CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

A fresh art-historico study of the temple door frames in Himachal Pradesh done in the foregoing chapters of this thesis has proved to be very fruitful in more than one way. Since it is the first study of its kind it has yielded good results both quantitatively as well as qualitatively. The entire work is based on, as already pointed out, our on the spot study during various field work trips to all the temples listed in the thesis. This gave us an opportunity to have a fresh insight in their art and architectural features and compare them in an analytical manner with the observations of the scholars who have dwelt upon various aspects of the temples of Himachal Pradesh. There are a large number of writings on the temples and some of them are as old as a century and half. During this period some changes became further noticeable. Many of the scholars have done a white collared job without even visiting the temples. Those who surveyed the temples studied them from a particular point of view and omitted some important details. The doorframes of temples though attracted their casual attention, yet no micro study has been done about them so far. The present study has provided us an opportunity to study the works related to the subjects by several eminent art-historians on one hand and compare their observations with the monuments in situ on the other. Further, we were able to check both the secondary works and the monuments to see how far they are compatible to the ancient śilpa sāstras. Each time our findings have been able to
shed new light on the subject as already described in detail, that have helped us in arriving at new conclusions.

As an introductory survey we have given a description of the temples and the door-frames of the temples in second and third chapters. This includes the temples of Himachal Pradesh as well as the rest of the country. The earliest surviving examples of the temples are those of the Gupta period, such as the temple no. 17 at Sanchi, Kankāli Devī Temple, Tigwa, Pārvatī temple, Nachna, etc. all being assigned to the 4th or early 5th centuries of the Christian era. However, the archaeological evidence has indicated towards the existence of temples at least in the Śuṅga period in the 2nd century B.C. The literary evidence goes further back as pointed out by scholars like V.S. Agrawala, Krishna Deva and P.K. Agrawala. All these examples and studies have highlighted the existence of early temples in the plains of the north and central India. On the basis of this evidence an impression has been created that the art of temple architecture came to Himachal Pradesh not before the seventh century A.D. and that too was borrowed from the idiom prevalent in the plains of North India. There is nothing farther from the truth. Though no early examples of temples exist in Himachal Pradesh today but the numismatic evidence has conclusively shown the existence of beautiful temples of more than one storey with pillars, śikhara, etc. as early as the 2nd century B.C. in the time of the Audumbaras and Yaudheyas. It is possible that these temples were made of wood and have since perished. Unfortunately the coins do not provided us any details of their doorframes. The findings from our study also dispel the popular beliefs about the architecture of the early temples based on those of Sanchi, Udaigiri, etc. such as they had a flat roof and consisted of small square
sanctum with plain walls. The temples during the Audumbara and Yaudheya period were more than one storey, had rows of pillars and a high śikhara with a dīvaja and kalaśa on the top. It may be presumed that they had developed artistic door frames also.

In the chapter on the structural stone temples in Himachal Pradesh, we have referred to the Mangarh Śiva temple, temples of Parahat (Hatkoti) and those of Nirmand. None of them belong to the anterior of the 7th century A.D. and none has flat roof. The latter feature may be attributed to the mountainous trait where a sloping roof was required because of the climatic conditions, as found at Mangarh. But the development of the nāgara style śikhara demands an explanation. Was it borrowed from the plains? Apparently yes. However, we must not forget that in time scale there is no difference in the development of the stone temples of Himachal and that of the rest of India. The idea of borrowing must not be forced upon. There appears to be a simultaneous development all over. Without any prejudice to the idea that the artists may have travelled from one place to another, the hilly region cannot be branded as borrower alone. This is specifically known from the Chamba inscriptions of Meruvaram’s time and onwards.7 The sūtradhāra of the Vaidyanātha temple at Baijnath was also a local architect of Trigarta.8

We have described the details of various stone temple doorframes. They represent the contemporary iconographic traditions, but at the same time the artists used their independent ideas in various representations. Some of the temples have plain doorframes, but it does not help us assign them an early date. It may be due to the availability of artists or finances for the purpose, despite of the directions laid out in śilpa śastras for making
and embellishing various types of doorframes. Some of the early temples like those of Mangarh and Latta Baoli (Nirmand) have carved doorframes. In the case of the former event the images of the river goddesses and the dvārapālas are made, a trait that became popular during the Gupta period but is missing at Sanchi. The development of the doorframes from single to triśākhā or pañcha-śākhā doorways in various temples when compared with the iconography of the frames has been instrumental in determining the dates of their construction and discard the theories of their early date on the basis of the external evidence. The case of Behni Mahādeva temple at Behna may be quoted here. M. Postel\(^9\) assigned it an early date on the basis of the Moharās enshrined in the temple. O.C. Handa\(^10\) has followed him but goes much beyond in describing its doorframe as ancient work in folk-art. The present study indicates that a temple may have existed there from an earlier period but the doorframe of the present temple is very late. On the other hand the doorframes of temples like Gaurī Śāṅkara at Naggar have folk element in them but can easily be assigned to the later phase of discussions. The doorframes of the Gaurī-Śāṅkara temple at Jagatsukh helps in assigning it an early date with some interesting features in the image on the lalātabimba. Some new iconographic traits have also been noted in some of the frames and must be attributed to the original thinking of the artists who made them. Like we have pointed out with reference to the Baijnath temple a panel of apsarās in amorously lying postures. It is a good variant of mithuna śākhā combined with gana śākhā. The depiction of Gaṅgā and Yamunā on the base of the doorframes, though a common feature of the temples from the Gupta period onwards, also have some interesting details in the
regional examples. The ones carved in the porch of Basheshar Mahādeva temple at Bajaura though belong to the main stream iconographic features show their own style with which Yamunā carries the lotus. On the other hand at Mani Mahesh, Bharmaur Gangā and Yamunā are shown standing on swans in place of crocodile and tortoise.

Another noticeable feature has been the crowns of these goddesses as well as of several other deities. The three pronged crowns have typical *Pahari* features. The only example in Himachal Pradesh where Gangā and Yamunā have been depicted on the upper part of the doorframe comes from an early Śiva temple at Sawara in Shimla District. Not unique by itself, but this arrangement is very rare even elsewhere in India till the medieval period. It is difficult to say if this arrangement was original idea of the local artists or borrowed from outside. But it definitely indicates their will to experiment with the new, something besides the traditional trends. It can be concluded on the basis of the study of the structural stone temples of Himachal Pradesh, that they deserve to be put at par with the temples in rest of India and presented a very fine synthesis of the national and regional characteristics.

Himachal Pradesh did not lag behind as far as the rock-cut architecture is concerned. Not a small example and by no means of lesser merits than those of Ellora and other places in Western India, the big rock-cut complex at Masrur vies with any other for its glory and grandeur. The only example of this type in the north-west India, it provides excellent examples of carving in the doorframes. A notable feature of the frames here is the despite of it being a Śaiva complex, as is generally believed, the images of Gaṇeśa on the *lalātabimbās* are missing. We have beautiful images of *dvārapālās* and couples on the base of the
doorjambs but the depiction of the river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna did not catch the fancy of its craftsmen and hence they are missing. The blind doorways with plain walls but beautifully carved frames are also an enigma, generally ignored by the earlier scholars. Were they left incomplete? The panels depicting images of various deities with attendants on the lintels of the doorframes is also very interesting. They show the usual iconographic traits mixed with the unusual imaginative ones. As pointed out by Ashvini Agrawal, the depiction of the female form of Vishnu-Vaikuntha here, is an innovation borrowed from the male form of the god in the region, where it has been so popular. In any case, at Masrur, we find a deep Kashmiri influence on the iconography and execution of images. Further it has been noted that the doorframes in the complex do not present a stereo-styled depiction but have a good deal of variety and originality. They also help us assign this complex to circa eighth century of the Christian era.

The wooden temples of Himachal Pradesh form a fascinating story. Foremost, during the period under discussion, are those of Lakshana Devi at Bharmaur, Sakti Devi at Chatrarhi, Markula Devi at Udaipur-Markul and Dakshinesvara Mahadeva at Nirmand. In each case we found that the artists, who appear to be adept at wood-carvings, put their best in original ideas while sticking to the known iconographic tenets. In the depiction of the images, several local traits have been introduced. For example, the three pronged crowns, ribbed maces of a typical variety, swords and so on. In dress, ornaments and attributes at each step the stamp of local workmanship can be seen alongwith the main stream national ideas and idioms.
The temples of Lakshaṇā Devī and Śakti Devī, which are contemporary in date, present exquisitely carved doorframes both of the mandapa and garbhagriha. The façade of the former has a deep Kashmiri influence on it which is especially noticeable in the depiction of Vishnu image on the top in a trefoil pediment. Even in the doorjambs and the motifs on the lintel the same is reflected. It indicates an intimate and active interaction between Chamba and Kashmir from a very early date. Even the portrayal of seated lions on both sides of the door-frame on upper part is very significant and has Kashmiri influence. Such original features have been noted even in the temples of Markulā Devī and Dakshineśvara Mahādeva. Besides the art idiom found in these wooden door frames the depiction of various images and motifs is equally enchanting. Despite of the almost same depiction of ideas, none has monotonous and stagnant feeling in them. Each doorframe is vibrant with life that makes their minute study a very useful exercise.

When studying these doorframes, what came to our notice was the advance stage of their development. All the frames have fully developed classical style of depiction. Considering the fact that these frames belong to the seventh or early eighth centuries and are indigenous to Himachal Pradesh as far as the material used is i.e. wood is concerned, we may trace their origin to a very early date. Because, it must have taken a long time, at least a couple of centuries, to attain such refinement in the art. If our observation is correct, then our hypothesis that the temples of the Audumbara and Yaudheyà period must have had beautiful doorframes should not be considered baseless.
In continuity to this idea, when we study the wood work of the Chāmuṇḍā Devī temple at Chamba, we feel justified in assigning an early date to this temple than the eighteenth century given by most of the scholars on the basis of an inscription on the bell in its mandapa. Further we find that the tradition of wooden temples and their exquisitely carved wooden doorframes continued in Himachal Pradesh and has come down to our times. Fine examples of this tradition are available in the Thakurdwara at Nirmand, Bhīmākālī temple, Sarahan and the perhaps the latest and most recent one at Batseri near Sangla in Kinnaur.

Through the foregoing discussion, it becomes clear that whether in structural stone temples or the rock-cut or wooden temples in Himachal Pradesh, the doorframes show a steady development of art and architecture both in style and grandeur. The start from the classical style, the earlier examples having all been vanished, if any, and continue through the post-Gupta, Pratihāra and post-Pratihāra till they start degenerating into medieval sculptural style. Along with continuity these doorframes show the contemporancity with their counterparts elsewhere in India. Thus we may conclude that the door-frames of the temples in Himachal Pradesh form a fruitful subject for the study of various aspects of the historical and art development.
Notes & References:


2  The remains of a Vishnū temple at Vidiśā near the pillar bearing an inscription of Heliōdorus in Madhya Pradesh and that of Nārāyaṇa Vāṭikā at Nagari near Chittor in Rājasthān are irrefutable examples.


5  Agrawala, P.K., *Bhāratiya Vāstu evam Kālā,*


7  In the Nandi pedestal inscription at Bharmaur technical terminology of temple architecture is used. There is no reference to any outside artist even in the inscriptions of Yūgākaravaran or in the Sarahan Praśasti of Sātyaki.


9  See supra, Chapter IV.

10  Supra, Chapter IV.
See the forthcoming paper of Prof. Ashvini Agrawal on this feature. He has been kind enough to let us use its unpublished draft.