CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE REGION

A study of wooden architecture and woodcarving of the western Himalaya must essentially take into consideration the historical as well as cultural background which gave rise to it. So in order to get a clear picture, it would be well to examine the factors that have been responsible for its origin and development over the centuries in the diverse parts of our region.

Kasmir:

The history of Kasmir goes back to hoary antiquity. We learn from Kalhana's Rajatarangini that all the rulers of Kasmir were devout worshippers of Siva, although they also built temples in honour of Visnu. ¹ Buddhism was introduced in Kasmir 150 years after the death (nirvana) of the Buddha in 487 B.C. ², and thereafter, it became a humming centre of Buddhism, although not at the expense of Saivism which continued to be the state religion. In fact, all the Hindu rulers of Kasmir extended generous patronage to Buddhism also, the examples par excellence being Harsayadhana (606-648 A.D.) and Lalitaditya Muktapida. Before the reign of the Kusana emperor Kaniska, a number of Hindu temples and Buddhist monasteries were constructed by the Hindu rulers of Kasmir, of which the Sankaracarya temple in Srinagar is mentioned as having been built by Raja Jalsuka who instituted a samvat in his name. ³
The invasions of the Hunas in early 6th century A.D. brought in their wake huge devastation all over Kashmir. A number of Hindu temples and Buddhist sacred structures were destroyed. Towards the end of the 6th and early 7th century A.D., temples were rebuilt and repaired. The Buddhist monks started reorganising themselves and repairing the partially ruined structures. When Hieun Tsang visited Kashmir in 630-633 A.D., he found the Buddhist centres of learning in a sorry state of destruction, but in the process of repair. He visited about one hundred Buddhist monasteries and found the local traditions regarding Kaniska fully alive in the country during his visit to Nagarjuna in Kashmir. In the first half of the 8th century, one of the most powerful Hindu kings ascended the throne of Kashmir and remained in power for 36 years, 7 months and 11 days. This was Lalitaditya Muktapida, the dates of whose reign have been given as 699-736 A.D. by Khazanchi who has based his opinion on Kalhana’s Rajatarangini, and as 725 to 756 A.D. by almost all foreign scholars such as Goetz, Percy Brown, Benjamin Rowland, etc. His empire extended from Mysore to Mongolia, and from Bengal and Orissa to Afghanistan. He was not only a great conqueror and a mighty monarch who defeated Yasovarman of Kanauj, led an expedition against the Chinese, annexed Tokharistan (Turkistan) and Ladakh, territories of Jalandhara and Lohara (Kangra and Punch) etc., but also patronised a great deal of artistic activity. One of the greatest builders of his time, he got erected the famous Surya temple at Martand, several caityas and viharas at Parihasapura (modern Parasapore), several temples and monasteries at Uskura (ancient Huviskapura) and founded a number of towns such as Parihaspura, Lalitapura and Punch.
All these facts reveal that Buddhism and Hinduism were given equal patronage by him in keeping with the earlier traditions of the land. A revival of Buddhism seems to have taken place during his reign and after, as we learn from the account of Ou-kong who reached Kasmir in 759 A.D. and found more than 300 stupas.

Lalitaditya's position of pre-eminence enabled him to foster and patronise the latent culture of his people, so that in the course of time Kasmir came to be regarded as a renowned centre of religious life and learning. A great building development was engendered; temples built of stone masonry, large and small, arose in great numbers in all parts of the kingdom. It is also noteworthy that about this time, a corresponding wave of religious emotion culminating in the raising of many shrines and temples swept throughout India, parallel in many respects to that which eventuated in Kasmir, as it was mainly in conformity with the ideals of the Hindu-Buddhist and Brahmanical ways of life and thought.

Certain distinctive features are present in the stone temples built by Lalitaditya at Martand, Buniyar, Narastan, Wangath, Loduv, Malot and Bilot. These are the tympana consisting of a triangular pediment enclosing a trefoil arch; the lantern ceiling i.e. a ceiling designed on the lantern system of beams laid over the angles. These features are clearly derived from wooden originals. More especially, the steep angles of these gables are derived from the natural trend of wooden architecture from which their rounded prototypes had also developed. At Martand, the image of
Suiyaa is framed within the same trefoil-leafed arch defined within a double triangular gable separated by a horizontal band (pl.114). It is significant to note that this motif figures as an ornamental device in the niches on both sides of the carved wooden doorway of Markula Devi temple in Udaipur village in Lahul.

From Lalitaditya's reign onwards, Ladakh became closely integrated into the cultural orbit of Kashmir. We come across the same features in their original form in wood in the Buddhist temples and monasteries at Alchi (Ladakh) and Tabo in Spiti set up in the 10th-11th centuries by Rinchen-bzang-po. This subject shall be studied in detail in a later chapter.

All these facts prove that since the earliest times, Kashmir had a distinctive style of wooden architecture as of stone temple architecture. Unfortunately, not a single specimen of old wooden structures is extant now. They are all said to have been destroyed by Sikandar Batsikan in the 14th century (1389 - 1413 A.D.). We can, however, form some idea of wooden architecture from the wall paintings adorning the Vairocana temple of Nako in Kinnaur district, executed sometime in the 10-11th centuries A.D. by Kasmiri craftsmen. The structures have multiple tiered roofs, each smaller than the one below it. They look more like the Shah Hamadan mosque in Srinagar and the mosque at Panpur than the Hidimba Devi temple in Kulu.

Another source of information is Kalhana's Rajatarangini composed in mid-12th century A.D., which deals with the history of Kashmir and refers frequently to the architecture of castles (bana-sala), monumental buildings such as caityas and viharas.
But these references contain very few structural details, so also do the references to Hindu temples and other structures.

A passage from Tarikh-e-Rasidi quoted by Sir Aurel Stein in his translation of Kalhana's Rajatarangini informs us that a wooden style existed in Kashmir in the days of Zain-ul-Abidin (1420 – 1470 A.D.). Here we come across a reference to a palace entirely built of wood which had been commissioned by Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin.

European travellers such as Bernier, Vigne, Hugel, Moorcroft and Lowenthal have left us brief descriptions of wooden buildings of Kashmir, but unfortunately they are not accompanied by illustrations. The extant wooden sacred structures of Kashmir are mosques dating from mid-15th century onwards, a detailed study of which shall be taken up in a later chapter.

Chamba:

Chamba is the most important of all the regions falling within the western Himalaya, for it has preserved the oldest artistic remnants. Apart from its scenic splendour and a rich historic past, its greatest asset is its seclusion due to which this valley has preserved a number of edifices which shed a revealing light on some of the obscurest and most crucial chapters of Indian art history. It is remarkable not only because it has yielded an uninterrupted series of specimens of art and architecture from 5th century A.D. down to the present era, but also because this is the only area
that has been ruled over by the same dynasty for nearly 1500 years, i.e. from 550 A.D. to 1947.

Today a district of Himachal Pradesh, Chamba was one of the prominent princely hill states prior to independence. It was ruled over by Rajput kings who trace their descent to Maru, the first king to rule over this territory in 550 A.D. with his capital at Brahmaur. His descendant was Raja Meruvamana, the great builder of not only our earliest wooden temples in Brahmaur and Chhatrarahi, but also the stone temples forming a complex in Brahmaur. It was he who commissioned the services of master metalsmith Gugga for casting the magnificent brass statues of the deities enshrined in all these temples as well as the image of Nandi standing in front of the Manimahesh temple in Brahmaur. All these images bear inscriptions mentioning Meruvamana's name. On the basis of their characters, Vogel ascertained that Meruvamana must have ruled over Chamba sometime between 680 and 700 A.D. Varahamihira (500 A.D.), author of the Brhatsamhita, enumerates Brahmapura among the countries of the north-eastern region along with Kira, Kasmir, Abhisara, Darada, Kuluta, Darva, Damara, etc. It is likely that here the ancient principality on the upper Ravi is meant. This ancient kingdom is spoken of as Brahmapurakas in the Markandeya purana. Both Vogel and Goetz opine that the Chinese Buddhist traveller Hieun Tsang visited Brahmapura, to which he refers as Po-lo-hih-mo-pu-lo. Goetz writes that Hieun Tsang mentions Brahmapura as having a rich flourishing population; the people have rough ways; they care little for learning and pursue gain; there are five Buddhist monasteries but very few brethren; there are above
ten deva temples and the sectarians live pell-mell. This description makes us feel that Hieun Tsang was not writing about Brahmaur but some other place, for till now, not a single Buddhist temple or monastery has been found in Chamba. Moreover, people who care little for learning and pursue gain could not have created such masterpieces of art and architecture as are to be seen in Brahmaur and Chhatrarhi.

After Meruvarmana's reign, a number of kings of his dynasty ruled over Brahmaur and Chamba in direct succession, among whom the best known are Musunavarna and Sahilavarna (920 - 940 A.D.). The painstaking efforts of Vogel and Hutchison have enabled them to reconstruct the history of Chamba state with the help of inscriptions, fountain stones and copperplate grants and deeds. They corroborated their findings with the help of the vamsavali (dynastic genealogy) of Chamba rulers. We will not go into all these details, for they are irrelevant to our study. The kings and ranas continued to get wooden structures built long after the reign of Meruvarmana also, but most of them have not survived. They were destroyed by fire, in the wars, or due to heavy snow and rain.

In my opinion, the wooden temples of Camunda Devi temple above Champa town and Khajinaga temple of Khajjar are very ancient structures, almost as old as the wooden temples of Brahmaur and Chhatrarhi. They are also probably constructed in the 7th-8th centuries A.D., although no vestiges of ancient carvings are to be seen now. The metal image of Camunda Devi enshrined in the Chamba temple represents Durga Mahisamardini and stylistically belongs to the
8th century A.D. Goetz has expressed the same opinion and states that the wooden temple of Camunda Devi above Chamba town had already been in existence in Raja Sahilavarma's time (ca.920-940 A.D.). Regarding the Khajiar temple, Goetz writes that the two wooden statues of pandava brothers are replacements of the 7th-8th century figures.

The vamsavali or genealogical roll of Chamba kings contains a number of references to these temples. The very fact that the Chamba rulers extended special patronage to both these shrines reveals their importance. From this work, we learn that on the eve of the 13th century A.D., the muslim invaders pulled down the Khajinagar temple along with Trimukha and Candrasekhara temples, desecrated and mutilated most of the other shrines. In the 16th century, the shrine seems to have been reconstructed and recarved by Raja Pratapasingh varmana (1566-1582) of Chamba. Some damage must have been done to it in a period of one hundred years. That is why Dai Batlu, the wetnurse of Prithvi Singh (1641-1664), commissioned some artisans to repair the temple structure and had the reliefs of two lions carved on both sides of the entrance. Raja Singh (1764-1794) and Sri Singh (1844-1870) also introduced a number of changes in the structure and carvings which shall be studied in detail in a later chapter.

Similarly the Camunda Devi temple above Chamba town received special patronage from Chamba kings from time to time. The name of this temple figures in the inscriptions of Raja Balabhadravarman (1589-1641) whose reign is said to have been the most
peaceful. This inscription informs us that the Camunda temple was destroyed in 1641 A.D. It is not mentioned how it was destroyed. To Dai Batlu is assigned its reconstruction sometime between 1641 and 1664, i.e. during Raja Prithvi Singh's reign.

The impulsive Raja Ugra Singh destroyed the structure erected by her by setting fire to it in 1735 A.D. The temple structure as it stands today and its carved ceiling are the work of Raja Umed Singh (1748-1764), who was a great patron of Chamba school of painting. The stone steps leading to the temple are said to have been constructed by his successor Raja Singh (1764-1794) who probably added a few figural panels in Kangra-Chamba style.

The annals of Chamba inform us that whenever peace reigned in the kingdom, the kings were able to devote themselves to the construction, renovation or reconstruction of temples and palaces both in wood and stone. The mediaeval period was marred by warfare and arsenal activities. Only in the mid-17th century, a powerful king named Prithvi Singh arrived on the political scene of Chamba. He issued grants to the Camunda temple of Porthi.

During 1647 and 1649 A.D., the upper reaches of Chamba were threatened by an invasion from the Mongols. It is said that Prithvi Singh built the stately wooden palace known as Brahmaur State Kothi on this occasion to protect the passes. Unfortunately this palace was destroyed in the earthquake of 1905. He got the wooden panels of this mansion carved in Basohli style. Similar wooden palaces were constructed in different parts of his kingdom but no remnants are left now.
Prithvi Singh's wetnurse Dai Batlu was responsible for getting a number of wooden temples reconstructed and repaired. It is significant to mention here that in 1664 A.D., during the reign of Chhattara Singh, the successor of Raja Prithvi Singh, Lahul was divided between Kulu and Chamba. Till then, the Chamba territory had its boundaries up to the junction of Chandra and Bhaga. Udai Singh revived the building activity but no wooden temple seems to have been built by him. During his reign, the old palace known as "Pakki Chauki" was built in Chamba town. It was constructed partly of wood and decorated with carved wooden panels. It was also destroyed sometime in 1774-1775 A.D., when Amritapala of Basohli swooped down on Chamba with sword and fire.

Raja Umed Singh's contribution in the field of wooden architecture is as remarkable as that of Prithvi Singh. He was a great patron of Chamba painting as well as of architecture. In 1754, he not only got the wooden temple of Camunda Devi temple built at Devidir-Kothi, but got it covered with wall paintings and wooden carved panels. He also got embellished a wing of Brahmaur State Kothi with very fine figural relief panels in Chamba style in 1762. They are of interest on account of their remarkable stylistic affinity with Chamba school of painting which had reached its culmination in the late 18th century. During this period, attention was also paid to painting on wooden doors and windows the same themes that were commonly executed on the palace and temple walls.
Raja Singh (1764-1794), son and successor of Umed Singh got installed some of the ceiling panels in the Camunda Devi temple above Chamba town but he seems to have been more interested in painting; that is why painters from other hill states such as Guler, Kangra, Basohli, etc., flocked to his court for patronage. In the 19th century, woodcarving suffered a great setback from which it never recovered. This was largely due to encouragement given to painting.

Kulu:

Kulu is one of the most ancient places in the area of our study. Its ancient name was Uluka later it was changed to Kuluta, as we learn from our ancient literature.

The name Kuluta used in later ages is said to have been derived from kulanta meaning the end of the habitable world. An ancient manuscript in sanskrit entitled "kulanta pitha mahatmya" is still preserved in the collection of a family of priests in Manikarana in the Parbati valley.

In the travelogue of Moorcroft and Trebeck entitled "Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan and the Punjab" published in 1820, we come across the use of another name Makarasa for Kulu, which is believed to have been derived from Makara, one of the sons of Vidura, uncle of the Pandava brothers, the heroes of the Mahabharata. The holy land of Nirmand situated in the southern part of Kulu district in the Satluj valley has sacred associations with Rsi Parasurama, Ambika and Jamadagni whose temples still stand here. The Parasarama temple (pl. 172) in this village has acquired a lot of
importance on account of a copperplate inscription. This copperplate preserved in this temple, according to a number of scholars such as J.F. Fleet, A.K. Coomaraswamy, etc., dates back to the 7th century A.D. Nirmand was inhabited by erudite Brahmanas whose fame for learning had raised it to the rank of Kasi (Banaras).

The name of Kulu also figures in the Prayaga edict which mentions Kuluta among other places such as Madrasa, Trigarta (modern Kangra), Udumbara (Murpur) and Kirtipura as having been conquered by the well-known Gupta emperor Samudragupta (335-375 A.D.). This is very important from our viewpoint, for this accounts for the widespread influence of Gupta art and architectural traditions on the wooden temples which continued till the end of the 19th century, as we shall see in one of the following chapters.

Kulu seems to have been a stronghold of Buddhism in the 7th century A.D. when Hieun Tsang visited it in the first half of the 7th century A.D. He records having visited the stupa built by the Mauryan emperor Asoka sometime in 250 B.C. In addition to that, writes he in Si-Yu-Ki, there were a number of Hindu temples and Buddhist monasteries. But now, no vestiges of Buddhism remain in the valley, the sole exception being an image of Avalokitesvara in the Kapila Muni temple in Kelata village near Sultanpur. Like Lahul, Spiti and Ladakh, Kulu was several times attacked by the Tibetans, but the latter did not leave a lasting impression on its art and culture.

Originally the kings of Pala dynasty (not the descendants of Bengal kings) ruled over Kulu from 9th - 10th century onwards.
Later on, in the 16th century, the kings changed their family name from "Pala" to "Singh". So we have Raja Sidha Singh, the builder of the Naggar Castle and his son Raja Bahadur Singh who got the temple of Hidimba Devi constructed in 1553 A.D. in Dhungri village.

Mandi :-

Today, Mandi is a district of Himachal Pradesh and is thought to be the youngest of all the erstwhile hill states of the Punjab Himalaya. The Sena dynasty ruled over Mandi State from 12th century A.D. till 1947. One of the descendants of the Sena dynasty was King Banasena (died 1346) who is said to be the builder of Parasara rsi temple in the village of that name.

Mandi was called Zahor by the Tibetan Buddhists who were the followers of Padmasambhava, who lived in the 8th century A.D. and built a Buddhist temple at Rewalsar. This place is still a major centre of pilgrimage for the Tibetans. Buddhism did not make a very strong impact on the cultural life of Mandi which remained and still is a predominantly Hindu state.

The only rock inscription that has come down to us from this district is from Salanu village going back to the Gupta period. We do not have very many wooden temples here, probably because deodar trees do not grow here. Good wood is not available for the construction of structures. Besides, this district like its neighbouring districts of Kangra and Bilaspur which do not have a single wooden temple is situated at low altitudes.
Kinnaur :

The history of Kinnaur is shrouded in obscurity. In the absence of concrete historical records, we have to fall back upon literary references which are plentifully available. The Hindu myths and legends describe it as the land of Kinnaras, the semi-divine singers and dancers. In the sabhaparva of the Mahabharata (chap. IX, verses 1-5), Kinnaur is mentioned as the country of the kimpurusas. According to Rahul Sankrityayana, the kimpurusas were not only confined to Kinnaur, but inhabited the entire region of the western Himalaya.

R.K. Mukerji describes the kinnaras as a polyandrous tribe of Tibeto-Himalayan region. But this view is not wholly correct. The original inhabitants of Kinnaur were the khasas, members of Aryan race, who ruled over this area till about the 7th century A.D. Rahul Sankrityayana, an Indian scholar, who studied the historical past of this region opines that the Tibetans attacked Kinnaur sometime in the 7th century A.D. and remained its overlords till the 13th century A.D. The indigenous population mixed with the Tibetans through matrimonial alliances only later, perhaps in the 9th or 10th century A.D. By about the 10th century A.D., the Tibetan sway here had started slackening and gradually declined in the next three centuries. It seems to me that the upper reaches of Kinnaur, i.e. the area now comprising the Poo sub-division of the district, were annexed into the Tibetan or Guge empire of Snyid-Nyima-gon. This is the reason that the population of Poo is Buddhist and there are a number of Buddhist monasteries here such as Murang, Charang, etc. Culturally, this sub-division forms a unit along with Ladakh, Lahul
and Spiti. Whereas: the other two sub-divisions of this district, namely Kalpa and Nichar, are inhabited by the Hindus and have many Hindu temples.

From Poo village has been found an inscription of the Tibetan King Ye-shes-od, which points to the Tibetan domination here in the 10th century A.D. The most remarkable contribution of the Tibetan rule to the cultural, religious and literary life of Kinnaur was made by Rinchen-bzang-po, an eminent Buddhist who lived in the 10th century (958 - 1055 A.D.). In the 10th century A.D., the Tibetan monarch of Guge named Ye-Shes-Od sent twenty-one youths from his kingdom to Kashmir and other parts of India to study Sanskrit. Of these, only two returned alive, one of them being Rinchen-bzang-po. The latter, also known as Ratnabhadra, translated a number of Sanskrit texts into Tibetan, thus acquiring the name of great translator or lotsava in Tibetan. He also built a number of Buddhist temples and monasteries not only in Kinnaur, but in Ladakh, Lahul, Spiti and parts of the Guge empire. The religious structures believed to have been constructed by him are still extant in Kanam, Ribba and Poo. Understandably, as in Ladakh and other places in Guge empire, here also, Kasmiri artisans - woodcarvers, painters and metalsmiths - must have been commissioned to execute the paintings on the walls and to cast metal statuettes of the Buddha and other Buddhist divinities. It is interesting to note that in the Rang-rik-tsuma monastery in Charang is preserved a three-dimensional wooden image of Vajrapani in Kasmiri style (pl. 168). We shall speak about this sculpture in greater detail.
In one of the following chapters.

In the mediaeval period, i.e. from the 13th to 15th centuries A.D., Kinnaur was divided into petty kingdoms ruled over by local chieftains known as the thakurs, who kept fighting among themselves all the time. It is thought that due to their continual warfare, a number of ancient and important Buddhist monasteries and Hindu temples were destroyed. In the course of time, some thakurs became extremely powerful and they set up impregnable forts, of which those of Labrang, Murang and Kamru are the best known. In Kamru fort, which is situated near Sangla in the Baspa valley, we come across tall tower-like structures about five to seven storeys in height. The walls of these structures are constructed of alternating layers of horizontal wooden planks and rubble masonry. Such structures were constructed on viable sites from where it was easy to spot and attack the enemy. In my opinion, the tower style temples that abound in Simla district came into existence sometime in the 15th century as a result of perpetual warfare of the thakurs and the Ranas.

In mid-16th century A.D., the thakur of Kamru fort named Chhattar Singh Jabbar—according to Rahul Sankrtyayana, the name is Chubal—was overcome with ambition and started extending the boundaries of his kingdom by annexing the neighbouring areas. Soon he became the most powerful and feared thakur in the area and assumed the title of king. This way, he laid the foundation of a dynasty that in later ages came to be known as the Bushahr kings who continued to hold their sway over their large kingdom till 1948. In later period, one of the descendants of Jabbar moved his
capital from Kamru fort to Sarahan (ancient name Sonitapura), while Kehari Singh selected the more congenial site of Rampur for building his palace. Nonetheless, all the kings in the line preserved the tradition of their forefathers of holding the throne-ascending ceremony in Kamru fort. Kehari Singh expended large sums of money for the renovation of Bhimakali and palace.

European travellers have left eulogistic descriptions of the ancient palace of Sarahan. Its original grandeur has faded now of which we can form some idea only from these accounts. We shall have occasion to write about them in detail in the chapter on domestic architecture.

It seems to me that due to the rule of the Bushahr kings over Kinnaur, the two sub-divisions of Kalpa and Nichar have largely Hindu population where there are a number of Hindu temples built in honour of local village deities such as Candika Devi, Mahesura, Ukha Devi etc. We shall speak about them in the chapter on wooden temples.

The wooden temples of Kinnaur, of which the prominent is that of Candika Devi at Kothi, have a tradition of deep repoussé worked doors of brass and silver. Some of the motifs engraved are of Buddhist inspiration. Since Sarahan was the capital of the erstwhile Bushahr state, we come across similar doors there, the best example being the door of the storehouse opposite the Bhimakali shrine and the principal entrance to the old palace complex.
Lahul:—

Despite the efforts of Hutchison and Vogel and Col. A. F. P. Harcourt, no consecutive account of the history of Lahul is available to us. Its earliest inhabitants were Hindus, as is evident from a large number of linga stones and stone images of naga (snakes) which are still being worshipped there. The custom of smearing the linga stones with oil or butter, and of pouring water on them is still in vogue, which again points to the Hindu origins of the indigenous population. Till the end of the 19th century, the linga stones were enshrined in hut-like structures with sloping roofs covered with shingles. From the ends of the uppermost beams of the roof project ram's head carved out in wood. This proves that what we have termed Type I or chalet style temples in our chapter on wooden temples is indigenous to the western Himalayan region. It may be noted that over a period of one hundred years or so, the inhabitants of Lahul have taken to Tibetan type houses with flat roofs consisting of willow branches and earth. No particular reason can be assigned for this change except that this construction material is more readily available in the area, whereas wood is scarce.

Nothing much is known of the early history of Lahul. According to Hutchison and Vogel, it was occupied by the rulers of Brahmaur around 600 A.D., which suggests that the Hindus lived here side by side of the Buddhists. It was an important centre of Buddhism on account of which Hieun Tsang
visited it in the 7th century A.D. From his account, we learn that La-u-lo was situated 1800 li - actually it should be 180 li - north of Kuluta. In the 8th century A.D., Lahul became a humming centre of cultural and religious activity under the inspiration of a Buddhist saint Padmasambhava. It is said that like Rinchen-bzang-po two centuries later, Padmasambhava erected the earliest Buddhist monasteries in Lahul and also constructed a number of Hindu temples in the contiguous areas. An ancient manuscript known as Padmasambhava-btang mentions the names of Zahor (Tibetan name for Mandi) and dGar-za, i.e. Lahul, in connection with the visits of Padmasambhava. He set up a number of Buddhist monasteries there, viz. the Gondola monastery at the confluence of Candra and Bhaga rivers, the Kangani monastery at Manchet, etc., to name just two. The construction of Gurughantal monastery and Trilokeshath temple is also attributed to him by A.H.Francke. In his opinion, these ancient monasteries and temples were originally wooden structures with pyramidal roofs perhaps resembling the Hemis Debi temple of Dhungrí (Kulu), but they underwent complete changes, when Lahul became a part of western Tibetan empire. They are now distinguished by flat roofs that are so common in Tibet. Nothing can be said as to what the original structures looked like. The structural changes that were introduced in the course of time might have been effected by climatic conditions as well as by the availability of construction material. Most parts of Lahul are not affected by heavy rains, and good wood for building structures is not easily procurable.
The Udaipur village with its remarkable wooden temple of Markula Devi was formerly included in this area. Some scholars such as A.H. Francke have tried to prove on archaeological grounds that this portion was incorporated into the kingdom of Chamba in the 11th century A.D. during the reigns of Raja Jasotai and Lalitavarmana. The earliest proof of Chamba suzerainty over part of Lahul is supplied by the name Udaipur by which the village of Marul is known today and this change of name is ascribed to Raja Udai Singh of Chamba (1690-1720 A.D.) who conquered this part.

Spiti:-

In spite of the researches of A.H. Francke and Hutchison and Vogel, a consecutive history of Spiti is not available. According to the chronicles of Ladakh, this land formed a part of the western Tibetan empire in the 10th century A.D. The philological version is that around 2000 B.C., a race speaking Mundri dialect spread from Bengal and Madhya Pradesh to the frontiers of Tibet. Scholars, however, agree that prior to 10th century A.D., Spiti was ruled over by Hindu kings of Sena dynasty, as we learn from the coins found here by Sir A.Cunningham who assigned the period 1151-1176 A.D. to them. According to him, the Sena kings of Spiti were related to the kings of Mandi, who also belonged to the Sena dynasty. The names of the Hindu rulers of this land are recorded in the Mandi vamsavali. But these observations have been rendered incorrect by the researches of J.F.Fleet who has fixed the 7th century A.D. as the period of these coins. In the 7th century A.D., during the reign of Raja Chetasena, the Tibetan king Srong-btsan-gampo attacked Spiti and overthrew the rule of the Sena.
dynasty. This is how this region fell into the area of Tibetan influence. In the opinion of Rahul Sankrityayana, the Tibetans settled here after the conquest of Srong-btsan-gampo, entered into matrimonial alliances with the local population, and this way a new race emerged into whose veins ran the Tibetan blood. By the 10th century A.D., Spiti merged into the western Tibetan empire. Skid-Nyima-gon (900-930 A.D.) handed it over to his youngest son Lde-Tsug-gon, when he divided his empire into three parts. His eldest son who was the king of Ladakh was also appointed the suzerain over his younger brothers. This way Spiti became a province of Ladakh. This is a historical fact, also corroborated by an inscription in the Tabo monastery in Spiti which was founded in 1000 A.D. From this inscription we learn that Lde-tsug-gon was the ruler of a vast kingdom extending over the regions of Shang Shung, Guge, Spiti and part of Kinnaur. The names of Ladakhi kings and the king of Guge are also mentioned in this inscription. Lde-tsug-gon and his successors contributed a great deal for the enrichment of Buddhist learning and art in the provinces of western Tibetan empire, by inviting eminent scholars from India.

In Spiti also, Rinchen-bzang-po played a vital role in re-organising and reforming Buddhism. As in Ladakh, Lahul and Kinnaur, he founded monasteries here also. We do not know how many monasteries and temples had been established by him. Today, only two monasteries of Tabo and Lhalung exist which are believed to have been founded by this great translator around 1000 A.D.
Till the mid-19th century A.D., Spiti was almost independent but paid tribute to or exchanged presents with all the Tibetan countries in its neighbourhood, viz. with Garu, Ladakh, Lahul and Kinnaur. In 1846 A.D., it followed the fortunes of Lahul in being transferred to British rule. Today, Spiti is a district of Himachal Pradesh and is separated from Lahul by Kunzum pass.

**Ladakh** :-

Today, Ladakh forms a district of Jammu and Kashmir state and has been a part of India since the earliest times. Its link with India's historical past goes back to the time of Asoka, the great Mauryan emperor (272-231 B.C.), who sent Buddhist missionaries to Ladakh sometime around 250 B.C. in keeping with the resolution adopted at the third Buddhist Council held at Pataliputra. Imposing remains of Buddhist art were discovered in Ladakh by A.H. Francke, who travelled here extensively at the dawn of the present century and found inscriptions in Brahmi and Kharosti scripts dating back to 200 B.C. Due to the ceaseless efforts of Asoka's missionaries, Buddhism gained a firm foothold in Ladakh and Kashmir. The latter became so important a centre of Buddhist learning that the Kushana king Kaniska (125-152 A.D.) held the fourth Buddhist council in Jalandhara in Kashmir kingdom. It is also learnt that Kaniska also sent 500 missionaries for the dissemination of Buddhism.

In the first half of the 7th century A.D., the empire of Harsavarthana extended in the north to Kapisa, Kashmir, Ladakh, Kulu, Satadru (original name of the river Satluj) and the empire
of women known as Suvarna; Godra. Hieun Tsang who was in India during Harsa's reign also visited Ladakh in 640 A.D. and spent two years in Kashmir.

Apart from these stray references, we do not have any historical information about Ladakh prior to the 10th century A.D. The opinion of A.H. Francke that the early monasteries of Ladakh, Lahul and Spiti were constructed by King Lhachen Byang-Chub-Semspah (1020-1050 A.D.) is based on the inscriptions found in the monasteries of Alchi and Tabo in Ladakh and Spiti respectively.

Luciana Petech, the author of the chronicles of Ladakh, has questioned the fact that Lhachen was a king. According to her, he was probably a Lama king, very much like Ye-shes-Od of Guge. This view seems to be acceptable, for in all the areas of the western Himalaya, the task of constructing, renovating, reconstructing religious edifices, getting them decorated with wall paintings or woodcarvings, installing metal, wooden or stucco images of the deities, lay entirely in the hands of the head priests. From time to time, they were endowed by local kings.

According to the Ladakhi chronicles, Utpala (1080-1110 A.D.) conquered Kulu, Ladakh and western Tibet and had strong links with Buddhism as their early grand religious institutions were erected and fostered by Indian Buddhists, mainly from Kashmir. The historical records mention the employment of Kasmiri craftsmen in the western Tibetan provinces under the inspiration and encouragement of Rinchen-bzang-po. The Kasmiri artisans were adept at
woodcarving and used timber for various structural parts and sculptures. It is not known whether timber was brought from Kasmir, but this seems highly probable, for deodar wood which has been employed in the monasteries is plentifully available in Kasmiri forests, not in Ladakh.

The sculptures carved in wood and now preserved in the monasteries of Alchi and Tabo represent the style that was characteristic of the art under the Utpalas. The figures have slim and elegant bodies, marked by all the features characteristic of Kasmiri style of the 9th-11th centuries. According to a local tradition, the monasteries and temples at Alchi were built at the instance of Rinchen-bzang-po. The layout of the halls is the same as that of the monasteries erected by him at Nyarma, Tabo, Nako, etc. Apart from these structures, we do not come across any notable specimens of woodcarving or wooden architecture in Ladakh in later periods.
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