhan village (Kulu).

Purnakumbha, variously known as purnakalasa, mangalaghata, ghatapallava, etc. is one of the eight auspicious symbols (astamangala) of classical Indian art and a symbol of plenty and creativity. It is one of the ancientmost symbols dating from vedic period :

"It is the emblem par excellence of fullness and prosperity, of life endowed with all its gifts...the full blooming overflowing contents of life are comparable to the plants and foliage luxuriating from the mouth of a jar filled with the life-giving fluid."  

This auspicious symbol gained popularity during the Gupta and post-Gupta period, whose art and architectural traditions bequeathed it to the western Himalayan sculptures. As everywhere else, here also, the pot is combined with overflowing foliage composed of lotus buds, flowers and leaves. In the temples of Laksana Devi and Sakti Devi, this motif is gorgeously set on the beautifully shaped wooden pillars (pls.10 & 11). Here the overflowing stylised leaves fall gracefully and delicately from the rim of the pot; it is remarkable for sheer delicacy of detail. This motif must have continued to be used in later temples, and underwent changes in the course of centuries. We notice this in Parasara Rsi temple of Mandi which was reconstructed in the 14th century A.D. Here the pot is flanked by two confronting birds which are intended to be peacocks but look more like eagles (pl.71). The foliage disappears. In all later temples, two confronting peacocks flanking a pot are seen surmounting the wooden
pillars all over Himachal Pradesh. The same motif recurs on miniature pilasters carved in relief on the frames of doors and windows of most wooden temples in Kulu district, e.g. Himka Devi temple (Dhungri), Devi temple (Prini), etc.

Gavaksa, literally meaning cow's eye, is the symbolical sun window and a common architectural motif in most stone temple dating from the 5th century A.D. onwards, as is evident from the Visnu temple in Deogarh. Its real function was to shield the structural opening of the temple sikhara. This Gupta period motif figures on the second storey of the triangular pediment of the doorway to the Laksana Devi temple just above the heads of the seated yaksas (pl. 7). This motif underwent several changes in the course of centuries, as has been shown by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, and finally developed into cusped arch that became a regular feature of temple and domestic architecture in wood and stone in the post-mediaeval period. Coomaraswamy has clearly traced the evolution of the cusped arch in the following words:

"Almost invariably the decorative gavaksa or kudus bespeak their origin...by their form and disposition...Before long too, the arched niche acquires also an independent status, and forms a regular setting for figures of deities represented in reliefs on walls or architraves, and now indeed has far more the character of an arch (torana).... This development can be traced back at least to the Kusana period (Vogel, Cat. Arch. Mus., Muttra, pl. IV) and it is highly interesting that before long a cusped form is developed. However, it must be pointed out that one of the commonest niche forms, that of a trefoil arch, is derived directly from such schematic representations of Cetiya-gharas.... The development of the many-cusped form has also been effected by, or may have been directly induced or deduced from (1) the structural beam ends within the arch of an early gavaksa and/or (2) the more elaborate development of the similar beams in gable arches.... However this may be, it is certain that from some or all of these sources, a
curved horse-shoe arch with many internal cusps must have been
developed not long after the Gupta period...Some of these forms,
as they survive in later Indian Muhammedan architecture, e.g.,
at Gaur (figs. 83, 84) bear clear traces of their origin and
should not be regarded as of western Islamic origin.43.

From this passage, it is amply clear that from the gavaksa
emanated the trefoil arch which gradually developed into cinque-
foil and cusped arches. Foreign scholars like Goetz44, Chetwode45
and others46 hold the view that the cusped arch was motif borrowed
by the Himalayan woodcarver from Mughal architecture. In recent
years, the researches of R. Nath have revealed that gavaksa was a
common motif till Jahangir's time, but in Shah Jahan's reign, it
was not favoured in preference to an "ornamental design which is
inspired obviously by the engrailed (cusped) arch which was so
much in fashion at the time."47 Nath was at a loss to trace the
actual links with that latter as Coomaraswamy, for he happens to
come to this field from political history. Any way, he has stated
clearly in his book that Hindu artisans had been commissioned
by Akbar to construct Agra fort and Fatehpur Sikri48 and allowed
them to draw freely from their indigenous repertoire of decorative
designs and symbols.49 The fact, however, remains that the cusped
arch is of indigenous origin and much of the credit for popularis-
ing it goes to Rajasthani architecture.

Kirttimukha, literally meaning the Face of Glory and represent-
ing the head of a lion with tusks, horns and bulging eyes, sometimes
with strands of pearls issuing from the mouth, is an important de-
corative motif in Hindu temple architecture dating from the Gupta
period.51 Since it was a common motif in Gupta temple architecture,
it figures commonly in areas influenced by Gupta art traditions.
It is said that originally it was a special emblem of Siva and a characteristic element on the lintels of Siva temples, but gradually it came to be regarded as an auspicious device expressive of the divine power of Rudra in warding off evil; perhaps this is the reason why it was generally depicted on the lintels of the temple doorways. It never figures on the vajramastaka at the apex of the gavaksa as in the case of most stone temples of Orissa. In Laksana Devi temple (Brahmaur), the kirttimukhas can be seen above the arched niches enclosing the figures of amorous couples (pl.7). Here they are carved in the conventional manner (described above). In Markula Devi temple, it is shown as emerging out of the profuse foliage on the ceiling panels. It must have continued to be carved in the subsequent centuries, for after the 8th-9th centuries A.D., we see it again on the lintel of Hidimba Devi temple (Kulu), where several kirttimukhas intersperse with delicately carved ornamental patterns (pl.57), and also on the lintel of Devi temple doorway (Prini). Of may be noted that this motif is conspicuous by its absence in Daksinesvara temple of Nirmand.

Makara, a symbol of the cosmic process of life, death and rebirth, is also an ancient motif depicted in a wide variety of beautiful forms with indescribable curves and twists. The crocodile vahana of the river goddess Ganga, it is generally depicted as a sea monster with the head of an elephant or crocodile. It figures as such on the side of the doorways accompanying the river goddess Ganga. When depicted on the doorframes, its hind body dissolves into a wild design of foliage or long scroll of
lotus flower. Its snout often reminds us of the tusk of an elephant but the head and the upper body could easily be that of a capricorn or an antelope.

In the ceiling panels of our earliest temples, the snouts of two makaras are joined in such a way as to form an ornamental arch. Similar arches and brackets are common in ancient stone temples all over India. In Laksana Devi temple, the makaras figure along with the kirttimukhas on the triangular slabs on the ceiling. Similar highly stylised makaras are represented on the triangular panels of the ceiling of the mandapa in Markula Devi temple also.

In most wooden temples of Kulu, Simla hills and Kinnaur, the makara heads are seen projecting from roof-ends or gable beams. As such, it is believed to guard the mansion against demonic forces, and also serves the traditional function of a gargoyle, somasutra in our ancient texts. The makaras are always depicted with an open mouth, curled-up snout and sharp teeth - this form was developed around 150 B.C. This motif appears also on later Nepalese architecture.

Mithuna or erotic couple is an auspicious symbol and used on the temples purely as an ornamental device. There are other beliefs that impelled the artisans all over India to carve this motif on the temple facades - one was that such a depiction protected the temple structure from being struck by lightning. "In the lightning is seen the union and identity of the immanent spirit of man and the transcendent spirit" - this idea has been expressed in the Chhandogya Upanisada, Kena Upanisada and Utkala Khanda. It is also
a symbol of moksa and in Hindu philosophy, kama (sensual desire), with the discipline of its satisfaction, is the third of the four purposes of life - dharma (observance of law and duty), artha (acquisition of wealth), kama (satisfaction of senses) and moksa (attainment of liberation or final release). Yet another belief is that each mithuna image delineates a specific mood of love-play treated symbolically against the metaphysical background of the embrace of Siva and Sakti that underlies the generation of the universe. It was probably this latter that guided the Himalayan woodcarver.

In the wooden temples, the mithunas figure in diverse attitudes and postures of love-making on the door lintels (as in Laksana Devi temple pl.7), on the central niche of the window as in Hidimba Devi temple (pl.57) on the pillar capitals and friezes (as in Sandhya Gayatri temple) and on the balcony panels as in the Urni temple (Kinnaur).

The navagrahas: Sculpted above the doorway leading into the shrine of most wooden temples is a row of nine planets (navagrahas). According to the Hindu astronomy, the navagrahas are Surya (sun), Chandra (moon), Mangala (Mars), Budha (Mercury), Brhasapati (Jupiter), Sukra (Venus), Sani (Saturn), and the ascending and descending nodes of the moon known as Rahu and Ketu. The aim in carving them on the main entrance of the temples was probably to protect the mansion from the evil influence of the planets. This is an ancient motif handed down to posterity by post-Gupta sculptors. On the earliest temples, e.g. in Laksana Devi temple, we see images of the navagrahas seated within trefoil arches niches separated
from one another by pilasters on the base of the triangular pedi-
ment (pl. 7). They are too weather-beaten now to be easily identi-
fied. The tradition seems to have continued unchanged over the
centuries, for this motif can be traced in most wooden temples
of Kulu district till the end of the 19th century.

Gandharvas and Apsaras: The divine nymphs (apsaras) celebrate
with their celestial dances the glory of the temples while their
male partners, the gandharvas, who have descended from the heavenly
mansions also, decorate the sanctuary doors with garlands of flowers.
These figures are a common feature of Gupta and post-Gupta tem-
ple architecture. They are seen wherever there are vestiges of
Gupta and post-Gupta art traditions. In the western Himalayan
region, it is not the earliest wooden temples of Laksana Devi (pl. 6),
Sakti Devi and Markula Devi temple (pl. 110) alone where we see them,
but in all stone temples dating from 7th-8th centuries A.D. In the western Himalayan
region, it is not the earliest wooden temples of Laksana Devi (pl. 6),
Sakti Devi and Markula Devi temple (pl. 110) alone where we see them,
but in all stone temples dating from 7th-8th centuries A.D. In the western Himalayan
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region, it is not the earliest wooden temples of Laksana Devi (pl. 6),
Sakti Devi and Markula Devi temple (pl. 110) alone where we see them,
but in all stone temples dating from 7th-8th centuries A.D. 71.

On the lintels of the doorways to our wooden temples in Brahmaur
and Chhatrarhi, and on the ceiling panels of the Markula Devi
temple, these heavenly couples are shown flying in the air and this
"soaring motion" (to borrow a phrase from Stella Kramrisch) "is
imparted not by the unconvincing addition of wings, but by the
direction of the legs and by the upward swirling lines of the
billowing scarf." 72 There is a graceful contrast between the
solemnity of the temples, abiding in their silent grandeur and the
jubilant divinities hovering on the temple entrances or ceilings.

Like most motifs of Gupta and post-Gupta period, these
figures also continued to be carved on the later wooden temples
which is evident from their presence on the door lintel of the
Hidimb Devi temple. They seem to have undergone considerable change, for they are not shown flying but standing in a row and dancing and playing on musical instruments, in the same manner as the minor divinities accompanying the gandharvas and apsaras on the ceiling panels of the Markula Devi temple. Only in the Camunda Devi temple above Chamba town, they are depicted on the ceiling panels in flying postures and are provided with wings (pl. 21). While the gandharvas sport traditional costumes such as dhotis, scarfs and crowns, the apsaras are shown sporting Rajput style turbans with crossbands. They appear to have lost much of their former verve and vigour.

The yaksas are tutelary deities and guardian angels. An ancient motif in Indian architecture, they are familiar to us from the Sanchi and Bharhut stupas. In temple architecture from Gupta period onwards, we come across various types of yaksas-like figures, one among them seems to uphold sections of a temple. These pot-bellied dwarf-like figures usually have their hands above their shoulders as if bearing a weight (hence the name bharavahaka). Another type is the one from whose mouth, shoulders or back issues forth the profuse scrollwork covering the doorjambs and lintels. The third type are always shown as bearing garlands. All these figures are short and dwarfish, with rotund and inflated bellies; some of them sport wigs of curly stylised hair. A.K. Coomaraswamy has left us a very accurate description of the yaksas:
"Stylistically the type is massive and voluminous, and altogether plastically conceived, not bounded by outlines; the essential quality is one of energy, without introspection or spiritual aspiration."74

All the features described above are common to the yaksa figures from Gupta temples as well as to their counterparts appearing on the doorways, ceiling panels and pillar capitals of the Laksana Devi, Sakti Devi and Markula Devi temples, where they always occur as single figures, never as couples. In later wooden temples, they almost disappear except in the Khajinaga temple (Khajiar), Camunda Devi temples of Devi-ri-Kothi and above Chamba town, where they are seen on the capital brackets on the wooden pillars fringing the circumambulatory passages and supporting the ceiling with both their hands.

This description of the decorative designs, motifs and symbols adorning the wooden structures of the western Himalaya reveals that they are vivid, imaginative, pleasing and meaningful. Most of them are ancient, some going back to the vedic period, which suggests that their meaning was deeply ingrained in the consciousness of the indigenous craftsmen who invested these architectural carvings with exquisite richness and delightful form.
REFERENCES: Chapter 9

1. See Chap. 4 of the present dissertation, p. 91.
2. Visnudharmottara purana, Part II, Ch. 169.
3. Agarwala, V.S. : Indian Art, p. 53:
   - Studies in Indian Art, p. 47: "The prime Symbol of Creation, the seat and substratum of Universal creative force which springs from the navel or centre of the primeval Creator."

5. Agarwala, V.S. : Studies, op. cit., Fig. 135, p. 227.
    "caturbhi srikanthai sivayuvatibhipancabhirapi prabhinnabhi sambhornavabhiriapi mulapraakrtibhi. tryascatvarimsadvasudala kalastatrivalaya, tripekhabhi sardham-tava bhavanakonaprinata," (verse 11).
16. ibid
17. ibid
Another evidence of its being a Hindu symbol is provided by the following lines penned by Stella Kramrisch in "Banner of Indra" in Art and Thought (ed.) K. Bharatha Iyer, London 1947; p.199: "The third ornament which Indra himself contributes to his standard is octagonal, a symbol of all the directions." This passage does no more than shed light on the Hindu origin of this symbol. However, it appears on the temple and symbol of Sakti universally worshipped in Himachal Pradesh.

23. Ibid
24. See Marg, Vol.VIII, No.1, March 1955; p. 40 ff., p.45 (top fig.), p.48 (bottom fig.), p.50 (top fig.)
27. Sen, Asis : op. cit., p. 74
28. Ibid
29. Iyer, K. Bharatha : op. cit., p. 64
31. Iyer, L. Bharatha : op. cit., p.61
32. See Iyer, K. Bharatha : op. cit. : p. 87
39. Rgveda, III, 32, 15; VI, 69, 6; IX, 62, 19; IX 97, 33.
42. Agarwala, V.S. 's "The Temple of Devagarh" in Art and Thought (ed) K. Bharatha Iyer, pl. IX, fig.5.

44. ibid, pp. 11 - 12.


46. Chetwode, Penelope's "Western Himalayan Hindu Architecture and Sculpture" in the Arts of India (ed. Basil Gray) to be published.


49. ibid, p. 20.

50. ibid, p. 20.


55. See Vidya Dehejia: op. cit., illustrations on pp. 36, 50, 51 & 52.


57. Sen, Asis : op. cit., p. 34.

"The earliest reference to Makara can be traced in the Yajurveda samhitas, in connection with the Asvamedha sacrifice."


60. Desai, Devangana : The Erotic Sculpture in India, op. cit., p. 196.

61. ibid.


63. Chhandogya upanisada, IV, 31.1.

64. Kena upanisada, verses 29-30.


67. Mukerjee, Radhakamal : The Cosmic Art of India, New Delhi, 1965; p. 86.
68. Kramrisch, Stella: op. cit., p. 315
69. See Agarwala, V.S. 's "The Gupta Temple at Devagarh" in Art and Thought (ed.) K. Bharatha Iyer, pl. IX, fig. 5.

70 & 71. I have already referred to these temples in the chapter on wooden temples when discussing the Laksana Devi temple, p. 86 ff.
74. Ibid, p. 29.