PREFACE

In the mid-70's when I visited various parts of Himachal Pradesh and happened to see the wooden temples, I was instinctively drawn to them. Their artistic beauty captured my imagination and for months I pondered over their special styles and their distant origins. Thereafter I undertook several trips and each time my interest in these temples grew deeper and deeper. My mind was haunted by a number of questions such as where and when did the distinctive architectural styles of these temples originate? Who was responsible for the initiation and construction of these temples and were these districts of Himachal Pradesh always the hub of such artistic activity? And how far they formed part of the mainstream of Indian architecture and sculpture?

These and many such questions prompted the research which finally took the form of my present doctoral dissertation. Later I discovered that the wooden architecture of Kashmir and the architectural woodcarvings of Alchi monastic complex in Ladakh share a number of stylistic features with the wooden structures and carvings of Himachal Pradesh. So I decided to include them also in my study. The present study distributed over various chapters will show an interlinked account of wooden architectural and sculptural styles in this vast area known as the western Himalaya. The account given here is based on all available information as well as my own researches. To present a connected account, this work could not escape ideas repeated in various chapters.
The introduction contains a survey of the geographical divisions of the vast region as well as the religious climate as a background against which to view the wooden architecture and woodcarving. This is followed by historical background of the different districts of Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh and Kashmir. Chapter three surveys the sources of wooden architectural traditions in ancient India and to what extent they have been preserved in our area of study. The architectural and sculptural material in wood has been studied in various chapters such as the wooden temples of Himachal Pradesh, woodwork in Alchi monastic complex (Ladakh), Early wooden mosques of Kashmir, domestic architecture and sculpture. All these are spread over five chapters. The last chapter is devoted to a study of decorative designs and motifs used in architectural carvings.

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