CHAPTER X: CONCLUSION

Our study of the wooden architecture and woodcarving of the western Himalaya reveals that in this region, a well-established and strong tradition existed as also a line of carpenters following established conventions. On account of this, a continuity of tradition can be traced and a link between ancient and later structures established.

Our first two chapters contain a discussion of the religious beliefs of the inhabitants of this region as well as a brief historical survey of the diverse areas. They provide a backdrop against which the development of wooden architecture and woodcarving can be viewed.

Our purpose of including such an extensive area was to show the stylistic uniformity of tradition of wooden architecture and woodcarving in this region. Here has remained preserved this age-old tradition about which we read in our ancient literature. For this purpose, we have traced in chapter three the origins and evolution of the tradition of wooden architecture and sculpture since ancient times, alluding to our old literary texts as well as the evidence furnished by archaeological excavations and actual objects. In our areas of study, this tradition has continued uninterrupted till the present century more or less in its pristine form as is evident from the striking similarity the residential structures of Himachal Pradesh bear to those carved in Sanchi reliefs. We have mentioned that wood
was not used by itself, but was combined with stones or bricks, and this device was intended to render them earthquake-proof.

In our analysis of wooden temples of Himachal Pradesh, we have mentioned four distinct architectural styles, Type I or hut-like temples termed chalet; Type II or tower type temples; Type III or temples having superimposed roofs rising in several tiers which have been termed as "pagoda" by western scholars, and Type IV or vimana style temples with mandapa. The first two, in our opinion, are indigenous to this state, while the last two form part of the mainstream of Indian architecture. Our enquiry is into the probable origins of tower type temples. The purpose of erecting such structures was purely defensive. Originally they were secular structures used as thakurs' castles and fortresses, but in later times, it appears to me that temples also came to be built in this style in areas ravaged by continual warfare of Rajput chieftains.

For Type III temples, we have desisted from using the oft-used term pagoda, for after a thorough study of ancient architectural texts, we arrived at the conclusion that the correct silpa-sastric term for such temples should be vimana and not pagoda. The reasons for it have been advanced in detail in chapter four. This discussion proves that this architectural style was common in ancient India as we learn from a number of ancient texts. That the Hindu and Buddhist temples were commonly built in this style is evident from the allusions in the memories of Chinese pilgrim-travellers, such as Fa-hian, Hieun Tsang, Sung-yun, etc. This architectural style in our opinion was introduced into Nepal, Burma, China, Japan,
Korea, Sri Lanka, and other Far-Eastern countries by Buddhist missionaries. We have traced the stylistic affinities between the wooden temples of Himachal Pradesh and similar temples of Nepal and Kerala. We have also made an observation about their similarity with the stone temples of Kashmir dating from 8th century A.D. which have tiered sloping roofs such as the Siva temples of Pandrethan and Payar. This suggests that similar structures were probably built in wood also in Kashmir. It would be erroneous to think that this architectural style was an invention of the pahari carpenter-architects. It belonged to the mainstream of Indian architectural tradition. The existence of similar temples in Kerala, south Kanara and Karnataka suggests that this architectural style was prevalent all over India in ancient times and has remained preserved only in the well-forested areas of Himachal Pradesh and Malabar coast.

The temples that fall in the fourth category are only a corollary of the vimana style temples, the only difference being the addition of a mandapa in front of the vimana. We choose to call this architectural style vimana temples with mandapa. We feel that this style did not originate nor developed in isolation in Himachal Pradesh, that is, it is not a local development; for temples in this style also exist in south India, for example, the temples of Muktesvara, Matangesvara, Tripurantakesvara in Kanchipuram, the only difference being that the latter temples built in stone have a mandapa covered with a flat roof, whereas the sloping roof - which is a necessity in the Himalayan region on account of climatic conditions - is a regular feature of our wooden temples in this style.
Most of the temples are built on the sites of ancient temples. The existence of such a large number of temples in ancient times clearly suggests royal patronage. We have no inscripitional material in any of these temples to aid us in fixing any absolute dates. The very few inscriptions that are available only allude to their re-construction, maintenance and upkeep. The earliest wooden temples of Laksana Devi and Sakti Devi appear on the scene fully developed and their antecedents lie in post-Gupta architecture and sculpture. These temples are complete masterpieces; they could not have emerged on the scene all of a sudden in the 7th century A.D. It is evident that the carpenters already had an established tradition of temple building and sculptural carving and were also trained in post-Gupta idiom. Doorways and motifs reveal a considerable indebtedness to and a continuation of Gupta traditions. One of the features in which the indebtedness of our wooden temples to accepted traditions of the Gupta age is the best apparent is in the treatment of doorways. The Markula Devi temple and the Alchi monastic complex show the persistence of post-Gupta and Kasmiri sculptural traditions into the 8th-11th centuries A.D. apart from being the glorious examples in wood of Kasmiri style.

The early wooden mosques of Kasmir reveal not only affinities with the wooden temples of Himachal Pradesh but also show an uninterrupted continuity of indigenous tradition over the centuries; they have their prototypes in ancient Hindu and Buddhist wooden temples and monasteries, hence their resemblance to the Buddhist temples of Sikkim and Bhutan. This proves that in this vast geographical area,
some mutual artistic and cultural pattern had evolved which accounts for this approximation of architectural styles.

The post-mediaeval period was overwhelmingly influenced by Rajput art and architecture and this influence has remained dominant till the present century. In Chamba, from mid-17th century onward, we notice the close link between woodcarving and contemporary painting. The simple reason for this striking stylistic and thematic affinity was that most painters and miniaturists belonged to the tarkhan (carpenter) caste and were equally proficient in painting and woodcarving. In other areas such as Simla hills and Kinnaur, we encountered carpenters who were adept at both woodcarving and stonework. We have touched upon this discussion in our study of the residential architecture of this area which comprises both palaces and dwelling houses. The significance of dwelling houses lies in the fact that they are the only existing specimens of wooden structures carved in Sanchi reliefs. A study of the palaces, although few and far between, reveals that they are built in accordance with traditional tenets and practices, and also have a remarkable affinity with Rajasthani architecture. The finely chiselled and perforated jalis, jharokhas, cusped arches resting on fluted pillars etc. which characterise Rajasthani palaces built in stone are repeated here in wood. The carved panels salvaged from Brahmaur state kothi are significant specimens of Basohli style. We have placed them in the latter half of the 17th century A.D. They suggest the existence of Basohli school of painting in the 17th century, and are a potential field for further research.
The ancient tradition of fashioning wooden sculptures to which we have alluded in chapter three has remained preserved in Himachal Pradesh over the centuries. The wooden sculptures of the Buddha: in Kasmiri style dating from 8th to 10th centuries A.D. are an important link in the history of Indian sculpture in the medieval period. They have striking affinities with statuettes in bronze, stone and ivory discovered from Kasmir. The wooden sculptures are available on account of their having been preserved in the remote Buddhist monasteries of Ladakh, Lahul, Spiti and Kinnaur. No comparable sculptures of Hindu deities have so far come to light. It does not mean that such images were not made; they might have perished. The parallel and distinct tradition of woodcarving which may be termed "folk" obviously continued to follow its own silent course which is evident from a number of sculptures of deities carved in the round and in relief. They are under worship in various parts of Himachal Pradesh. These images were carved for the fulfilment of spiritual needs of the villagers, to appease the deities on the fulfilment of vows or wishes, to appease the soul of a dead ancestor, etc. Relief panels carved for this purpose were either fixed on the temple pillars or left in the temple courtyards or under a tree along with other statuettes for worship.

Our study of the decorative motifs and symbols reveals that the carpenters in the western Himalayan region worked within the framework of Indian tradition. Most of the motifs such as the group of navagrahas, mithuna, river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna, yaksas, purna-ghata, makara, kirttimukha, scrollwork, lotus rosettes, etc.
are the legacy of post-Gupta period temple architecture. Others such as horse-riders, elephant-riders, etc. were borrowed from Rajput folk art. Symbols based in geometrical forms such as triangles and octagonals had their origins in tantrika philosophy centering around the worship of Siva and Sakti. All the decorative motifs and symbols are derived from the repertoire inherited by the artisans from their forefathers. Bold experimentation is discernible in the carving of patterns on the innermost frames of the doorway to Hidimba Devi temple, but this is not a departure from tradition.

Since the wooden tradition was original, the forms that have survived in wooden architecture and sculpture are ancient which have continued to be reproduced over the centuries by families of carpenters. Even the residential dwelling houses reveal techniques and details deriving from an ancient past. It is heartening to note that in the villages of Himachal Pradesh, the carpenters are still continuing to work in traditional style.