



THE WONDERLAND HIMACHAL PRADESH • VOLUME I

Art & Architecture

IN HIMACHAL

A complete, exam-ready study of the temples, monasteries, sculpture and the celebrated Pahari painting traditions that make Himachal the Dev Bhumi – the Land of the Gods.

HERITAGE • SCULPTURE • TEMPLES • PAINTING • CRAFTS

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Pan-Indian Traditions that Shaped Himachal

Before Himachal evolved a voice of its own, four great currents of Indian art – Mauryan, Gupta, Pala and Kashmiri – flowed into the hills and left their imprint on stone, bronze and brush.

MAURYAN / ASHOKAN

GUPTA

PALA

KASHMIRI



FOUNDATIONS • THE ROOTS OF HILL ART

How the Art of Himachal Took Shape

The art of Himachal has grown out of its cultural strains and religious beliefs, mirroring the many-sided realities of the hill man's life. Successive waves of migration enriched its forms, and although the great majority of Himachalis are Hindus, their Hinduism differs sharply from that of the plains: every village keeps its own deity alongside the gods of the wider pantheon.

The earliest inhabitants professed some form of **Shaivism**. Whether Shiva-worship was borrowed from the Mohenjodaro culture or was of local origin cannot be settled conclusively, but it was probably around **3000 B.C.** that the art of the region began to crystallise around the fertility symbol of the divine yogi of the Himalaya — the Shiva prototype of the Indus Valley civilisation. Shiva is invoked here under many names: **Mahasu, Mani Mahesh, Ruldung, Baijnath** and others. The major Indian art movements that arose and spread across the subcontinent each left their mark on the hills.

“ Man has been called a "tool-using animal" and no doubt all progress of culture is due to the increased use of tools in the conquest of nature. The material history of man is an account of the progress from a "tool-less state" to the present state of complicated machinery.

OPENING EPIGRAPH • THE WONDERLAND HIMACHAL PRADESH

1. Mauryan (Ashokan) Art

Mauryan art encompasses the work produced under the **Mauryan Empire (4th–2nd century B.C.)**, the first empire to rule over most of the Indian subcontinent. It marks the great transition of Indian art **from wood to stone**. A royal art patronised above all by Ashoka, it survives chiefly in **pillars, stupas and caves**. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* recommends brick and stone for durability, yet devotes long passages to fire-safeguards for the still-popular wooden buildings.

Megasthenes records that Pataliputra was ringed by a massive timber palisade with sixty-four gates and 570 towers. Excavations by Spooner and Waddell at Bulandibagh and Kumrahar uncovered remains of an eighty-pillared hall; one polished grey Chunar-sandstone column closely resembles an Ashokan pillar. Many stupas — Sanchi, Sarnath, probably Amaravati — began as brick-and-masonry mounds in Ashoka's reign.

COURT ART VERSUS POPULAR ART

The period took an imaginative leap in stone sculpture. The elaborately carved **animal capitals** are its finest survivals — above all the **Lion Capital of Ashoka from Sarnath**, now the National Emblem of India. Coomaraswamy distinguishes **court art** (the pillars and their capitals) from **popular art** (works of local sculptors such as the chauri-bearer of Didarganj).

4th–2nd c. B.C.
MAURYAN PERIOD

Sarnath
LION CAPITAL • EMBLEM

Wood»Stone
THE GREAT TRANSITION

The pillars were carved from two stones — the spotted red-and-white sandstone of Mathura and the buff Chunar sandstone near Varanasi — and given the fine Mauryan polish. Notable capitals include the **lion capital of Sarnath**, the **bull capital of Rampurva** and the lion of Laurya Nandangarh, whose Achaemenid affinities have long been debated. Popular art is seen in the female figure of Besnagar, the male figure of Parkham, the Didarganj chauri-bearer and the rock-cut elephant at Dhauli. Terracotta mother-goddesses and folk deities of great earthy charm have also been found at Mauryan sites; under Ashoka the forms turned ever more toward realism, culminating in the Buddhist art of the plains. A shrine to **Lakulisha** (ascetic Pashupati) at Maruta Math, Udaipur, in Chamba-Lahaul, and Gurughantal in Lahaul-Spiti, carry this tradition into the hills.

2. Gupta Art

Many historians regard the Guptas as a **Vaishya** dynasty. R.S. Sharma sees them as a reaction against oppressive rulers; A.S. Altekar, the numismatist, likewise read the "-gupta" name-ending as a Vaishya marker. As Michael Brannigan notes, their rise was a striking breach of the caste order. Their original homeland is disputed — H.C. Raychaudhuri places it in the Varendri region (now in Bangladesh), while D.C. Ganguly favours Murshidabad.

The pilgrim **Fa-Hien** visited during Chandragupta II, leaving China in 399 C.E. and reaching India in 405 C.E.; he found a mild administration where offences were punished by fines alone, and a prosperous realm.

WHY THE GUPTA AGE MATTERS

The Gupta period is the **classic peak of north-Indian art**. It saw the iconic carved stone deity in Hindu art and the great Buddha and Jain Tirthankara figures. The twin sculptural centres were **Mathura** and **Gandhara** (the home of Greco-Buddhist art).

Though produced under later dynasties, the caves of **Ajanta, Elephanta and Ellora** reflect Guptan monumentality and balance; Ajanta preserves the most important paintings of the era. The Udayagiri Caves record the dynasty itself, and the Dashavatara Temple at Deogarh is among the earliest surviving structural temples. In the Himalaya, Gupta art flowered in the Shivalik hills from the **6th–8th century**

onward; in upper Lahaul-Spiti the local art was shaped instead by Tibet and the towering figure of **Padmasambhava**.

3. Pala Art

The **Pala Empire** was a Buddhist imperial power of classical South Asia, named for rulers whose names ended in *-pala* ("protector"). Centred on present-day Bengal, Bihar and Nepal, the Palas followed the Mahayana and Vajrayana schools and built outstanding temples and monasteries — including the UNESCO-listed **Somapura Mahavihara**. The renowned universities of **Nalanda** and **Vikramashila** flourished under their patronage.

c. 750s Gopala becomes first Pala king in a landmark election by regional chieftains.

Peak Dharmapala & Devapala contest Kannauj with the Rashtrakutas and Gurjara-Pratiharas.

Revival Mahipala I and later Ramapala briefly restore Pala power before the Senas displace them.

The Pala school of sculpture — influenced by Gupta art and famed for the technical sophistication of Bengal's sculptors — forms a distinct phase of Indian art. The art of Bihar and Bengal under the Palas and Senas in turn influenced **Nepal, Burma, Sri Lanka and Java**. Somapura's twenty-one-acre complex held 177 cells, stupas and temples; many such mammoth viharas were mistaken for forts by Bakhtiyar Khilji's forces and demolished.

4. Kashmiri Art

The Kashmiri idiom is widely celebrated. The valley's temple ruins (7th–9th century) are among India's oldest standing temples. The **Martanda Temple**, built by **Lalitaditya Muktapida**, is one of the earliest and largest stone temples of Kashmir — a rectangular mandapa-and-shrine plan enclosed by a peristyle courtyard of **84 niches**, each once holding an image of Surya (84 = 21×4, from the solar association of 21).

Lalitaditya also raised a vast chaitya and an even larger stupa at Parihasapura, whose monuments became models for Buddhist architecture **from Afghanistan to Japan**. The Pandrethan temple and the Avantipura complex (built by King Avantivarman, 855–883 A.D.) display further excellence; Kashmiri ivories and bronzes are reckoned among the world's finest.

A PAINTING TRADITION CARRIED INTO THE MOUNTAINS

Kashmir's painting survives mainly through the Buddhist temples of Ladakh and Tibet, since records in the valley were lost after the advent of Islam. The Tibetan scholar **Rinchen Zangpo (950–1055 A.D.)** is said to have visited Kashmir thrice, bringing back 75 Kashmiri craftsmen to build and decorate 108 temples in western Tibet. The Gilgit manuscript paintings — their Padmapani figures fusing Gandharan, Gupta and local elements — deepen our picture of the school.

The finest surviving site is the **dharma-mandala at Alchi in Ladakh**, which escaped the destruction other Ladakhi temples suffered. Its Du-khang preserves astonishing mandalas; the three-storey Sum-tsek shows piled-rock walls, mud plaster and delicate Kashmiri wood-carving, with a famous painting of **Pra-**



jnaparamita. The wall-paintings of Mang-nang and the manuscripts of Tholing in western Tibet are now accepted as Kashmiri work — a final, refined stage of the style that faintly recalls distant Ajanta.

The Three Art Streams of Himachal

From these many influences an indigenous voice emerged. The art of the hills can be classified into three great groups, each rooted in a different material, people and faith.

KHASA • WOOD

INDO-ARYAN • STONE

INDO-TIBETAN • VAJRAYANA



THREE STREAMS • ONE TRADITION

The Art Styles of Himachal Pradesh

The divided Himalayan region, parcelled among small rulers (Chauhan, Parmara, Rathore, Chandela), lacked the centralised patronage of the plains. From the amalgamation of many styles an indigenous art grew on local resources — later famous as the **Pahari style**. Broadly, the art of Himachal falls into three groups: the indigenous **Khasa art**, the **Indo-Aryan art**, and the **Indo-Tibetan art**.

1. Indigenous Khasa Art — The Age of Wood

The most ancient architecture of Himachal is in the local style, and its base material is **wood**. The copper and silver coins of the **Audumbaras** (2nd century B.C.) bear a *dhwaja* (royal flag), a *trishul* (trident) and a battle-axe — the earliest evidence for Shaivite temples in those olden days. The vast number of temples scattered across the middle belt of the Himachal Himalaya are all built in **deodar wood**.

2. Indo-Aryan Art — The Rajput Inheritance

Indo-Aryan art refers to the major tradition of Indian art that matured under the Guptas and flourished in the Indo-Gangetic belt. After the death of **Harsha (647 A.D.)**, the Rajputs dominated the art and history of northern India for five-and-a-half centuries, until the Muslim arrival at the close of the 12th century. Dignified powers — Yashovarman of Kannauj, the Gurjara-Pratiharas, the Palas of Bengal and Bihar, the Rashtrakutas of the south — pushed up to the Himalaya and settled their kinsmen there.

Artists and artisans migrated with them, so the Rajputs were partly responsible for introducing **post-Gupta forms** into the region. In time the original inhabitants took over the art and translated it into beautiful temple architecture and sculpture found all over the Pradesh. This purely local style — one that could only have been shaped in Himachal — **bloomed from the 8th to the 13th century A.D.**

3. Indo-Tibetan Art — The Vajrayana World

This style flourished in **Kinnaur, Lahaul and Spiti**, the trans-Himalayan tract. Buddhism here took the form of the **Vajrayana** ("the school of the Thunderbolt"), distinct from the Hinayana and Mahayana, marked by elaborate symbols and named deities invoked for spiritual advancement. It survives in Lahaul-Spiti and Kinnaur, and across the Himalaya in Ladakh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim.

THE VAJRAYANA VISUAL VOCABULARY

Tibetan art is overwhelmingly religious — distemper on cloth (*thangka*) or murals. Vajrayana practice uses **visualisations**, so meditational deities (*vidams*), mandalas and ritual implements are central. A common figure is **Chenrezig (Avalokiteshvara)**, the thousand-armed all-seeing compassionate one.

A striking feature is the **wrathful deity** — the protector (*dharmapala*) whose fearsome face masks a compassionate nature, used to conquer the practitioner's negative attitudes. The indigenous shamanistic religion of the Himalaya, **Bon**, contributes local tutelary deities; in temples (*lhakhang*), statues of the Buddha or Padmasambhava are often paired with a dark, angry local guardian who — after Padmasambhava subdued these forces — now serves the Buddha.

III

PART THREE

Temple Architecture & the Major Shrines

Perpetual snows, deodar forests, Rajput adventurers and Shakti Peethas together produced a rich diversity of temple forms. Here are the shrines that define the Land of the Gods.

MASRUR ROCK-CUT

BAIJNATH

SHAKTI PEETHAS

BIJLI MAHADEV



DEV BHUMI • THE LAND OF THE GODS

Temple Architecture of Himachal

Perpetual flames and snow, abundant sandstone and deodar, heavy rain in some valleys and none in others, half a dozen socio-religious groups settling centuries apart, principalities founded by Rajput adventurers from Rajasthan, contact with the Mughal Durbar, the Vaishnava revival of the 18th–19th centuries, Nadir Shah's 1739 sack of Delhi (which drove master painters into the hills), and Maharaja Ranjit Singh's devotion to Jwalamukhi — all of this has produced an extraordinary diversity of temple forms, functions and decoration.

Bajaura — Vishweshwar Mahadev

KULLU

Dated to the **late 10th–11th century** and reflecting Pala influence, the Mahadev temple at Bajaura is hailed as one of the finest monuments of the western Himalaya and a unique late-Gupta survival. Its striking features are the balance of composition and the strength of its carving.

Jwalamukhi Temple

KANGRA

One of the **fifty-one Shakti Peethas**, where the **tongue of Sati** is said to have fallen. The eternal flames issuing from the earth are worshipped as Jwalamukhi Devi — the goddess from whose mouth flames come forth. Even Akbar is said to have visited to test its power. Great fairs gather here during the Chaitra and Ashwin Navratras.

Brajeshwari Devi — Nagarkot Dham

KANGRA

A Shakti Peetha where the **left breast of Sati** fell. Legend credits the original temple to the Pandavas at Nagarkot. Famously wealthy, it was repeatedly plundered — Mahmud of Ghazni is said to have looted it at least five times. The shrine is a stupendous example of superior stone carving, with two janitor-figures at the doorway and exterior niches enshrining four-armed Durga on a lion and Vishnu in his Vaikuntha form.

The Monolithic Temples of Masrur

Structurally the Masrur complex belongs to the **rock-cut technique of the Nagara style**. Having surveyed the rock and drawn their plan, the architects made two parallel transverse cuttings 11–18 feet wide and quarried out a block 160 feet long and 105 feet wide, keeping the highest point at the centre to become the main shrine. The whole composition revolves around this tallest, biggest *vimana*; the others

merely enhance its grandeur. To the north a rectangular tank, 155×85 feet, is scooped from the same rock.

STRUCTURE

When complete, the main shrine was a full early-Nagara *vimana* — **garbha-griha**, **jagmohana** (audience hall) and **ardha-mandapa** (portico) — rising to about **80 feet** at the top of the shikhara. Today only pillar-bases of the ardha-mandapa and a fragment of the jagmohana remain. The garbha-griha (13 ft square, 16 ft high) has uncarved walls but a ceiling with a great central lotus; on a platform of the parent rock stand images of **Rama, Sita and Lakshmana**.

THE 15-SHRINE PLAN, IN BRIEF

Intact, the complex held **15 shrines** — the main shrine, four corner shrines, four flanking shrines, two side shrines and two unattached end-shrines — plus two shikhara-roofed staircases, a flat roof shooting up thirteen shikharas, and four *gopuram*-like spires. The Nandi pavilion has never been traced.

SCULPTURE

Sculpturally the work is mature but not over-elaborate: here sculpture is **subordinate to structure** (the reverse of Ellora's Kailasha). Every carvable surface — shikhara faces, door-jambs, lintels, friezes, cornices, ceilings, pillars — is moulded into floral motifs, geometric designs and divine figures. The lintel of the main doorway depicts the **coronation of Shiva**, with nine seated divinities and winged *ganas* about to crown him — proof that the shrine was originally Shaivite, though now worshipped as a Thakurdwara (Vaishnava).

WHO BUILT IT — AND WHEN?

Local legend, as ever, credits the **Pandavas**, who began it during a six-month night of their exile and fled when a lamp was mistaken for dawn (a tale also told of Baijnath). In truth, with no temple-building tradition in these hills before the 8th century, the work must have been executed by a **professional guild from Orissa or the Deccan**, masters of both Nagara and Dravidian modes — the *gopurams* and flat roof betraying Dravida knowledge.

Only four free-standing rock-cut monuments are known: the *Rathas* of Mahabalipuram and the Kailasha of Ellora (Dravidian), and **Masrur** and Dhamnar (Nagara). Masrur, with its 15 shrines (against Dhamnar's 8), its superior carving, and its position atop a 2,500-foot ridge that "elates" rather than "depresses," surpasses its Nagara rival. Datable only by style, it is fixed to the **8th century** — the first Nagara temple of these hills, predating Bajaura (11th c.) and Baijnath (13th c.). It was brought to scholarly notice by H.L. Shuttleworth in **1913**, having survived iconoclasm by its remoteness and the 1905 earthquake by being of solid rock.

“The aim of a Nagara temple is to convey the soaring urge of the human soul towards the universal spirit. When the man-made shikharas run parallel to the pinnacles of the snowy range, the effect is sublime — the flanking spires rising like nymphs towards Krishna, or souls running into the mouth of the Lord.

ON THE AESTHETICS OF MASRUR

The monument satisfies the classical canons of **saundarya** (harmony of proportion), **lavanya** (the ennobling total effect) and **auchitya** (propriety of theme), and is touched by what Jagannatha called *cham-atkara* — aesthetic wonder.

Bajinath Temple

KANGRA

Dedicated to **Vaidyanath (Shiva)**, this 13th-century shrine stands in the ancient land of the Kiratas, as a Sharada-script Sanskrit inscription on its stone slabs attests. A conical spire crowns it; four artistic pillars divide the mandapa ceiling into fine compartments. Legend says **Ravana** offered nine of his heads to Shiva here; all were revived as he reached for the tenth, and the pleased god blessed him with a rare Shivalinga.

Bhadrakali & Lakhpur Temples

KANGRA

The nearly 400-year-old Bhadrakali temple at Sarah tilted on its foundation in the **1905 earthquake** yet stood for over a century before INTACH, using Orissan artisans, dismantled and numbered every stone for an exact reconstruction. Nearby in Kangra town stand the Lakshmi Narayan, Ambika Devi, Shitla Mata and Indreshwar temples.

Lakshmi Narayan Temple Complex

CHAMBA

The oldest and largest temple group of Chamba, begun by **Raja Sahil Varman (c. 920 A.D.)** and added to by later rajas. Built in the **Shikhara (Shilhara) style**, its six main shrines — dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu — run north to south. The image of Vishnu was carved from rare marble brought from the Vindhyas; legend says Sahil Varman sacrificed several sons to obtain it, his eldest, Yugankar, finally fetching the stone. The wooden *chhatris* and shell-roofs answer the local need for protection against snowfall; Raja Chhatra Singh placed gilded pinnacles on the temples in defiance of Aurangzeb.

Bharmaur — The Bronze Tradition

Few realise that Himachal holds a heritage of **bronze sculpture**. The art was patronised by **Meru Varma**, who ruled the area in ancient times; almost all the temples at Bharmaur preserve bronze images. Their remoteness kept them safe from smugglers — only one image was ever stolen, and that was recovered and restored. With the cost of bronze now many times higher, artists work only on order.

Panchvaktra Temple (Mandi) — a 14th-century shrine to the five-faced Shiva (*Panchanan*), at the picturesque confluence of the Beas and Suketi.

Bala Sundari, Trilokpur (Sirmaur) — a form of Durga on a hillock, drawing lakhs of pilgrims to its annual fair, founded after a salt-trader's vision of the goddess.

Bhalei Mata (Chamba) — built by Raja Pratap Singh in the 18th century after the deity appeared in his dream; the idol could not be carried onward from Bhalei, so the temple rose there.

Bijli Mahadev (Kullu) — 14 km from Kullu at 2,460 m, overlooking the Beas-Parvati confluence. Its

60-foot staff glistens like a silver needle; lightning ("bijli") strikes the Shivalinga each year, shattering it, after which the priest rejoins the pieces with butter.

Hidimba Temple, Manali (Kullu) — dedicated to Hidimba, wife of Bhima; a four-tiered pagoda roof over a doorway carved with legendary figures.

Bhutnath & Ardhanarishwar (Mandi) — Raja Ajbar Sen founded the township of Mandi around the Bhutnath shrine; the Ardhanarishwar idol bears Shiva on its right half and Parvati on its left.

The Great Shakti Peethas

Naina Devi

BILASPUR

On the triangular Naina Dhar hill (3,535 ft) overlooking the Gobind Sagar lake, this is the Peetha where the **eyes of Sati** fell. Also called **Mahishapeeth** for the Goddess's defeat of the demon Mahishasura — whose eyes she tore out, prompting the gods to cry "Jai Naina!" A cable-car now carries pilgrims to the top. The shrine drew tragedy on 3 August 2008, when at least 123 devotees died in a stampede during Sawan.

Chintpurni — Chhinnamastika Devi

UNA

One of the most important of the 51 Shakti Peethas, where part of Sati's **forehead** fell. By the Markandeya Purana, the goddess Chandi severed her own head to satisfy her thirsty yoginis Jaya and Vijaya — hence Chhinnamasta, the headless goddess, who frees the yogi's consciousness from the body. She is guarded in the four directions by four Shiva temples (Kaleshwar, Narayana, Muchkund and Shiva Bari), confirming Chintpurni as her abode.

Baba Balak Nath — Deot Sidh

HAMIRPUR-BILASPUR BORDER

A Hindu deity worshipped in a natural cave 45 km from Hamirpur. Believed to be an incarnation of **Kartikeya**, born "Dev" in Junagadh and made a Sidh under Guru Dattatreya, he is offered rot (gur-and-wheat bread in pure ghee). Women may not enter the cave but take darshan from an opposite platform; six km away lies Shahtalai, where Babaji practised *Dhyana Yoga*.

REFORM: THE 2008 TEMPLE COMMITTEE

On 3 July 2008 a committee reviewed temple control, recommending removal of encroachments, orientation programmes and full historical knowledge for priests, CCTV for security, a **Dharamsthal Parishad** for supervision, and uniform rules for temple workers.

Among many others stand the **Mrikula Devi** (Kali) temple, founded by the Kangra-born queen Surya Mati of the Kashmiri king Ananta; the Hateshwari temple at Hatkoti; the Chamunda, Tara Devi, Magru Mahadev and Shringa Rishi shrines — and at every village a temple, so that Himachal is rightly called **Dev Bhumi**, where Shiva and Shakti are worshipped under countless names.

IV

PART FOUR

Buddhist Sculpture & the Monasteries

In the trans-Himalayan valleys of Lahaul, Spiti and Kinnaur, a Lamaistic world of gompas, frescoes and thangkas keeps the eighth-century faith of Padmasambhava alive.

TABO • 996 A.D.

GURU GHANTAL

KARDANG

TRILOKINATH



LITTLE LHASA • THE LAMAISTIC HERITAGE

Buddhist Sculpture & Monasteries

Buddhism in Himachal can be traced to the early 8th century and is rooted deepest in the Lahaul, Spiti and Kinnaur valleys. After the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, escaped Tibet in 1959 and took refuge in India, Tibetan Buddhism spread further; the Dalai Lama made Dharamshala his capital-in-exile, with McLeod Ganj — "Little Lhasa," or **Dhasa** — close by.

The faith's local link reaches back to **747 A.D.**, when **Guru Padmasambhava** — the "Guru Rinpoche" and "Second Buddha" — went from Rewalsar in Himachal to Tibet to spread Buddhism. The Western Himalaya, bounded by the Indus and the Tons-Yamuna gorge, remains a stronghold of Tibetan Buddhism, now pursued both by resettled Tibetans and the original practitioners of the high valleys.

A DIFFERENT ARCHITECTURE

In Lahaul-Spiti and Kinnaur, bordering Tibet, the architecture of **Lamaistic (Northern) Buddhism** differs sharply from the hill style: **flat roofs, inward-sloping walls** of sun-dried brick or simple stone. Inside, frescoes in the Tibetan manner and hanging *thangkas* surround a central chapel, with images of the Buddha, Padmasambhava and Avalokiteshvara. The Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti gompas are flat-roofed; the Rewalsar monastery, by contrast, is in the tiered **pagoda** style.

Mrikula Devi

UDAIPUR, LAHAUL

About 54 km from Keylong, in the place anciently called **Moorgul / Mrikul**. Tradition holds it was designed by the same architect who built the Hidimba temple for the Kullu raja, and shares carvings with that famous shrine — arguably the last wooden temple in the early 8th-century tradition.

Trilokinath Temple

MOOLING, LAHAUL-SPITI

Sacred to **both Hindus and Buddhists**, with a white-marble image of Avalokiteshvara at the centre of its compound. Every August the three-day **Pauri festival** brings both communities to seek the deity's blessings.

Guru Ghantal & Kardang Gompas

LAHAUL

Guru Ghantal (8th century, consecrated by Guru Padmasambhava) is a fully wooden temple above the Chandra-Bhaga confluence, hosting the annual *Ghantal festival* and an idol of Bajreshwari Devi. **Kardang**, erected around 900 A.D., is rich in colourful frescoes and prayer-wheels inscribed a million times with the sacred mantra; here nuns and lamas enjoy equality, and the silver memorial stupa of Lama Norbu (d. 1952) is preserved.

Gemur & Shashur Monasteries

LAHAUL

Gemur (18 km from Keylong) keeps a lovely 11th–12th-century sculpture of **Marichi Vajravarahi** and hosts a July masked dance. **Shashur**, a 17th-century gompa, is decorated with murals and large thangkas.

Tabo — "The Ajanta of the Himalaya"

The 10th-century **Tabo Monastery** of Spiti, regarded by many as second only to the Tholing Gompa of Tibet, houses over thirty lamas and a great store of scriptures, wall-paintings, thangkas and stucco. It was founded around **996 A.D.** by the western-Tibetan ruler **Yeshe-O**, inspired by Rinchen Zangpo, and took forty-six years to complete with craftsmen drawn from Kashmir, Kullu and Swat.

WHY TABO IS CELEBRATED

Its wall-frescoes rival **Ajanta** in antiquity and quality — hence its popular name. On 12 July 1983 the 14th Dalai Lama inaugurated a new temple here, and Tabo celebrated its **1,000th year in 1996**.

North of Tabo lie meditation caves now preserved by the Archaeological Survey. With a temple in every village, there is, as the chapter says, no hesitation in calling Himachal the **Dev Bhumi**.

The Styles of Hill Architecture

Where dense forests met heavy snows, the Himalaya evolved a distinctive architecture in stone and deodar — expressed in four great roof-forms.

PENT-ROOF

PAGODA

DOMED

FLAT-ROOF KANGRA



STONE & DEODAR • FOUR ROOF-FORMS

The Hill Architecture

Hill architecture means a stone-and-wood structure on a square or rectangular plan, roofed with concave or superimposed pyramidal forms one above the other. Such temples are scattered across upper Garhwal, Kumaon, Kashmir, Kinnaur, Mandi and beyond. The timber is the prized **cedar deodar** (locally keloo), which resists decay and insects and lives over a thousand years.

1. THE PENT-ROOF (PAHARI) STYLE

Simple in structure, of stone and wood, with a sloping slate roof and a circumambulatory passage around the shrine; the wood is laid not only across but also along the length, the gap filled with cement-lime. Carvings adorn the ceiling. The temples of **Chamba** are the supreme examples — thorough use of wood, fine wood-carving, and exquisite metal images.

2. THE PAGODA STYLE

Here the diminishing roofs rise one above the other, the topmost — unlike the squarish lower tiers — round and funnel-shaped. Fewer than the pent-roofs, the well-known examples include **Hidimba Devi (Dungri) at Manali, Tripura Sundari at Naggar, Bijli Mahadev, Tryambakeshwar (Trijugi Narayan) at Diyar, Adi Brahma, Prashar and Chhatari (Mandi), and Sharvari**. Outside India the pagoda style is found in Nepal and Myanmar.

3. THE DOMED TEMPLES

A direct outcome of **Mughal and Sikh rule**, built by local rulers in the 18th–19th centuries. Important domed shrines include those of Jwalamukhi and Chintpurni, and temples in Mandi and Tarnah.

4. THE FLAT-ROOFED TEMPLES OF KANGRA VALLEY

Here ordinary mud-and-lime-plastered walls carry remarkable **Pahari-style paintings** drawn from the Ramayana and Mahabharata — a category famously represented in the Kangra valley.

Deodar

CEDAR • 1000+ YRS

Pagoda

NEPAL & MYANMAR TOO

Domed

MUGHAL & SIKH ERA

Pahari Painting & its Schools

In the seclusion of the hills, under the patronage of chieftains, Himachal gave India one of its most lyrical arts — the Pahari miniature, in the kalams of Basohli, Guler, Kangra, Chamba and Arki.

BASOHLI

GULER

KANGRA

CHAMBA

ARKI



THE LYRICAL ART OF THE HILLS

Pahari Painting

Himachal is known the world over for its painting. The excellence of the Pahari painters owes everything to the secluded hills — their peace, natural beauty, religious cast of life, and the security and patronage of the chieftains. The principal kalam schools are the **Mandi, Kangra, Kullu, Bilaspur and Arki** schools.

A local school existed before the Mughal style intruded. In its early stages, Raja Kirpal Pal of Basohli (1678–94), Raja Chhattar Singh of Chamba and the rulers of Kahlur and Baghal — descendants of the Chandelas of Bundelkhand — nurtured the art. Himachali painting falls into three kinds: **miniature** painting on stiff handmade paper; **wall painting** in temples and palaces (the murals of the Rang Mahal, Chamba, and Sultanpur Palace, Kullu, now grace the National Museum); and **manuscript** painting of the 18th–19th centuries — the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavata Purana.

Basohli School

EARLIEST HILL SCHOOL • FROM C. 1678 • RAJA KIRPAL PAL

The earliest known hill school, rising under Raja Kirpal Pal of Basohli (1678–93). Basohli is today a byword for a **vigorous, bold, unconventional** style — primary colours, a peculiar facial formula, beetle-wing green for emeralds. From Basohli the manner spread to Mankot, Nurpur, Kullu, Mandi, Suket, Bilaspur, Nalagarh, Chamba, Guler and Kangra. It was first reported by the Archaeological Survey in 1921.

Guler School — the Cradle of Kangra Kalam

FOUNDED 1415 • RAJA DALIP SINGH & GOVARDHAN CHAND

Guler, founded in 1415 by Raja Hari Chand, is famed as the **birthplace of Kangra painting**. In the early 18th century a family of Kashmiri painters trained in Mughal style took shelter at the court of **Raja Dalip Singh (1695–1741)**; an active school flourished under Govardhan Chand (1743–73) at Haripur Guler. Guler work has liquid grace, precision, and cool blues and greens — "the colours of the dawn and the rainbow." Its masters were **Pandit Seu** (d. c. 1740) and his sons Manaku and Nainsukh.

Kangra School

ZENITH UNDER RAJA SANSAR CHAND (1775–1823) • SUJANPUR TIRA

Absorbed from Guler, Kangra painting softened Mughal influence with Hindu religious devotion. **Raja Sansar Chand** patronised the Kangra Kalam, whose full flowering came at **Sujanpur Tira**. Its hallmarks are delicate line, the charm of colour and intricate detail. Its focal theme is **shringar** — the love of Radha and Krishna, drawn from the Gita Govinda and Bhagavata Purana — set in lush, naturalistic landscapes of many greens, flowering creepers and brooks. Female figures are exceptionally graceful; colours are cool, made from vegetable and mineral extracts. The Kangra Arts Promotion Society at Dharamshala now works to save this dying art, which takes nearly a year to prepare its natural colours.

Arki School

CAPITAL OF BAGHAL • SOLAN • "THE SUNNY PLACE"

Arki, capital of the old **Baghal** state ("the land of leopards"), first felt the Kangra influence and then adopted its style. Its paintings depict the Krishna legend, Shiva-Parvati and **Nayaka-Nayika** themes from the Rasikapriya of Keshavdas. Ranas Mehar Chand and Bhup Chand favoured the Basohli Kalam, while later rulers helped the Kangra Kalam flourish; the famous Arki *wall-paintings* were executed in this period.

Chamba Painting

17TH–EARLY 20TH C. • BHURI SINGH MUSEUM

Early Chamba work was in the Basohli Kalam, later influenced by Kangra under Raja Raj Singh, a contemporary of Sansar Chand — the golden period of Pahari miniatures, now in museums worldwide. The **Bhuri Singh Museum** holds two kinds: portraits of the rulers in homely settings, and mythological series. Nikka of Basohli migrated here; master artists included **Laharu, Mahesh, Nainsukh, Nikka, Godhu, Kishan Lal** and Chhajju. Painters from Chamba, Guler and the neighbouring states often worked here as guests around their yearly pilgrimage to Manimahesh Kailash.

VII

PART SEVEN

Crafts, the Chamba Rumal & the Painters

Beyond the temple wall and the miniature lay a living world of embroidery, metalware and the master families who carried the brush across generations.

CHAMBA RUMAL

METALWARE

PANDIT SEU & SONS

HIMBUNKAR



THE LIVING HERITAGE

Crafts & the Master Painters

The Chamba Rumal — "Painting in Thread"

Where men painted, the women of Chamba and Jammu translated the same skill into **embroidery**. The **rumal** ("handkerchief") was not for the pocket but for covering gifts on metal and bamboo trays at weddings, festivals and fairs. On a base of white *khaddar* cloth, untwisted raw-silk threads in many hues were worked in the **double-satin stitch**, giving an identical picture on both sides.

A MASTERPIECE IN LONDON

One of the finest specimens — depicting the **battle of Kurukshetra** — was presented by Raja Gopal Singh of Chamba to the British Resident in the 19th century and is now in the **Victoria and Albert Museum, London**.

Raja Sir Bhuri Singh of Chamba (1904–19) had such embroidered cloths produced and showed them at the Delhi Darbars of 1907 and 1911 — the first wide appreciation of the craft, which thereafter carried Chamba's name. Its decline at the close of the 19th century was reversed by the interest of J.Ph. Vogel and Bhuri Singh, and after Independence by the state's Handicrafts and Handloom department.

The Crafts of Chamba

Chamba is noted for metal-casting in copper and brass since the Bronze Age — large relief plaques for walls, and the golden **kalasha** crowning temple cupolas. It is equally famed for its leather and "vegetarian" (leather-free) footwear, its embroidered double-sided shawls and handkerchiefs, gold and silver jewellery showing Tibetan and pan-Indian influences, wood-carving for temple iconography (as at Chamunda), and musical instruments — the kettle-drum *nagara*, the curved and straight *singa*/*ransinga* horns, the *shankh*, *karnal* and many more.

The Painters of Himachal

Little is known of the earliest masters; clearer light dawns in the 17th century. Under **Raja Raj Singh of Chamba (1765–94)**, the artist **Nikka** reached a high mark in the Chamba style. Greatest of all was the family of **Pandit Seu** of the Guler-Pahari school, whose sons **Manaku** and **Nainsukh** inherited his art. Nainsukh served Raja Balwant Singh from 1743; Manaku became one of the great masters of Pahari miniature under Sansar Chand of Kangra.

- **Fattu** Eldest son of Manaku — the Sat Sai, the Lambagraon Baramasa and the Ragamala are his work.
- **Kishan Lal (Kaushala)** Another son of Manaku — probably the Srimad Bhagavata Purana; with Godhu, Sansar Chand's atelier in-charge.
- **Sardar Sobha Singh** Master of the Kangra revival; his "Sohni Mahiwal" is celebrated. His gallery stands at Andretta, Kangra.

Famous Chamba painter-families — those of **Mangu, Banwari, Mukund and the Chaity clan** (originally of Guler) — carried the brush across many generations, painting marriage panels, deities and palace murals down to recent times.

Reviving a Fading Art

In May 2018 the **National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT)**, **Kangra** joined artisans to revive dying crafts — pine-needle, bamboo and wood-inlay work — through awareness workshops. The state's apex body, **HIMBUNKAR** (the H.P. State Handloom & Handicrafts Weavers' Apex Society), unites some 253 primary co-operatives — 89 of them run by women — producing woollen, angora and pashmina shawls, Tibetan carpets, embroidered leather footwear, Chamba handkerchiefs, pottery, wood and metal craft, and supports them with raw material, modern tools, design and marketing.



Dev Bhumi — The Land of the Gods

From Mauryan stone to the Chamba mural, every valley of Himachal tells a story in temple, bronze and brush.