CHAPTER - III
Artistic and cultural study
The collection of sculpture of the museum consists of items some of which are of very high degree of excellence, while the others are not of the same quality. In a collection of the miscellaneous types of sculptures this phenomenon is bound to be noticed. The collection has been built up mostly through annual purchase and by way of the receipt of occasional gifts or of transferred items. The criteria for making the selection is not always the artistic and aesthetic consideration, but, on many occasions, the historical importance of the sculptures gets preference over other considerations. Not that the aspect of beauty is not reckoned as an important point of view, but it has been found that seldom an item is selected only on the basis of its cultural or artistic or aesthetic standing. In view of this, as expected, the collection of the Himachal State Museum has very few sculptures which are important only because of their beauty. However, in this collection there are some sculptures which have a rightful place of excellence even on artistic and aesthetic considerations.
By artistic and aesthetic consideration we mean to imply the novelty of the technique applied and the visual impact that the sculpture displays. Many of the sculptures, particularly those in stone, are of local origin. That means they hail from various places of the Himachal Pradesh. Some of these sculptures are not of very high order of technical and aesthetic import. This is due partially to the type of stone that has been used and partially to the lack of technical know-how of the sculptures. The centres of sculptures of Himachal Pradesh probably do not have a very remote antiquarian history. In view of this the sculptors are mostly without much of traditional practice behind them, compare to the type of long antiquarian history that exists in respect of the other centres of sculpture in India.¹ That explains perhaps the comparatively poorer quality of these sculptures. But the same cannot be said about the metal sculptures hailing from these places. It seems that the tradition of metal sculpture in the centres of Himachal Pradesh is quite old, and perhaps is supported on a tribal background. In view of this, the metal sculptures have distinctive edge over the stone counterparts hailing from the centres of Himachal Pradesh.
Interestingly some very distinctive examples of wooden sculptures are found in the collection. The medium of wood for sculptural practices was not very popular throughout India all the times. The reason for paucity of evidence of wooden sculpture from the various places of India lies in the fact that wood being easily perishable many of the wooden sculptures might have been destroyed through the ravages of time and weather. The importance of the collection of the museum lies also on the fact that it has the wooden sculptures in its collection, whereas such sculptures are rare in most of the museums. Fortunately, inspite of the perishable nature some wooden sculptures of excellence have survived and have found place in the museums including one like the Himachal State museum.

The terracotta sculptures of the museum are noticeable on account of their distinctive stylistic features. The relationship between clay sculptures and metal sculptures is very intimate, because we know that quite frequently a clay model (or a model in wax) is prepared before casting the metal sculpture on it. The relationship is more or less inseparable in the casting
of the metal sculptures of the so-called masks. The collection of the museum has beautiful examples of the excellence of the artistic creativity in the medium of terracotta and metal. Terracotta art, for that matter expression in clay, can be of two types—time bound type and timeless type. The former type has the characteristics of the stylistic quality of stone sculpture which are noticeable in respect of the different times and regions. A terracotta figurine of this type, thus bears the features of style of a time of period and also of a region or place, in accordance with the time and place that the figurine is related to. Contrary to this type is the timeless type which does not bear the impress of time or region. It is the same through the ages and through the regions. Irrespective of wherein and when the figurine has been made, this type retains its appearance as the same. In the Himachal State Museum the terracotta sculptures are mostly of the time bound type, although the traditional type is not altogether are known.

Here we will take note of some of the examples showing some interesting stylistic and aesthetic
features. The stone sculpture (figure number 1) representing Umā-Maheshvara has the usual features of the well known examples of this theme in medieval sculpture. But here the bodily postures of Shiva and his consort are quite distinctive. Shiva’s face is turned partially towards Umā, while the latter has her face almost in the profile. The effect is of the expression of the dramatic situation of the two being engaged in conversation of very intimate nature. This has added some special meaning to this sculpture. Kalidasa, in his *Raghuvaṃśam* has referred to Umā and Maheshvara (i.e. Shiva and Pārvatī) as the primordial parents of the world.²

As we observe the image of Vishnu (figure number 5), at the first site, the conventional nature of the representation is noticed. But what adds distinctiveness to the sculpture is the two attendant figures of Sarasvatī and Bhudevi on his two sides. These two goddesses have their bodies in a very delectable tribhanga pose, and significantly, both the figures have their bodies tilted towards the central figure of Vishnu. In view of this not only an element of grace is bestowed on these female figures, but, at the same time, their swaying body breaks the static monotony of the standing
central figure in a considerable way. Compare to this, the figure of Vishṇu (figure number 4) standing in contraposto does not have this element of extra monotonous effect. Here the flanking figures are much crowded that their contribution to the breaking of the monotony is negligible. It should however be admitted that here the body of the lord, particularly the torso, is modelled with superb proportion and with all possible attributes of bodily grace. The *vanamāla* has also been carved with careful precision.

While we compare the above mentioned Umā-Maheshvara sculpture with its Vaishṇavite counterpart in the image of Lakshmi Narayana (figure number 6) has her face almost in the profile. Vishnu here seems to be either in a contemplative mood or in the role of a listener of whatever is being said by his spouse. In terms of modelling and plasticity of the form this sculpture is superior to its Shaivita counterpart. The figure of Garuda shown below is an example of the expression of devotion and humility.

The image of Jagaddhatri-Durgā (figure number 13) is an example of the capability of the medieval sculptor
to represent the high lights of the female form. The torso is attenuated emphatically at the middle, while the breasts and the lower abdomen have been shown with the burden of physicality. Interestingly the feet of the goddess have not been very carefully carved. Crudety of plastic quality is also noticed in the form of the lion. The over all effect of the frontly oriented figure is one of pseudo-naturalism. But it is compensated by the serene and contemplative expression of the face of the goddess. The image of Ganesha (figure number 12) on the other hand expresses beautifully the idea of natural grace. The modelling of the body is quite sensitive. The rounded turn of the end of the trunk is done in such a way that it adds to the liveliness of the figure. Even the eyes and the ears have the effect of animation.

The seated form of the sun god (figure number 11) is not too many is Indian sculpture. The representation of the god seated in a peculiar way with the feet wide apart is known from Kushana sculptures of Mathura, but its continuation in the later sculptures is somewhat not very frequent. In this sculpture the female figure shown at one side has an emphatic side ways turn of the body
whether the artist desired to counterbalance the static unnaturalism of the figure of Surya is not known. However we see here the presence of two different moods of sculptural expression. Another image of Sūrya (figure number 10) contains the conventional iconography of the god, particularly the foreign elements of his dress and personal decoration. What is peculiar in this sculpture is the way the two lotuses have been shown. It seems as if the god is not holding two lotuses by their stalks but is carrying two weapons of the type of dumbbells. Moreover, the crown of the god is rendered almost like a cape flattened at the top.

Some of the Buddhist sculptures like the figure number 18 are examples of the artist's technical expertise and imaginative skill. Here the way the side figures have been represented is no doubt distinctive. It has given the effect of idea of the comprehension of a number of views within a single plane stone in which a number of planes have been intelligently carved to bring in the expression. The plastic surface of the body of the Buddha is of high degree of excellence. The details are many, but they do not seem to be superfluous. One of the best expressions of sculptural grace is to be noticed in
a figure of Jain Tirthankara (figure number 20). The
dangling hand at the sides in the kayotsargapose are so
aesthetically related to the torso that the over-all
effect is not that of a physical presence but of the
expression of an idea. The face is lit with the
expression of contemplation and be attitude. The nudity
of the figure does not bring in any sensuous effect— it
rather adds to the glory of innocence that the body
figure is intended to convey. Although in terms of
plastic quality another figure of Jain Tirthankara
(figure number 19) is quite different, but herein also
the sculptor has succeeded in interpreting the body
structure as an idea. Here the form is comparatively more
fleshy and closer to the physical reality. But, in spite
of this, the divine grace of the subject has been
beautifully arrested in plastic terms.

We have already noticed the Lakṣmī Nārāyana
figure (figure number 6) seated on the back of Garuḍa. In
this sculpture the vāhana is shown with a comparatively
smaller size than the divine couple seated on its back,
as is quite appropriate. In another sculpture (figure
number 9) showing Vishnu seated on Garuda, there is a
departure from this conventional practice. Here, surprisingly the size of Garuḍa figure is almost the same as that of his lord. In view of this, there is an oddity of the proportional relationship between the sitter and the carrier. Moreover, this sculpture is comparatively more gross and less sensitive than the previous example. A high degree of excellence of plastic quality is to be seen in the image of Devi (figure number 2). All details of drapery and ornaments are exquisitely carved. The lotus designs on the top and the trefoil background have added to the overall aesthetic import of the sculpture. The sculpture (figure number 14) that we identified as Kubera has distinctive Kushana features of broad face, wide open eyes and the fleshy lips. Moreover the over all sculptural type, including the nature of its ornaments, has striking resemblance to the famous sculptures discovered from Sanghol. 

While we look at the sculpture like the one found on an architectural slab (figure number 21) we find altogether a different stylistic expression. The rendering of the face and the form of the body is quite efficiently done, but the way it stands are the manner of its placement of the left hand on the hip are flattened.
exposer of an artificial language of art that was current during the medieval period. But what a striking difference one can notice in the two sculptures (figure numbers 17 and 17A), each representing a pair of mail and female figures. Not only that in the plastic quality they are far superior in nature, but their gestures and postures are so natural and evocative that they seem to be examples of lively presence through the plastic medium. The figures seem to be engaged in intimate dialogues, as if they are the actors in a piece of drama each of the pairs occupying two faces of the same slab is also something interesting. It might be the example of the continuity of a scene along the faces of the slab.

The figure of Varuna (figure number 16) deserves attention not only in view of its good quality of plastic form, but also because of its expression of the concept of serenity. But a somewhat oddity disturbs its over all effect. This is in the nature of an inordinate extension of the size of its limbs below the navel. The size of its part downwards is not in proper proportionate relation with the portion above. While describing double facet slab representing Kubera (figure numbers 15 and 15A) we
have already pointed out some of its interesting stylistic features. It is doubtless an example of significant stylistic and iconographic features that one can notice in the stone sculptures preserved in the Himachal State Museum.

Some of the stone heads noticed as individual examples of sculptures (figure numbers 22 and 23) should be mentioned here in view of not only their plastic quality but also because of the expressive nature of the characters they represent. That it is possible to visualize the complete figural form, sometime, when we observe these heads are doubtless the mark of distinctiveness of these pieces of art.

The expressive nature of the heads is perhaps more evident in the terracotta sculptures. A number of interesting examples of which (figure numbers 26, 30 and 33) are preserved in the Himachal State Museum. Terracotta is substantially a different type of plastic medium than stone or wood. The former is more based on moulding and modelling, while the sculpture in stone and wood are dependent on the carving. The terracotta heads under reference seems to be more expressive than even
some of the stone counterparts. Expression of sentiments like happiness, pathos, amusement and grief are writ large in some of these faces so well that they cannot but appeal to the viewer at the first sight. Many of these examples, preserved in the Himachal State Museum, are from the adjacent hilly areas. In view of this, not only some local flavours are noticeable in the types of characters they relate, but they are intimately associated with an important form of art of local relevance namely the art of the so-called masks or moras done in metal. Some of the terracotta sculptures are distinctively significant as examples of iconographic forms not easily found in this medium. In this category reference should be made of the Mahishasuramardini figure (figure number 27) and representing a Mother Goddess. (figure number 28). We cannot but mention separately the terracotta head of the lion (figure number 29) in view of its super quality of modelling and its expressive content. Apparently, this is in the nature of moras, but done in the terracotta medium.

The stylistic variety of the metal sculptures in the Himachal State Museum is distinctively significant. Most of these sculptures belong to the style and
iconography of the medieval art of representation of various divinities, Hindu, Buddhist and Jain. Technically all of them, excepting however a few pieces of the so called masks, are made by the process known as the cireperdue or the lost wax process. Both solid and hollow casting are evidenced in these sculptures. A few of the so called masks have combined the art of carving or chisellings and the process known as repousse technique. As has already been said, the sculptures vary in respect of artistic quality and aesthetic import. These qualities have already been referred to in the chapter dealing with the descriptive features. Here we take up only a few selected ones which stand apart due to their stylistic and aesthetic distinctiveness.

Two interesting images of Mahishasuramardini are known from the collection. One of them (figure number 44) has a distinctive tribal feature of the facial type, although the over head beautifully floriated prabhamandala and the other decorative features have a sophisticated bearing about them, the same cannot be observed about the other image (figure number 43) of the same theme. Here however the stunted body of the goddess
and a comparatively flattened face add to its individuality. The nature of the floral aureole here is also quite different.

Of the two beautiful images of Ganesha the one (figure number 36) showing the god with his consort on his lap is a very interesting depiction combining naturalism and abstraction. The body of the god, particularly the pot shaped abdomen and very smooth and flesy type of trunk have a refined expression of the sensitivity of the fleshy parts of the body. The deep-set navel, almost like a conduit, cannot but draw our attention. The floral pedestal is also an example of the best refinement of expression. But, interestingly, the figure of the consort has been rendered very summarily, almost in abstract terms. Her figure seems like a doll with notional depiction of the limbs. Compared to this the other figure of Ganesha (figure number 35) is an example of the expression of medieval iconography. Unlike the previous example here the god is shown only with four arms. But here the most distinctiveness is the way the trunk has been shown. The elaborate background with floral aureole adds to the grandeur of the expression.
Beautiful is the word that can be used for the image (figure number 38) depicting lord Krishana dancing on the serpent. This theme is very much common in the metal sculptures particularly from South India. Here the god is shown in dancing pose with his right hand holding a ball of butter and the left hand holding the tail of the snake. The facial expression and the overall appearance are of the majestic glory that the sculptor obviously wanted to express.

The standing figure of Hanuman with folded hands (figure number 37) is distinctive example of mature south Indian sculpture in metal. The lotus pedestal, the drapery and ornaments and the sensitivity of the body surface make the sculpture a unique example of the expression of beauty of proportion and propriety. The facial expression and the anjalimudra of the hands are expressive of humility and devotion that Hanuman, the divine lieutenant of Lord Rama, represents.

Many other interesting examples of stylistic expression are known from the metal sculptures that we have studied from the collections of the Himachal State Museum. The representations of Buddhist and jain themes
are also known. Some of them (figure numbers 39, 39A, 40, 41 and 42) represent Bodhisattvas of Buddhism and Tirthankaras of Jainism. They follow the medieval iconography and style. Although in terms of stylistic features and iconographic characteristic they belong to the category of the usual, they are, nevertheless, representative of the excellence of the art of metal casting that could be achieved even within the canonical prescriptions that these sculptures had to follow.

Some very beautiful examples of wooden sculpture are there in the museum collection. Some of them are carved in low relief, and some in the high. A few examples are there where the carving is almost in the round, as an independent image. For instance, the image of Budha or Bodhisattva (figure number 48). Iconographically also some of these wooden sculptures are very important. For instance the figure showing Māheshvarī seated on a bull (figure number 51). Normally however, Pārvatī or Durgā is shown on a Lion, and her Lord Shiva, rides on the bull. The deviation is significant.
Independent images of Brahama are very rare even in stone and metal sculptures. Here we have a very interesting image of Brahamāni (figure number 52) the consort of Brahma. It is interesting because of its independent presence and also because it being in wood. Wooden representation of mātrica figure is not too frequently met with. A sculpture depicting Narasimha (figure number 49) is a unique expression of this theme. Ferocity combine with divine majesty has been explicitly represented here. Wooden sculptures in India being very few from the early times, this sculpture draws our attention because of its high merit of expressive dynamism. The entire sculpture is charged with the sense of animation which has added to it the feeling of the sentiments of valour and virulence. The face of the god however has the impress of the terrible deities of tantric Buddhist known from Tibet. The wooden sculpture (figure number 50) representing Maheshasuramardinī also deserves special attention. This sculpture hails from the Lahaul spiti area, and that is quite significant. This theme in various expressios was common in the art of Himachal Pradesh. The images of lakshmī Devī and Shakti
Devi from Western Himalayan centres are perhaps the metal counterpart of the basic iconography of Maheshasuramardinī theme.

The collection of the museum preserves a number of sculptures in ivory. All of them are examples of intricate carving of exquisite effect. In this ivory sculptural piece (figure number 53) stands apart due to its beauty and individuality. It represents a lady with a child on her lap. It could have been taken as an example of the theme of mother and the child. But the facial expression of the mother and that of the child mark it with a divine element. The Chubby nature of the child—his anklets and armletas, his hair and mysterious smile in the face cannot but tempt us to identify him as the baby Krishana. If it is so, then it is the representation of mother Yashoda with the enfant Krishana on the lap. The mother seems to be lost in some thoughts, and the child seemingly wants to bring her back to this mundane world. But a fantastic expression of the Divine Lila of Lord Krishana this is.

Apart from the artistic and aesthetic characteristic of the sculptures one can have glimpses on
many important aspect of the culture in those representations. Culture is the totality of the social behaviour of the people in a given time and space. The sculptures that we have studied are ascribable to different periods and to various regions. But in spite of this, it is possible to notice of the overall cultural pattern of the period and area covered by those sculptural expressions. Most of the sculptures belong to the medieval period and they generally hail from northern India. In view of this, the glimpses of culture which are obtained from the view of these sculptures represent the medieval pattern of north Indian culture, so to say.

It is found that most of these sculptures representing human figures have an exhuberance of ornaments and an emphatic stress on personal decorations. Not only that female figures where ornaments like bangles, necklaces, earrings, anklets and the like, even such ornaments are lavishly there on the male figures as well. This is indicative of the fact that the representations cover mostly the economically affluent people. This idea is reflected also by the fact that the facial expressions of most of the figures are of satisfaction and contentment. Of course, some deviations
from this could be noticed in some forms of the tribal and folk types. These figures obviously represent the state of being of the social underdogs. But, interestingly, even these figures seem to be with happy expression in the face. If the sculptural forms are taken to be reflective of the then social and cultural milieu, it should be admitted that the atmosphere was of bounty and sophistication.

Many of the sculptures represent the male and female figures together human or divine. The female figures are not shown with any indication of their lower status. This perhaps shows that the women in the then society participated in the culture of the age in the same way as their male counterparts. In these medieval sculptures we hardly notice any evidence of the existence of the pardah, although in some examples of folk type sculptures there is the evidence of the prevalence of having the evil covering the head partially.

A number of sculptures, mostly from the areas in the Himachal Pradesh, have come to our notice which are usually known as the Barselas. These are mostly commemorative panels. They perpetuate the memory of some
Noteable incidence in the life of the society. Even some kings and queens are often seen to participate in these activities. These panels are not like the satī stone known from various sites of India. But in terms of the idea of co-memoration there is a conceptual similarity between the satī stones and the barsela panels. These panels indicate also the cultural background and the social status of the people who are depicted in them.

In medieval India the iconography of various religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism was elaborated with a hierarchical pantheon. Hindu religion had developed into a number of sects and subsects. These sects and subsects resolved themselves basically into five cults, namely Shaivism (having Śiva as the lord), Vaishnavism, (with Vishṇu as the supreme), the Shaktism, (The Goddess as the principal force), The Sauras, (Sūrya or sun god as the supreme) and the Ganapatyas, (Ganesha or Ganapati as the lord).

In our sculptures we notice the representation of all these divinities with importance to either of them in some and to the other in another sculpture. Similarly, Buddhism seems to have moved far ahead of the situation when it was introduced by Gautama Buddha. Mahayana
Buddhism with its turn towards Tantaryana and Vajrayana systems was the prevailing order. In this system there was the provision of the representation not only of the Buddha but also of the other divinities. In Jainism too, images of the Tirthankaras were frequently represented obviously for ritualistic worship.

In the light of the above mentioned development of the Buddhist iconography we must here refer two interesting images. There is the representation of the Buddha with crown and profuse ornamentation. Usually the Buddha is shown in the dress and personal bearing. The deviation here is interesting and are representative of a new development in the tantarayana- Vajrayana Buddhism. Such images could be found in a vast area from Madhya Pradesh to Indo-China and their dates range from the beginning of the early medieval period (A.D.700) to its conclusion (A.D.1200). Dr. V.S. Pathak has studied these sculptures and have interpreted them interns of a deep rooted Buddhist thought that developed during this period. We also notice another sculptural type of interest. This is the one showing the Bodhisattva Lokesvara shown with four hands the principal pair of
which are disposed in the anjalimudrā (folded hands). This form of Lokesvara is known as the Shadakshari form or the form symbolising the six aksharas syllables—Om Mani Padma Hum⁶ (meaning the jewel on the lotus). This auspicious mantara became eventually a significant expression of the Budhist way of offering of veneration to the Master, i.e. the Buddha. The sculpture showing the multiple presence of the Buddha within a single form is also indicative of an interesting development in Buddhism. It might be a parallel type of the Jain Chaumuhās (The four Jain Tirthankaras shown simultaneously on the four sides).⁷

Compered to the stone and metal sculptures the terracotta sculptures are considered to be the art of the masses in view of the inexpensive material needed for them. But the sculptures in wood and ivory are not to be found in the medieval period for popular usage. The carving of wood was not favoured in most of the areas because of the hazards of durability. In view of this, this material was used with specific purpose and with support from established pattern. Of course, wooden sculpture was practised at the folk and tribal levels. But they are usually of cruder type and the treatment
there is very cursive and summary type. Ivory has been, and it is still so, an expensive material. Moreover, its carving needed the expertise different from that of stone carving. In view of this, this form of art is not too many that have found place in the museums. The Himachal State Museum fortunately has some beautiful examples of ivory sculptures.

The sculptures preserved in the Himachal State Museum offer not only a flight to visual ecstasy, in view of their artistic and aesthetic qualities, but also a glimpse of the culture of the artists and of the pattern who were instrumental in giving these expressions a timeless enshrinement in the museum of the present age.
CHAPTER - III

Notes and References
Notes and references

Chapter-III

1. For instance, the well known sculptural centre like Mathura has a very long tradition of this art. Not only sculptures ascribable to the Kushana, Gupta, and medieval periods are known from this centre, even pre-kushana sculptures are claimed to have been found from this centre. However, such claims are mostly based on surmises, and not on sound evidence of historical archaeology.

2. Raghuvamsham, Canto I, Verse 1. The same poet has given details of this relationship in his other Kavya known as the Kumarasambhavam. In the sculpture that we have mentioned above, the sculptor has beautifully captured these ideas and sentiments of conjugal love and intimacy.


