

Chapter 6

Influences and Innovations: Analysing the Collaboration of Painters with Regional Sculptors, Metalsmiths and Woodcarvers

The role of painters in the development of Chamba painting has received little scholarly attention in the past. Development of subject-matter and its systematic evolution is largely credited to the patron, whose personal choices and inclinations usually dictate the popularity of the thematic content. Albeit the selection of themes is purely out of the wishes of the patron, the accountability of presentation solely lies on the executor, the painter in this context, who determines the layout of composition, iconographic devices and typological arrangements in the paintings.

My analysis of typological elements and iconographic details in Chamba painting revealed that while the painters were developing a visual language on the basis of their interpretation of mythological episodes, poetic texts and local legends and folklore, their modes of representation were emerging through the influence of the regional sculpture and woodcarving traditions. This was also greatly influenced by their close association and collaborations with contemporary craftsmen such as sculptors, woodcarvers and metal-craftsmen, and the abundance of artworks left by their predecessors.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the painters, on their arrival at Chamba, were settled in the lower terrace of Chamba town among traditional craftsmen and artisans including tinkers, sculptors and woodcarvers. Being in the vicinity of other craftsmen and coming into relations through marital ties, the painters seem to have been closely associated with sculptors and woodcarvers, leading to an exchange of ideas to occur. This bilateral exchange inspired the painters to adopt symbols and iconographic devices from these craftsmen, while influencing their visual lexicon in return.

However, it appears that the syncretism was not limited to a mere exchange of ideas, but the painters were directly involved in crafts other than painting. In the *bahis* of

Haridwar, the painters of Chamba refer to themselves as *tarkhan-chitere*, meaning painter-carpenters. It cannot be ascertained whether the painters were already trained as professional carpenters prior to their arrival at Chamba or received training once a workshop at Chamba was established.

In my opinion, the *tarkhan-chitere* were unfamiliar with the usual manner of chiselling, as the early woodcarvings assigned to the painters are rendered in bas-relief, as opposed to the traditional high-relief method. As all of the later woodcarvings assigned to them are executed in the bas-relief style, it is plausible to presume that the painter-carpenters continued to work in the bas-relief tradition in a characteristic method.

Second important evidence reflecting the direct involvement of painters with metal-casting is the inscription pertinent to the gold-plated silver *torana* of the Lakshmi-Narayana temple at Chamba town, installed in the year 1747 CE, on the orders of Raja Dalel Singh. The inscription is the earliest known record to denote a direct participation of painters with metal-casting, as it attributes the design of the *torana* to painters **Laharu** and **Mahesh**. The inscription reads:

Om, Hail. In the year 1804 of the illustrious king Vikramaditya (1747 CE), the Shalivahana Saka year 1669, and in the thirteenth year of the reign of illustrious Dalel Singh; in the month of Shravana during the rainy season; on Wednesday, the eleventh day of the dark fortnight, in Mrigahir Nakshatra during Dakshinayana, gold-plated silver Torana was offered to the Lord Lakshmi Narayana. Of the kingdom of the illustrious Dalel Singh, Kundyal Jaimal is the minister, the minister of Lakshmi Narayana [temple] is Mansueda.

The painters and others who made this [Torana] are; painters Laharu and Mahesh; goldsmiths Yeerju and Kirpu; coppermiths Jairam and Kirpu. Their supervisors and others [are]; Holalu Durga Das Petru and Bhagwan Soni

Bania; Mehta Ludra; Pandit Dayarama. During the term [for Pooja] of the priests Lakshu, Dheech and Kirpu, the watchmen Prashadu, Ablu, Hariya and Sontokhu and the storekeeper Shiv Ram, the Torana was offered. Written on the 21st day of the Shastra year 23. Bliss.

The evidence of the association of painters with sculptors and woodcarvers and the visual correlation of sculpture, woodcarving, and metal-casting with Chamba painting is additionally best understood by analysing the iconography, typology, and symbolism evidenced in the hero-stones of the Rajas (stone), the Torana of the Lakshmi Narayana Temple (metal), the wooden doorways of the Bharmour Kothi, and the woodcarvings of three Devi temples at Chamba²⁸⁴ (wood).

This exchange contributed towards the development of an iconographic and typological lexicon which was very specific to Chamba. In this chapter I aim to locate and pinpoint specific instances of parallel imageries and typologies between the above-mentioned aspects and the Chamba school of painting.

6.1 Hero-Stones of the Rajas of Chamba

The material under investigation is as below:

Hero-stone A – Raja Udai Singh in Vamsigopala Temple (c. 1720)

Hero-stone B – Raja Udai Singh in Udaipur (c. 1720)

Hero-stone C – Mian Lakshman Singh in Vamsigopala Temple (c. 1720)

Hero-stone D – Raja Ugar Singh in Vamsigopala Temple (c. 1735)

During the early 18th century, two Rajas of Chamba – Raja Udai Singh (r. 1690—1720) and Raja Ugar Singh (r. 1720—35) – were assassinated by their court, a fact highlighted in Chapter 3. **Hero-Stone A** (Fig. 6.1) commemorating the demise of Raja Udai Singh is kept at the Vamsigopala Temple (Fig. 6.2), near the royal palace.

²⁸⁴ Chamunda Devi, Chamba; Shakti Dehra, Gand-Dehra; Chamunda Devi, Devi-Kothi

The second hero stone of Udai Singh, **Hero-stone B**, (Fig. 6.3) lies in the memorial shrine erected by Ugar Singh (Fig. 6.4) near the site of the former's assassination (present-day Udaipur). I discovered two additional hero-stones at the same temple – one of which I identified as the hero-stone of Raja Ugar Singh (**Hero-stone D**) (Fig. 6.5) on comparing the appearance of the Raja with a portrait housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Fig. 6.6); while the other hero-stone (**Hero-stone C**) (Fig. 6.7) appears to be that of Mian Lakshman Singh, the brother and Wazir of Udai Singh who was killed by the officials for attempting to defend his brother. **Hero-stone C** suggests that Lakshman Singh might have died unmarried as the commemorative plaque does not feature his wife(s), as is the convention observed in the other hero-stones A, B and D.

Two more hero-stones situated in the Lakshmi Narayana temple (Fig. 6.8) are unidentifiable. The apparel and the headdresses of the men suggest that they must have been carved much earlier, around the 14th century (personal communication with Dr. Vijay Sharma).



Fig. 6.1 Hero Stone A depicting Udai Singh, Vamsigopala Temple, c. 1720

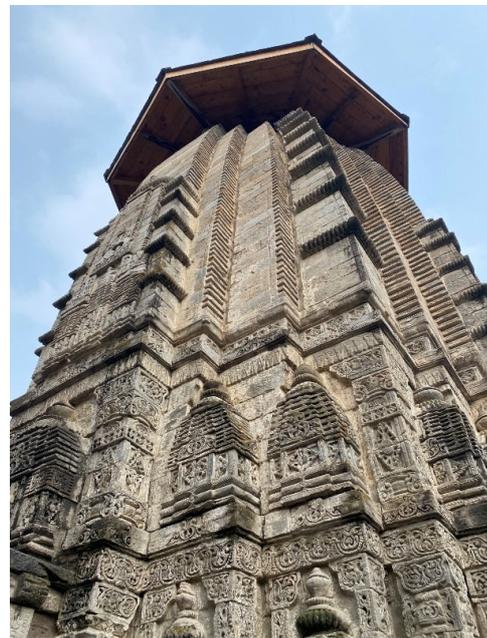


Fig. 6.2 Vamsigopala Temple, late 16th century



Fig. 6.3 Hero Stone B depicting Udai Singh with his 22 Ranis, Udaipur, c. 1720



Fig. 6.4 Memorial Shrine of Udai Singh constructed by Ugar Singh, Udaipur, c. 1720



Fig. 6.5 Hero Stone D depicting Raja Ugar Singh with his four Ranis Vamsigopala Temple, c. 1735



Fig. 6.6 Detail from a portrait of Raja Ugar Singh, Victoria and Albert Museum, c. 1730



Fig. 6.7 Hero Stone C depicting Mian Lakshman Singh, Vamsigopala Temple, c. 1735



Fig. 6.8 Hero Stones installed in the Lakshmi Narayana Temple, c. 14th century.

On studying the iconography and typology of the hero-stones, I have noted that the deceased Rajas are always shown pointing a finger towards their torso, symbolism of which is mired with mystery with no plausible explanation. However, its repetition suggests that the gesture is associated with the hero-stone tradition, and hence, must symbolise the passing-away of the chieftain perhaps. The usage of this gesture in the hero-stone of Mian Lakshman Singh signifies that it is not exclusively reserved for the Rajas, but for any male of significance, as the Ranis are always depicted with folded hands. The symbolism appears to have been adopted in the painting tradition, particularly in portraiture, in which the gesture became a recurring symbolic device to denote the demise of the subject.

The earliest available specimen in which the usage of this symbolic device is demonstrated in the 'Bathu set'.²⁸⁵ In the folio that shows a Raja²⁸⁶ paying his respects to Goswamis Bhagwanji and Narainji (Fig. 6.9), the gesture that Goswami Bhagwanji makes with his right hand is similar to the one observed in the hero-stones of Chamba Rajas, while Narainji folds his hands, in a manner akin to the Ranis in the hero-stones. The proposed methodological correlation between the sculptural and pictorial tradition propels towards the interpretation that this symbolic device signifies the passing away of Bhagwanji. Although the exact details about the life and passing away of Bhagwanji are unknown, this gesture in the painting leads one to deduce that he must have died during the reign of Prithvi Singh (r. 1641—64). Furthermore, had this painting not read in context of its sculptural counterpart, the hand gesture in question would have been read as just a mannerism.

²⁸⁵ The content of the Bathu set is elaborated in 4.2.3

²⁸⁶ Identified in 4.2.3 to be Raja Prithvi Singh of Chamba (r. 1641—64)



Fig. 6.9 The typical hand gesture recorded in the hero-stones of Chamba and its use as a symbol in a c. 1665 Chamba painting

The narrative of Bhagwanji and Narainji is continued further by another portrait of a youthful Raja²⁸⁷ paying respect to Narainji (Fig. 6.10), in which Narainji also make this gesture.



Fig. 6.10 Prince Paying Obeisance to Narainji, identified to be young Raja Chattar Singh of Chamba (r. 1664—1690), Museum Rietberg, Zurich

²⁸⁷ Identified in 4.2.3 to be Raja Chattar Singh of Chamba (r. 1664—90)

A third portrait depicts the two Goswamis sitting together (Fig. 6.11), both pointing fingers towards their torsos, symbolising that the two Goswamis have passed away.

The available historical records pertaining to the demise of Bhagwanji and Narainji are notably scarce. However, employing this methodological framework of comparing the paintings with hero-stones, it is plausible to infer that the two Goswamis died during the respective reigns of Prithvi Singh and Chattar Singh.

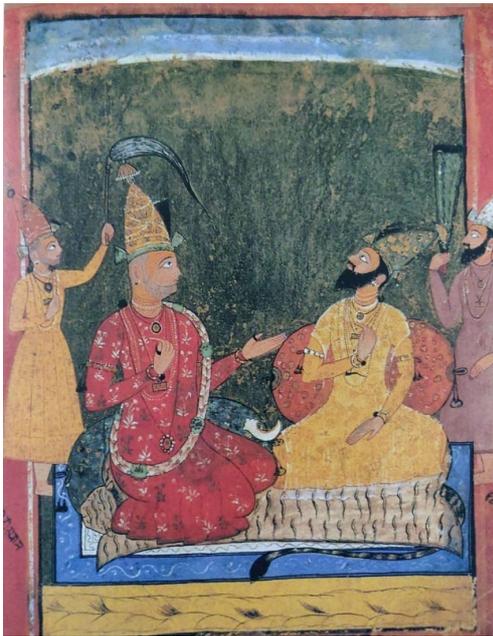


Fig. 6.11 Bhagwanji and Narainji seated on Tiger Hide, from the Bathu set, Chamba, c. 1665, National Museum, New Delhi

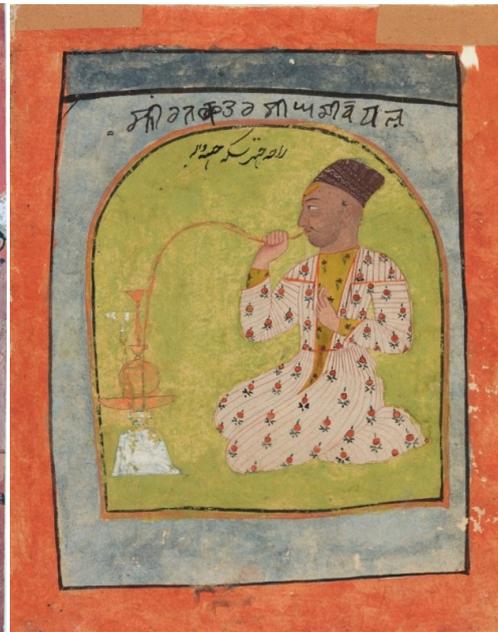


Fig. 6.12 Raja Chattar Singh of Chamba Smoking a Hookah, Chamba, c. 1690, 19.7 x 16.4 cm, Accession Number 2018.109, Cleveland Museum of Art

The earliest available painting in which a Raja of Chamba is depicted in this manner is the portrait of Raja Chattar Singh of Chamba in the Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio (Fig. 6.12). He appears to be old and frail, contrary to his conventional depiction as a towering muscular man. What is notable about the portrait is that the Raja is depicted seated within a framed casing, that resonates with the shape of the hero-stones at the Lakshmi Narayana Temple. It needs to be pointed out the hero-stones are rendered immediately following the demise of the king. Details regarding his death remain unknown, however, his appearance in the portrait suggests that the Raja might have

died due to some illness. Hence, this portrait, in my opinion, due to its visual imagery, must have been recorded immediately after the demise of Chattar Singh in 1690 CE.

Another portrait was identified by me in the Cleveland Museum of Art (Fig. 6.13), in which Chattar Singh is depicted seated with his brother Jai Singh, and his son and successor Udai Singh. Here, Chattar Singh and Jai Singh are depicted with the same hand gesture, while Udai Singh extends one hand out in a gesture which is seen in several portraits from Chamba during this period. While Chattar Singh's depiction is based on his previous portrait, Jai Singh and Udai Singh are added to the composition. Reading the painting in the same methodological framework, the painting, in all likelihood, appears to have been painted after the passing away of Jai Singh in 1696 CE, who had served as the Wazir and regent of Udai Singh. Hence, in my opinion, this painting appears to be the pictorial representation of Udai Singh's succession as the Raja of Chamba, without a regent.

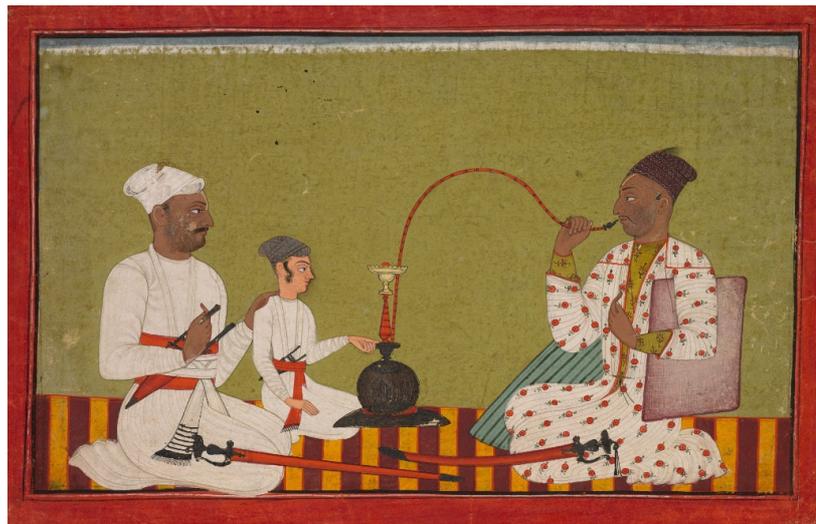


Fig. 6.13 Raja Chattar Singh of Chamba with Wazir Jai Singh and [future Raja] Udai Singh, Chamba, c. 1696, 20.3 x 31 cm, Accession No. 1960.47, Cleveland Museum of Art

No painting rendered in this manner, other than the two mentioned above, has come to my attention. However, the possibility of the existence of such commemorative portraits of Prithvi Singh (d. 1664), Udai Singh (d. 1720), Ugar Singh (d. 1735), Dalel Singh (abdicated in 1735) and Umed Singh (d. 1764) cannot be ruled out. Other than the exception of Udai Singh and Ugar Singh, not one hero-stone of a Chamba Raja who reigned between 1650-1750 has been discovered, although almost all of the Rajas

belonging to this period died in their forties. The sole parallel which Udai Singh and Ugar Singh share with each other, in my opinion, is that both were assassinated by their officials during their respective reigns.

While the influence of the symbolism in the hero-stones on the painting typology is established, it is critical to discuss the role of painters in the development of sculpture tradition during the early 18th century. While sculpture as a tradition, as established before, remained in vogue in Chamba since the 7th century, it, in my opinion, underwent significant transformation during the mid-17th century, coinciding with the arrival of painters in the region. I consider the possibility of painters working as sculptors unlikely, as no plausible evidence to support this claim has come to light. However, I find it reasonable to speculate that they assumed a role as designers, conceptualising the layout of sculptures on paper. Painting being a popular visual medium in the early 18th century and the higher social status of the painter in comparison to other craftsmen would have, in my opinion, also made it possible for painting sensibilities to penetrate other art forms such as sculpture. This transition from two-dimensional representation on paper to the three-dimensional medium of stone was likely facilitated by the traditional sculptors.

This synthesis of painting sensibilities into sculpture finds a compelling exemplification in the four hero-stones (A-D).

Hero-stone A (Fig. 6.1) is divided into five registers. The uppermost register is occupied with the depiction of *Sheshashyai* Vishnu – Vishnu reclining on the Shesha with Lakshmi tending to him. The representation of Vishnu is signifier of Udai Singh's religious inclinations, whose adherence to Vaishnavism is testified by the Vaishnavite subject-matter which remained in vogue during this period. Udai Singh is seated in the centre of the second register, reclining on a large bolster. The other registers contain the depiction of his twenty-two wives. The layout of the hero-stone is in the shape of the multifoil arch which was in fashion in the Mughal architecture (Fig. 6.14). The lotus flowers and shoots appear to be inspired from Chamba painting (Fig. 6.15). The painting influence further extends to the depiction of the apparel of the Ranis – particularly collared blouses and folds on the sleeves (Fig. 6.16).



Fig. 6.14 Comparison of the layout of Hero-Stone B with a Mughal multifoil arch in Agra Fort



Fig. 6.15 Comparison of lotus flower in Hero-Stone B with the same motif in a c. 1690 Chamba painting



Fig. 6.16 Comparison of the female apparel in Hero-Stone B with the same garments in a c. 1720 Chamba painting

The **hero-stone D** (Fig. 6.5) depicts Raja Ugar Singh sitting in company of his four wives. The Vishnu panel noticed in the uppermost register of the two hero-stones of Udai Singh is replaced with a Shivalinga, suggesting Ugar Singh's religious inclination towards Shaivism. The multifoil cusped arch which frames the register depicting Ugar Singh and his wives appears to be inspired from the painting tradition (Fig. 6.17), as firstly, the arch design is not seen in sculptures or woodcarvings made earlier than the mid-17th century; and secondly, ornamented arched structures like these are associated with Mughal architecture. As the manifestation of this architectural embellishment is not witnessed in any temples or palaces constructed prior to this period, it is safe to assume that the motif was introduced in Chamba in mid-17th century by painters trained in the popular Mughal tradition. The design could also be compared to the woodcarvings on the Bharmour Kothi doorway (Fig. 6.18).

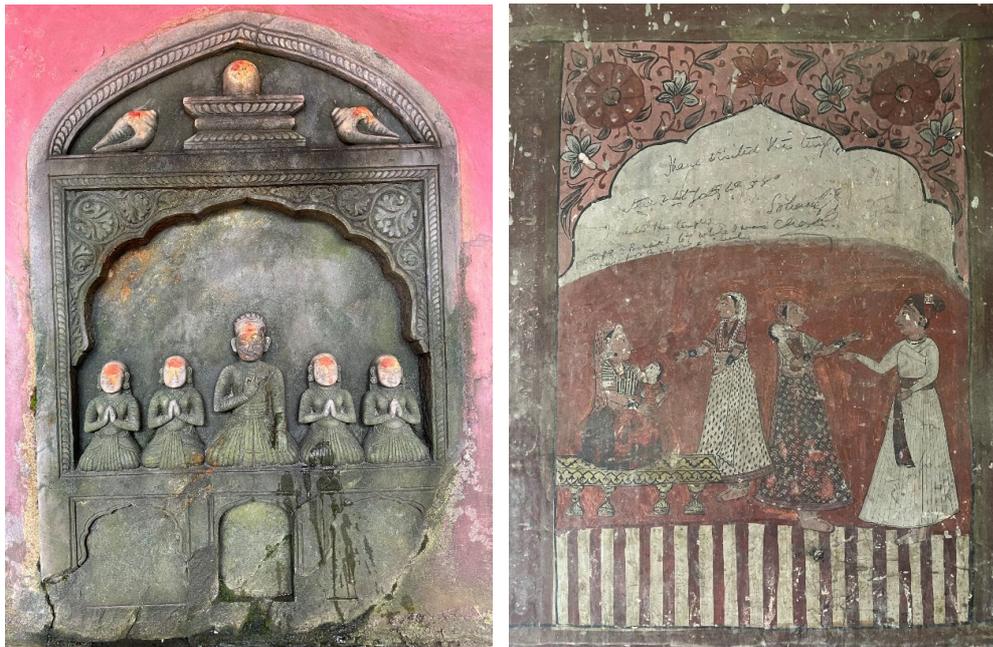


Fig. 6.17 Comparison of the multifoil cusped arch in the hero-stone D and a mural panel in the Shakti Dehra Temple, c. 1725

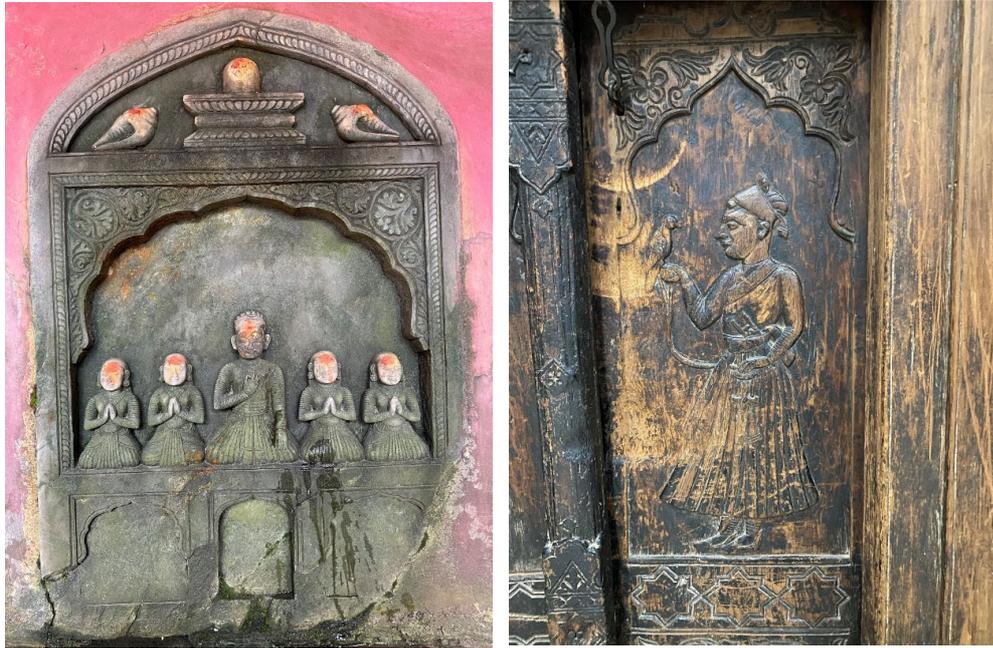


Fig. 6.18 Comparison of the multifoil cusped arch in the hero-stone D and a carved panel in the wooden doorway of Bharmour Kothi, c. 1641-43

The layout of these four hero-stones A-D is dissimilar to the two unidentified hero-stones of the Lakshmi Naryana temple complex (Fig. 6.8) and marks the advent of painting sensibilities in the sculptural culture of the region. In the above light, it becomes an important observation that the design and space-division of the four hero-stones is highly similar to the work of the painter Laharu of Chamba, who is known for the production of a *Bhagavata Purana* (dated 1757 CE). In a fashion similar to the hero-stones, Laharu also composes the painting in registers, with the top register appearing as the courtyard in which the narrative takes place, while the lower register, which is usually comprised of doorways and arched windows, denotes of the outer walls of the building (Fig. 6.19). The practice of dividing space in this manner can be traced to the painting of Janardan Varmana praying at a Devi Shrine (Fig. 6.20), in which Dai Batlo, Bhairava and Ganesha appear to be guarding the entrance to the shrine. On comparing the layout of the hero-stones of the four Rajas to the space-division applied by Laharu, not only is the influence of the painting tradition on the sculpture of Chamba felt, the layout of the hero-stones is also realised. Hero-stones A-D are designed in the form of a chamber, perhaps the Raja's heavenly abode, with lowest register becoming the outer wall. The Raja sits at the end of the chamber,

surrounded by his Ranis, who pay him respect with folded hands. The top portion of the hero-stone is reserved to the deity the Raja prayed to.

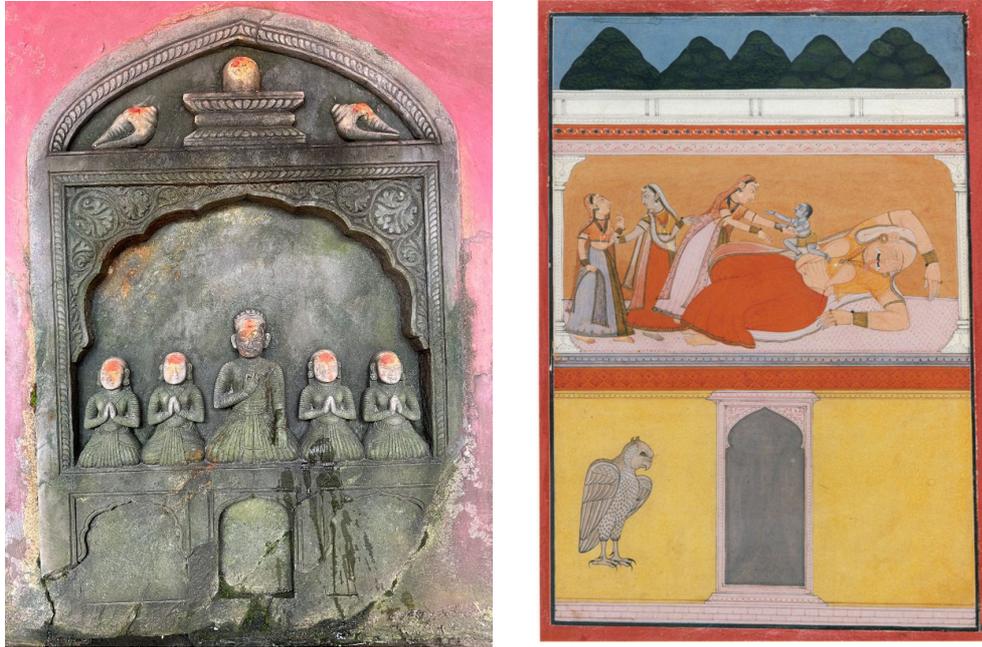


Fig. 6.19 Comparison of space-division in the hero-stone D and a painting from the 1757 Laharu Bhagavata Purana

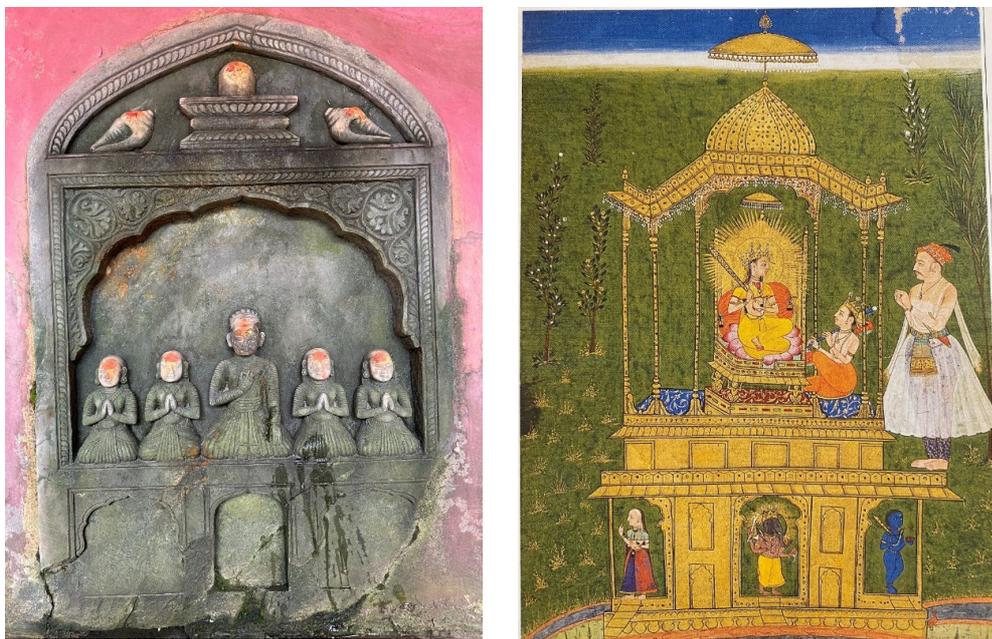


Fig. 6.20 Comparison of space-division in the hero-stone D and the posthumous portrait of Janardana Varmana, c. 1645

6.2 Torana of the Lakshmi Narayana Temple

The Torana of the Lakshmi Narayana Temple is the second instance in which the painters appear to be directly involved in other handicrafts. The names of the painters Laharu and Mahesh find mention in the Torana inscription of the Lakshmi Narayan Temple, making it the earliest document to surface which mentions the involvement of painters in an activity other than painting in Chamba. The oeuvre of Laharu has been identified, and the production of a Bhagavata Purana and two Ramayana sets is attributed to him. On the other hand, the identity of painter Mahesh is a matter of debate, as no painting bearing his name has come to light. Nonetheless, it is safe to assume that the latter was contemporaneous to Laharu, and the body of work which has been attributed to him by Goswamy and Fischer²⁸⁸ bear stylistic and compositional similarities to the paintings credited to Laharu.

The complex of the Lakshmi Narayana Temple falls under the supervision of the Archaeological Survey of India, and photography inside the sanctum sanctorum is strictly prohibited. However, an old photograph, taken by Vijay Sharma (Fig. 6.21) in the year 1995, reveals one portion of the Torana, which shows the design layout and the subject-matter of the structure.

The Dasavatara engravings of the Torana are designed by Laharu and Mahesh are most certainly inspired from the painter's system in terms of visual language and iconography, and they vary remarkably from their counterparts in the Chamba sculpture tradition. Dasavatara is a popular subject-matter in the sculptural heritage of Chamba, and the visual depiction of the ten incarnations of Vishnu ornament the *rathas* of a number of temples in the town.

²⁸⁸ Goswamy, B. N., and Eberhard Fischer. 1992. *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*. 182



Fig. 6.21 Torana of the Lakshmi Narayana Temple, dated 1747 CE,
Photographed by Dr. Vijay Sharma in 1995

The Torana is in the shape of an arched gateway, with a semi-circular arch held by two columns on either side. The arch is engraved with the depiction of seven gods and demigods, and yogis of the Hindu faith within multifoil frames, in no particular order. However, it is the two columns of the Torana that draw attention. On either of the

columns, depiction of nine of the ten incarnation of Vishnu is done in a reverse order, beginning from Buddha on the top register.²⁸⁹ Each column is divided into three vertical segments, with the centre panel showing the manifestation of the incarnation, with supporting characters bowing in devotion on either side.²⁹⁰ The engravings of the right column are identical to those of the left one, but in an inverse fashion.

As the content and subject-matter of Dasavatara has already been detailed in the previous chapter, a comparison between the iconography and composition of Chamba Dasavatara sculpture and painting is detailed in the following table:

Table 6.1 Comparative analysis of Chamba Dasavatara sculpture and painter iconography

No.	Name of the Incarnation	Sculpture iconography	Painter iconography
1.	Matsya	A giant fish (Fig. 6.22)	Vishnu emerging from the mouth of a giant fish recovering Vedas from Shankhasura's belly (6.23)
2.	Kurma	Churning of the Ocean on the back of a tortoise (Fig. 6.24)	Churning of the ocean on the back of a tortoise (Fig. 6.25)
3.	Varaha	Boar-headed Vishnu standing in <i>pratyalida</i> asana (Fig. 6.26)	Boar-headed Vishnu slays Hiranyaksha (Fig. 6.27)
4.	Narasimha	Lion-headed Vishnu depicted with four hands (Fig. 6.28)	A lion ripping open the belly of Hiranyakasipu (Fig. 6.29)
5.	Vamana	Dwarf Vishnu receiving alms from Bali (Fig. 6.30)	Vamana receives alms from Bali while Shukracharya looks at

²⁸⁹ The reason behind omission of the Kalki incarnation from the Torana cannot be explained with plausible evidence. One assumption is that the Torana includes only those incarnations which have already happened. The absence of his depiction in the Torana is suggestive of his future incarnation.

²⁹⁰ The only exception in the format lies in the depiction of Vamana panel, in which Bali is depicted in the center.

			him suspiciously (Fig. 6.31)
6.	Parasurama	Parasurama standing with an axe in his hand (Fig. 6.32)	Parasurama chops the many arms of Sahastrabahu while his father's corpse is supported by Renuka (Fig. 6.33)
7.	Rama	Rama standing with a bow in his hand (Fig. 6.34)	Rama and Sita enthroned (Fig. 6.35)
8.	Krishna ²⁹¹	Krishna Fluting (Fig. 6.36)	Not included in the painting system
9.	Balarama	Balarama stands with plough in his hand/ Balarama with Revati (Fig. 6.37)	Balarama changes the course of Yamuna with his plough (Fig. 6.38)
10.	Buddha	Not included in the sculpture tradition	Buddha seated in a temple adored by devotees (Fig. 6.39)
11.	Kalki	A warrior with bow and a sword (Fig. 6.40)	A warrior seated on a pedestal is brought a horse by a groom (Fig. 6.41)

²⁹¹ In the painting tradition, Krishna is omitted and replaced with Balarama.



Fig. 6.22

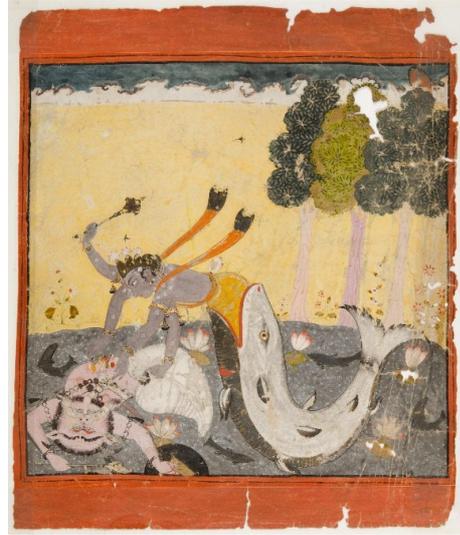


Fig. 6.23



Fig. 6.24

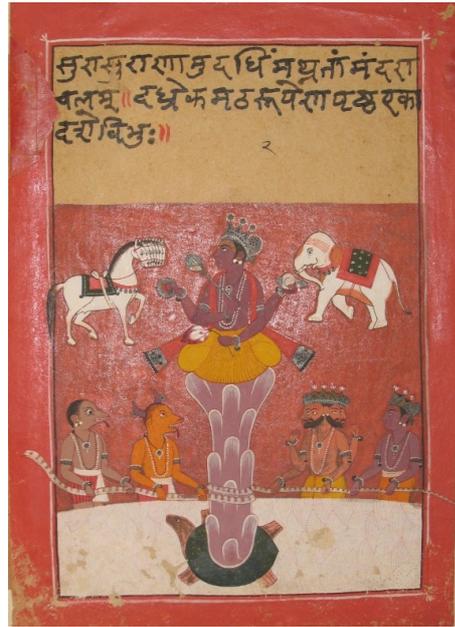


Fig. 6.25



Fig. 6.26

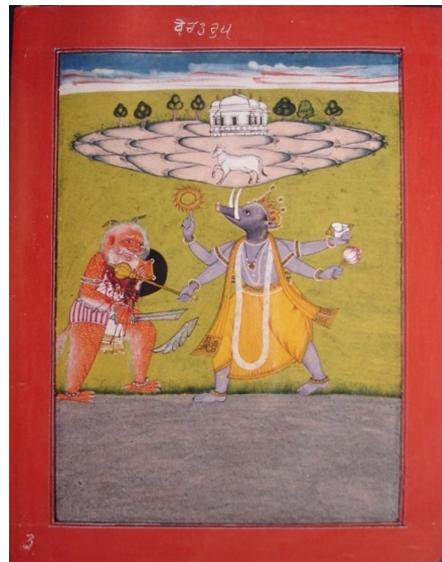


Fig. 6.27



Fig. 6.28



Fig. 6.29



Fig. 6.30



Fig. 6.31



Fig. 6.32



Fig. 6.33



Fig. 6.34



Fig. 6.35



Fig. 6.36



Fig. 6.37



Fig. 6.38

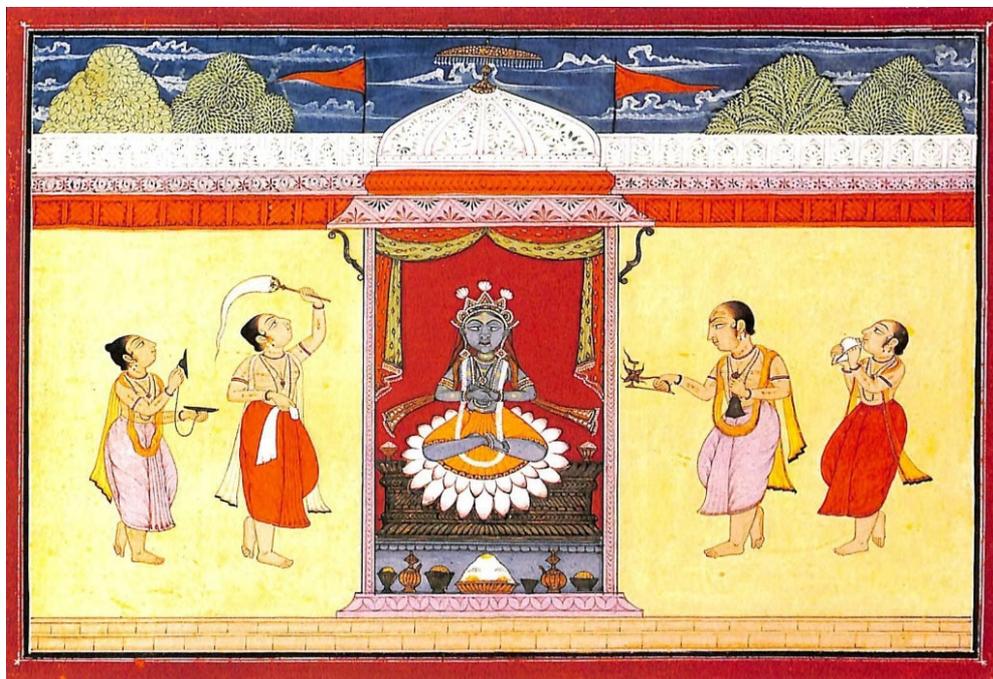


Fig. 6.39



Fig. 6.40



Fig. 6.41

The topmost panel of the Lakshmi Narayana Torana depicts Buddha, the ninth incarnation of Vishnu, who is shown seated on a pedestal, with his hands cusped together. Two devotees are depicted on his either side – one on the left blowing a conch, while the other praying to him with a lamp and a bell in his hands. The Buddha incarnation in the Torana engraving is similar to its representation in several Dasavatara paintings pertaining to the Buddha incarnation (Fig. 6.42).

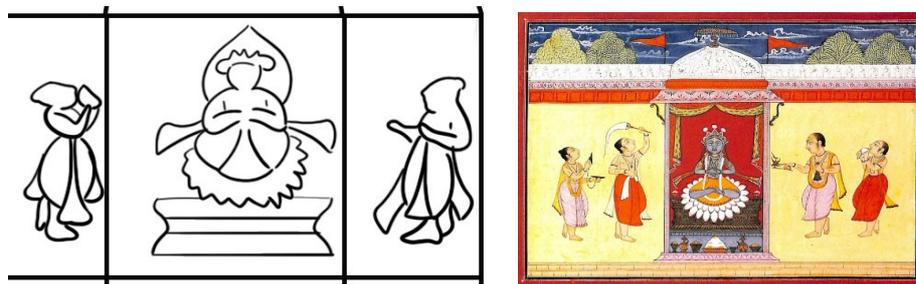


Fig. 6.42 Drawing of the Buddha incarnation as depicted on the Torana and its comparison with a Buddha Avatara painting



Fig. 6.43 Drawing of the Balarama incarnation as depicted on the Torana and its comparison with a Balarama avatara painting

The second panel in the column is Balarama, the eighth incarnation of Vishnu. Balarama is depicted changing the course of the river Yamuna with his plough. The incarnation bears the plough in one hand and his club in the other and turns his head around to look at the river, in a fashion identical to his depiction in the painting tradition (Fig. 6.43). Krishna and Yamuna are depicted on the either side of Balarama. The third panel comprises of Rama, the seventh incarnation of Vishnu. Rama is shown about to shoot an arrow to slay the donkey-headed Ravana. He is flanked by Hanuman on one side and Lakshmana on another. The depiction of the scene is similar to a number of Rama paintings from Chamba (Fig. 6.44), and Hanuman raising his hand is inspired from loose folios showing him in a similar posture (Fig. 6.45).

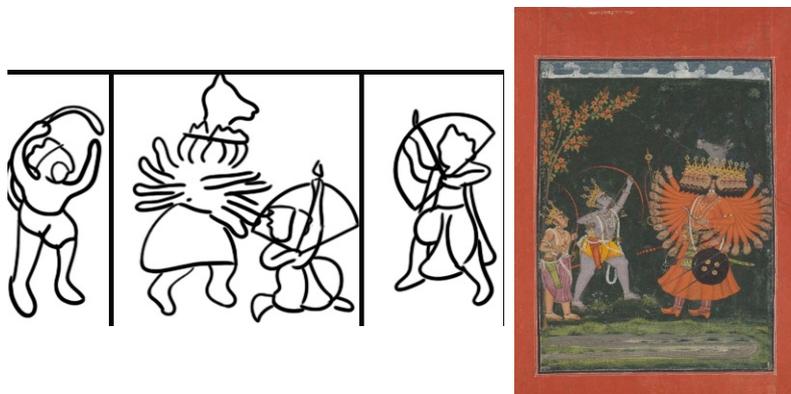


Fig. 6.44 Drawing of the Rama incarnation as depicted on the Torana and its comparison with a Rama Avatara painting



Fig. 6.45 Hanumana, Chamba, c. 1700, Christie's, auctioned on 10 June 2013

The fourth panel depicts Parasurama, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu. Parasurama grips the multiarmed Sahastrabahu by the tuft of his hair and heaves his axe in the air to smite the antagonist of the narrative. Two figures, a female and a male, flank the incarnation on either side. The comparison of Parasurama's depiction reveals a consistency with his portrayal in a number of Chamba Dasavatara paintings (Fig. 6.46).



Fig. 6.46 Drawing of the Parasurama incarnation as depicted on the Torana and its comparison with a Parasurama Avatara painting

The fifth panel represents Vamana, the dwarf incarnation of Vishnu. Unlike the other incarnations in the Torana, who are depicted in the middle section, Vamana is depicted in the corner section while Bali takes the central position in the panel. In my view, the liberty is taken by the designer(s) in order to remain consistent to the painting

convention of Vamana's depiction, in which a suspicious Shukracharya is depicted behind Bali's back, cautioning him of the dwarf's real identity (Fig. 6.47).

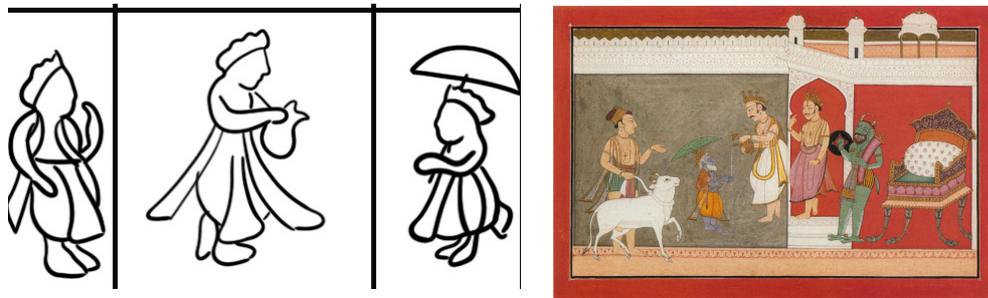


Fig. 6.47 Drawing of the Vamana incarnation as depicted on the Torana and its comparison with a Vamana avatara painting

The next panel depicts a front-facing four-armed Narasimha flanked by Prahlada and Kayadhu on the either side. The custom of depicting Narasimha facing in frontal manner with Kayadhu and Prahlada surrounding him is a repeated arrangement in the painting system (Fig. 6.48). However, the lion incarnation is always depicted disembowelling Hiranyakashyapu, whose lifeless body lies on Narasimha's lap. The exclusion of Hiranyakashyapu's depiction from the Narasimha panel could be attributed to the limitation of space in this medium, which constrained the designers from portraying Narasimha in the customary manner. The depiction of Narasimha in the Torana is similar to a bronze idol in Bharmour (c. 7th century) which shows Narasimha with two of his hands cusped.



Fig. 6.48 Drawing of the Narasimha incarnation as depicted on the Torana and its comparison with a Vamana avatara painting and the Bharmour bronze idol

Throughout the history of the sculptural depiction of the Dasavatara at Chamba, it is observed that Krishna is generally depicted as the eighth incarnation of Vishnu. In the Torana, however, Krishna is excluded from the Dasavatara order and is replaced by Balarama instead, in a manner akin to the painter's system. This appears to be a clear indication of the role of the painting tradition in the sculptural convention.

The Lakshmi Narayana Torana showcases the harmonious blend of metalcasting and painting traditions through its Dasavatara panels. The painters influenced the iconography of metalcasting, while also integrating certain metalcasting motifs into their paintings. One of the most remarkable borrowed elements is the lotus-petal design on the Torana's arch. This exchange highlights the cross-pollination between different art forms and artistic expressions.

6.2.1 Buddha Avatara in Chamba Painting

In the popular culture of Chamba, prior to the 16th century, awareness regarding Buddha appears to be of limited value, as suggested by lack of Buddha images in sculpture and woodcarving tradition of Chamba. While Buddhism bloomed and spread in the neighbouring kingdoms of Kashmir, Ladakh and Lahul, its impact on the society and culture of Chamba was either of little significance or none at all. On the other hand, although the standardisation of Buddha dates back to the Gupta period²⁹², it seems that awareness either did not reach Chamba or was purposefully subdued by the priestly or elite class. It is only in the painted Dasavatara sets from the late 17th century that the earliest depictions of Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu is seen.

It is a matter of examination and consideration whether Buddha as the ninth incarnation of Vishnu was introduced into the consciousness of the elite and the masses of Chamba due to the migration of Brahmins from Banaras and Kashi in the late 16th century, who popularised Vaishnavism in Chamba through Bhakti literature; or by painters, who migrated to Chamba from diverse backgrounds, bringing along their own sensibilities and frameworks which manifested in the medium of painting.

²⁹² Holt, John C. 2013. *The Buddhist Visnu: Religious Transformation, Politics, and Culture*. Columbia University Press, 14-15

The possibility of both factors contributing equally as well as simultaneously cannot be undermined.

The manner in which Buddha is depicted in paintings deserves substantial attention. Unlike the nine other incarnations of Vishnu, who are depicted in a popular narrative associated with their manifestation, the Buddha incarnation is usually depicted as an idol being worshipped by Brahmin priests inside the *garbhagriha* of a Shikhara temple (Fig. 6.49). The blue complexioned Buddha, with either two or four hands, sits frontally with two of his hands cusped together, while the additional hands tell beads of a rosary. Long tresses of hair fall loosely on his back, and at times a third eye could also be seen on his forehead, suggestive of his attainment of enlightenment. A close examination of the iconographic and iconological details of the Buddha image in painting reveals that his depiction is influenced and appropriated from the sculptural depiction of a Shaivite image, most likely Triloki Nath (Fig. 6.49), who also appears with long tresses and hands cusped in a manner identical to the Buddha in painting. While the Hindu population of Chamba and Lahul venerate the Triloki Nath idol as Shiva, the Buddhist population revere it as Avalokiteshvara, the earthly manifestation of Buddha Amitabha (personal communication with Bhuvaneshwar Sharma).

In my opinion, with the passage of time, embellishments such as – blue complexion, Vaishnavite religious markings, *vaiyantimala*, flowing *uttariyas*, yellow Dhoti, and two supplementary arms – were added into the original iconography to assert a Vaishnavite identity.

The Torana of the Laxmi Narayana temple is important from this perspective as it marks the appropriation of visual language from sculpture to painting and its reassertion and reimagination into the sculptural tradition.



Fig. 6.49 Buddha avatara painting and comparison with Avalokiteshvara/Trilokhi Nath idol

6.2.2 Lotus Petal Motif in the Lakshmi Narayana Torana

The Torana is embellished with decorated motifs on its architrave, comprising of lotus petals ornamented with double stigmas, which are separated with filaments (Fig. 6.50). The design is derived from the woodcarving tradition of Chamba with its earliest depictions manifested in the stylobates of the 7th century Shakti Devi temple at Chattarari; later repeating itself in the stone sculptural tradition in the form of fountain slabs dating back to the 11th century (Fig. 6.51). Variations of this design are also found in the hero-stones A and D (Fig. 6.52). This pattern was adopted by the painters, and they employed this motif to decorate architecture in

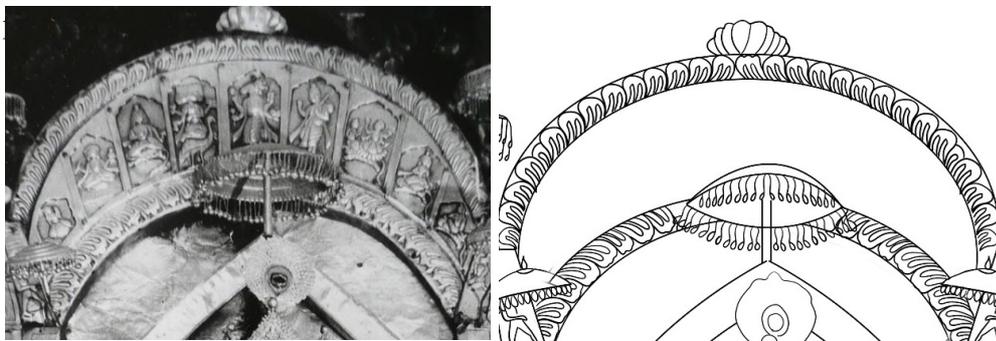


Fig. 6.50 Lotus petal motif on the architrave of the Lakshmi Narayana Torana

roofs, columns, and stylobates (Fig. 6.53), suggesting the interaction, engagement, and collaboration of painters with the sculptors of the region, as both were from the same artisan community.



Fig. 6.51 Lotus petal motif on a stylobate of the Shakti Devi temple in Chattarari, 7th century, and Lotus petal motif on a fountain stone slab, 11th century CE



Fig. 6.52 Variations of the lotus petal motif on hero-stones A and D, c. 1720 and c. 1735 CE



Fig. 6.53 Architectural embellishment in paintings with the lotus petal motif, indicating the influence of sculpture and woodcarving on painting

Once the association of painters with the sculptors and metal-craftsmen is established, it is crucial to examine the influence of painters on the woodcarving tradition of Chamba. The tradition of woodcarving dates back to the 7th century, and the temples of Lakshana Devi at Bharmour²⁹³ (Fig. 6.54) and Shakti Devi at Chhattarari²⁹⁴ (Fig. 6.56) being among the earliest temples adorned with woodcarvings bearing similarities with Post-Gupta sculptures. In the mid-17th century, a sudden change in the visual language associated with the tradition of woodcarving is observed with the manifestation of Perso-Timurid elements in the Bharmour-Kothi wooden doorway, and the three wooden Devi temples – Chamunda Temple, Chamba town; Shakti Dehra Temple, Gand Dehra; and Chamunda Temple, Devi Kothi.

A visual analysis of the pictorial and symbolic elements in the woodcarvings of these sites suggest an influence of Mughal architectural and painting tradition. It appears that the woodcarvings were designed by painters trained in the Mughal tradition who

²⁹³ Goetz, 1955. *The Early Wooden Temples of Chamba*, 72.

²⁹⁴ Goetz, 1955. *The Early Wooden Temples of Chamba*, 86.

migrated to Chamba during the reign of Raja Prithvi Singh (r. 1641—1664).²⁹⁵ In my opinion, while endeavouring in crafts other than painting, these painters likely found a pliant and adaptable medium such as wood to be more advantageous in contrast to the rigid and inflexible nature of stone. This affinity between painters and the woodcarving craft bestowed upon them the designation of *tarkhan-chitere*, signifying 'Painter-Carpenters'.

To comprehend the interconnection between painting and woodcarving, a thorough examination of the wooden doorway of the Bharmour Kothi becomes indispensable.



Fig. 6.54 Lakshana Devi temple at Bharmour, c. 7th century CE



Fig. 6.55 Wooden facade of Lakshana Devi temple



Fig. 6.56 Shakti Devi temple complex at Chattarari and its wooden *garbhagriha*, c. 8th century CE

²⁹⁵ The presence of Mughal painters at Chamba has been detailed in Chapter 4

6.3 Wooden Doorway of the Bharmour Kothi



Fig. 6.57 Bharmour Kothi doorway, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba, c. 1641-43

The State office at Bharmour, known as the Bharmour Kothi, was built by Prithvi Singh in the Chaurasi town, soon after consolidating his power in 1641 CE.²⁹⁶ The building suffered massive damage in an earthquake in April 1905, and most of the wooden panels and brackets are now preserved in the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba town.²⁹⁷ The Bharmour Kothi was designed as a royal residence as well as administrative centre, and the importance of the construction is suggested by the entrance doorway (Fig. 6.57), which depicts Prithvi Singh receiving honours from a Muslim noble, now widely identified to be Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1627—58).

²⁹⁶ Sharma, Vijay. "The Woodcarvings of Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh." Sahapedia, March 9, 2017, <https://www.sahapedia.org/the-woodcarvings-of-chamba-district-himachal-pradesh>.

²⁹⁷ Sharma, Vijay. "The Woodcarvings of Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh." Sahapedia.

The doorway is divided into two registers. In the upper register, young Prithvi Singh is depicted holding the *Mahi-Maratib*.²⁹⁸ In front of the Raja stands a person of significance, as suggested by his apparel, holding a falcon in his right hand. The falconer appears to be of around the same age as Prithvi Singh who must have been in his early twenties at the time of the construction of Bharmour Kothi²⁹⁹. The falconer, sporting a Shah Jahani turban and a Jama tied in the Mughal fashion, appears to be Dara Shikoh (b. 1615) in all likelihood (Fig. 6.58). Falcons of the North-Western hill-states were popular at the Mughal court³⁰⁰, and a painting depicting Prithvi Singh offering a falcon to Shah Jahan has come to light (Fig. 6.59). It could be said with confidence that the doorway commemorates the meeting of Prithvi Singh with Dara Shikoh in which the Mughal prince awarded the Chamba Raja *Mahi-Maratib* and received the falcon as a tribute in return.



Fig. 6.58 Portrait of Dara-Shikoh, c. 1631-37, British Library, Add.or.3129, f.59v; comparison of his likeness with the depiction in the Bharmour Kothi doorway, c. 1641-43

²⁹⁸ *Mahi-Maratib* (Persian for fish dignity) was a fish standard which was awarded by the Mughal emperors to the Mansabdars and highly valued allies of the emperor.

²⁹⁹ Prithvi Singh was born in the year 1619.

³⁰⁰ Sharma, Vijay. "The Woodcarvings of Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh." Sahapedia.



Fig. 6.59 Shah Jahan receives falcon from Raja Prithvi Singh of Chamba, Chamba, c. 1650, 19 x 18 cm, Object Number 2009.202.217, Harvard Art Museums

The left panel in the lower register shows a royal guardsman wielding a shield and a scimitar, and the right panel depicts a noble holding a rose. The four panels are embellished with multifoil arches and are parted by the Islamic eight-pointed stars – a common decorative motif in Mughal architecture.

The iconography of the wood carved doorway evidently reflects the prevailing political climate in Chamba during the mid-17th century. The Mughals generally refrained from granting the title of 'Raja' to the Pahari chieftains, opting instead to refer to them as 'zamindar' (landlord). However, Prithvi Singh stood apart as one of the few Pahari hill-chiefs to be officially recognized as a Raja in the Mughal records. Hence, the installation of a doorway adorned with elements of Mughal visual language in the administrative office holds significant implications. Firstly, it seemingly aimed

to legitimise Prithvi Singh's claim to the throne of Chamba as the rightful Raja. Secondly, it sought to affirm Chamba throne's allegiance to the Mughal imperial authority. Lastly, the presence of such a doorway indicated the eventual submission of Chamba under Mughal domination.

Dara Shikoh was formally anointed the heir to the imperial throne by Shah Jahan in the year 1642 and was granted the title of Shahzada-e-Buland Iqbal (Prince of High Fortune). Being coetaneous to Dara Shikoh, and possibly a close ally, Prithvi Singh's choice to be depicted next to the Mughal prince symbolises that his loyalty to the imperial crown would be extended to the future generation as well.

The style in which the woodcarvings are rendered is parallel to the tradition of painting in vogue during the reign of Shah Jahan.³⁰¹

The stylistic origins of the Bharmour Kothi woodcarvings, in my opinion, lie in a Narasimha painting. The facial type of this style (Fig. 6.60) is characterised by – arched eyebrow, elongated eye, flat forehead, pointed nose, thin and protruding lips enhanced with the use of fine shading, and a bulging and round chin, with a sharp jawline highlighted by shading. The physiognomic details (Fig. 6.61) comprise of a short torso supported by a long bottom half. In all likelihood, it appears that the painters responsible for the designing of the Bharmour Kothi doorway belong to this workshop.³⁰²

The doorway of Bharmour Kothi paved way for the involvement of painters with the tradition of woodcarving, which was continued to the woodcarvings of the three Devi temples at Chamba.

³⁰¹ It appears that the person(s) active in designing the doorway were trained in the art of Mughal painting and were familiar with the style and iconography of Shah Jahan period painting. There is enough evidence to suggest the beginning of patronage to artists at Chamba who had migrated from a Mughal workshop during the reign of Prithvi Singh. Given the Raja's close association to Shah Jahan, it appears unlikely that Prithvi Singh was not influenced by the Mughal court culture, as suggested by his costumes and the extension of patronage for miniature painting at Chamba.

³⁰² The stylistic details of the painters belonging to this workshop are elaborated in Chapter 7



Fig. 6.60 Comparison of facial details in the c. 1630-40 Narasimha painting and the c. 1641-43 Bharmour Kothi doorway

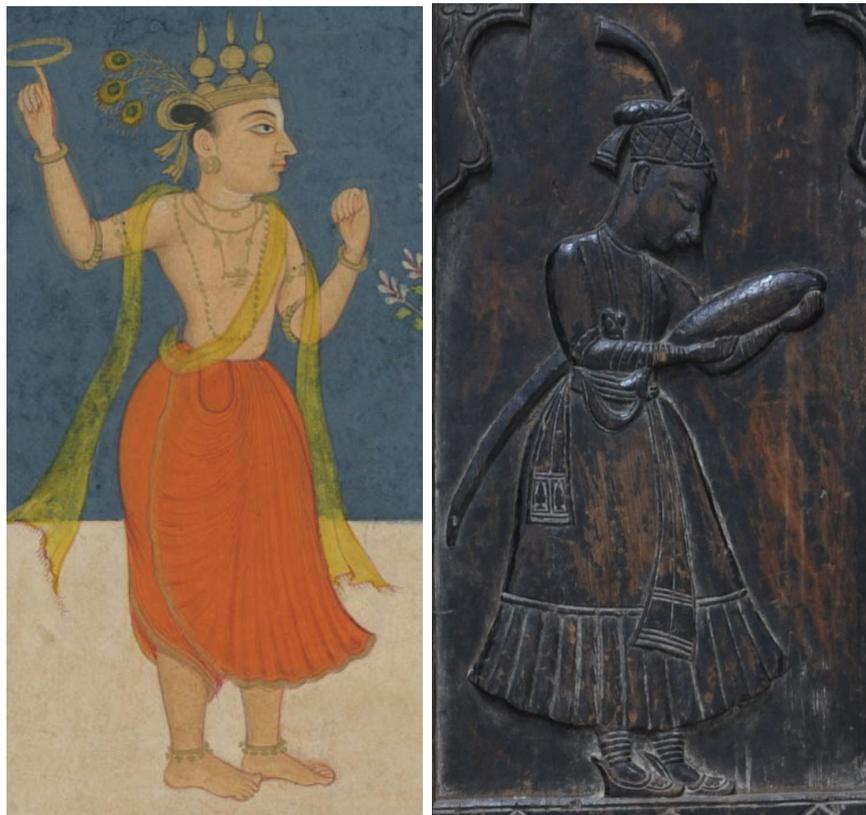


Fig. 6.61 Comparison of physiognomy in the c. 1630-40 Narasimha painting and the c. 1641-43 Bharmour Kothi doorway

6.4 Woodcarvings of the Chamunda Devi Temple at Chamba Town

The Chamunda Temple at the town-centre of Chamba (Fig. 6.62) is among the early temples to contain woodcarvings inspired by the tradition of miniature painting. The information regarding the construction of the temple is scanty, and no exact date can be attributed to the construction of the wooden temple. Dr SM Sethi has suggested that the plinth of the temple predates the woodcarvings, hence the temple must have existed prior to their execution (personal communication). As per my observations, there appears to be the presence of two guilds active simultaneously in the design and construction of the woodcarvings – one guild which is trained in the woodcarving tradition of Chamba, bearing strong stylistic similarities to the sculptural tradition of the region (Fig. 6.63); whereas the other guild is of the painters belonging to the reign of Raja Chattar Singh of Chamba, the workmanship of whom bears indications to the visual elements in vogue in Chamba painting during the last quarter of the 17th century (Fig. 6.64).

Other than the stylistic and iconographic dissimilarities in the visual language of the two types of woodcarvings, the difference between the two guilds is also highlighted by the technical approach, which the two guilds have undertaken. While the woodcarvings attributed to the woodcarvers' guild demonstrate the high-cut approach, suggestive of their familiarity with the tradition, those influenced by the painting tradition appears to be flat in a bas-relief manner. However, no specific criterion appears to be followed in the division of the panels between the two guilds and at times the simultaneous operation of the two groups on a single panel could be observed. Nevertheless, the woodcarvings attributed here to the painters' guild significantly outnumber the panels designed by woodcarvers, suggestive of the patron's preference for the visual language of the painting tradition.



Fig. 6.62 Chamunda Temple, Chamba, late 17th century CE



Fig. 6.63 Chamunda riding a lion, high-relief wooden panel in Chamunda Temple, Chamba



Fig. 6.64 A Rajput warrior, bas-relief wooden panel in Chamunda Temple, Chamba

My observations indicate that subject-matter of the woodcarvings is diverse, ranging from the depiction of Devi, the various incarnations of Vishnu, and demi-gods of Hindu pantheon to the representation of Persian winged fairies, Perso-Timurid eight-pointed star rosettes, arabesque patterns, floral decorations, Mughal cartouches and various nobles and people of importance. The woodcarvings are laden in no particular order and at times the figures appear to be overlapping and interrupting the linear continuation of the subject-matter (Fig. 6.65).



Fig. 6.65 Wood carved panel depicting various forms of Shakti; Kartikeya with peacock; and winged Cherub-heads, Chamunda Temple, Chamba

Of particular interest among the wood carved panels on the ceilings and pillars of the circumambulatory path is the male dancer within a Mughal cartouche (Fig. 6.66). The dancer, wearing a bulbous turban and Turkish boots, joyously raises his arms in enthusiasm, lifting one knee in the air. The depiction is among the rare examples of figures carved in the temple complex by the painters' guild shown in three-quarterly manner. In my opinion, the painter-carpenters have chosen to depict the dancer as Ragaputra Bhramarananda in the Ragamala iconographic system of Chamba (Fig. 6.67) since they were already familiar with the iconography. A comparison of the

Bhramarananda iconography with the dancer in the wood carved panel suggests that the former is the inspiration for the dancer panel³⁰³, securely fixing the iconographic trait to Chamba.



Fig. 6.66 A dancer, Chamunda Temple, Chamba



Fig. 6.67 Detail of Bhramarananda's iconography, Chamba, c. 1720, Provenance Unknown

Second important aspect is the depiction of the female-type (Fig. 6.68). The women are depicted having a short torso supported by an elongated lower body. An *odhni* is kept on the head and comes down to the heavy border of the ankle-length skirt. A short blouse which exposes the midriff is characterised by thick collars at the neck. The jewellery comprises of gullubund, armllets, and bracelets, with anklets at the feet. This depiction of the female-type is typical in a number of late 17th century Chamba paintings (Fig. 6.69). The thick collars of the blouse, particularly, is a trait exclusively found in Chamba painting belonging to this period.

³⁰³ The iconography of Ragaputra Bhramarananda has been detailed in Table 5.4

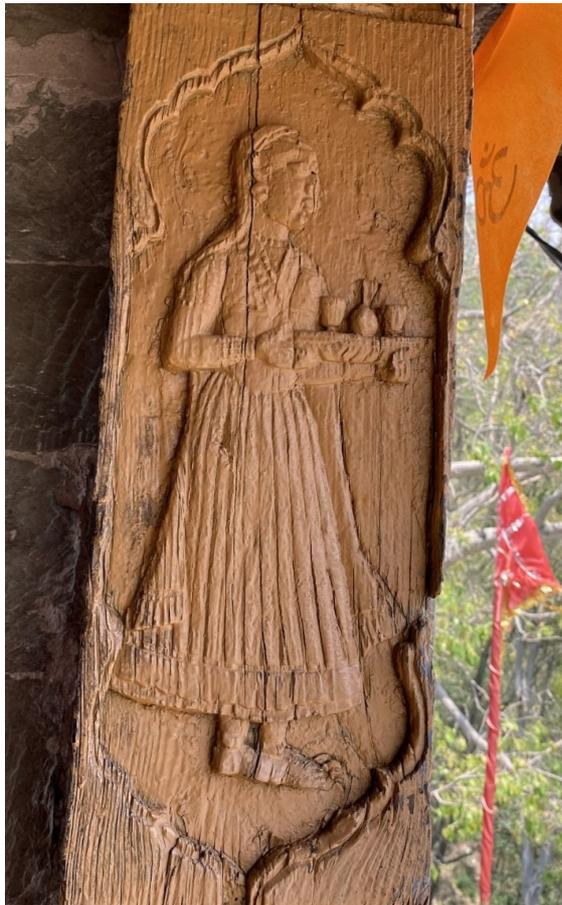


Fig. 6.68 A female attendant, Chamunda Temple, Chamba



Fig. 6.69 Detail of a female attendant from a Ragaputra Chandrakasa painting, National Gallery of Canada, Accession No. 23614

Lastly, the significance bestowed on the several Perso-Timurid elements in the woodcarvings, particularly the eight-pointed star – known as Najmat-al-Quds (Fig. 6.70) – needs to be discussed. The star appears several times in the woodcarvings, mostly as a frame with images of Hindu deities within. The distinctiveness of the star as the Islamic eight-pointed star, which is formed by imposing two squares over each other, is ascertained by the presence of similar other Timurid elements in the woodcarvings, which include the ten-pointed star rosette (Fig. 6.71). Other than these, the depiction of several Cherub-heads and Peris (Fig. 6.72) – Persian mythological winged spirits, solidify the belief that the Chamunda Temple woodcarvings are laden with Persian-Timurid elements. The Peri-figures (Fig. 6.73) deserve particular importance as they appear highly similar to the depiction of Peris in the murals of the Lahore fort (Fig. 6.74).



Fig. 6.70 Brahma within a Najmat-al-Quds frame, Chamunda Temple, Chamba



Fig. 6.71 Ten-pointed star rosette, Chamunda Temple, Chamba



Fig. 6.72 Winged Cherub head, Chamunda Temple, Chamba



Fig. 6.73 Winged Peri, Chamunda Temple, Chamba



Fig. 6.74 Winged Peri, Lahore Fort, Pakistan, c. 1610 CE

Stylistically, the same guild which carved the wooden doorway of Bharmour Kothi, in my opinion, appears to be active in the design of the Chamunda temple woodcarvings. In the discussion on the former, it was ascertained that the painters who designed the woodcarvings must have had origin in the Mughal tradition of painting. On analysing the visual language of the Peri figures, it is not only established that the painters in all likelihood migrated to Chamba from a Mughal workshop, but it is also highly likely that the painters of this guild, prior to their advent in Chamba, must have been active at Lahore. The temple of Chamunda is among the early sites to showcase the Persian Peris in woodcarvings, which became a tradition in later Devi temples in Chamba. The second temple in continuation of this tradition of painters collaborating with woodcarvers is the Shakti Dehra temple at Gand-Dehra (Fig. 6.75), about nine kilometres North-West from the Chamba town.



Fig. 6.75 Shakti Dehra Temple, c. 1720-30, Gand-Dehra village, Chamba

6.5 Woodcarvings of the Shakti Dehra Temple at Gand-Dehra

Although no date of the construction of the temple has come to light – neither in the copper-plate charters nor in the inscriptions on the temple – the style and visual quality of the murals on the circumambulatory path suggests, as discussed in Chapter 4, that the temple must have been constructed in the third decade of the 18th century (c. 1720-30). The temple is dedicated to Goddess Durga and is the family shrine of the Barotra family, a prominent local family having historical ties with the Chamba court. The family maintains that the temple was constructed by one of their ancestors, symbolising their financial affluence and political influence in the state affairs. As the temple was not a royal construction, the structure is rather modest, and woodcarvings lack the splendour of the Chamunda temple. However, the temple is notable for its murals, making it among the earliest known temples in the North-Western Himalayas to have murals inspired from the miniature painting tradition.³⁰⁴



Fig. 6.76 Detail from the ceiling of the Shakti Dehra Temple, c. 1720-30

The woodcarvings in the temple are found on the pillars, the ceiling of the Mandapa, and the two wooden panels at the either side of the sanctum sanctorum. At the centre of the ceiling is an elaborate woodcarving panel (Fig. 6.76), comprising of three squares within one another, each dissecting the outer square into four triangular panels,

³⁰⁴ The murals of the Shakti Dehra temple are discussed in 4.2.5

resulting in the formation of a total of eight panels of equal measurements. At the centre of the inner square lies a protruding triple-lotus design from where the temple bell suspends. The responsibility of crafting the ceiling panel can be primarily ascribed to the painters' guild, with the potential exception of the central triple lotus panel.

I have observed that the woodcarvings of the outer four triangles are based on the subject-matter of Ashtamatrika – depicting a group of eight mother goddesses as described in the text of Devi Mahatmya (also known as Durgasaptashati). The names of the Ashtamatrikas, their attributes, and their depiction in the Shakti Dehra woodcarvings are detailed in the following table (in a clockwise manner):

Table 6.2 Ashtamatrika Panel in the Shakti Dehra Temple, Gand Dehra

No.	Name of the Matrika	Attributes as described in the Devi Mahatmya	Depiction in the Woodcarving
1	Maheshwari	Seated on Nandi, 4-6 arms, white complexioned, <i>tri-netra</i> , holds trident, drum, garland of beads, <i>panapatra</i> , or axe or an antelope or skull bowl, or serpent and is adorned with crescent moon and <i>jata mukuta</i>	 A woodcarving of the goddess Maheshwari, depicted seated on the bull Nandi. She is shown with multiple arms, holding various symbolic objects. The carving is set within a triangular panel.
2	Varahi	Boar headed, holds <i>danda</i> , plough, goad, <i>vajra</i> or sword, a <i>panapatra</i> , sometimes bell, <i>chakra</i> , <i>chamara</i> , wears a crown called <i>karanda mukuta</i> and other ornaments	 A woodcarving of the goddess Varahi, depicted with a boar's head. She is shown with multiple arms, holding various symbolic objects. The carving is set within a triangular panel.

3	Chamunda	Identified with Kali and similar in appearance, wears garland of skulls, holding a <i>damaru</i> , trident, sword and <i>panapatra</i> , rides a jackal or corpse of a man, described as having three eyes, a terrifying face and sunken belly	
4	Brahmani	Depicted in yellow, with four heads, 4-6 arms, holds a rosary or noose and <i>kamandalu</i> , or lotus stalk or book or bell, seated on <i>hamsa</i> , basket shaped crown called Karanda Mukuta	
5	Shivadooti	Shivaduti is described as having a dark complexion, with long matted hair, three eyes, and holding a trident, while her right foot rests on the back of a jackal	
6	Vaishnavi	Seated on Garuda, having 4-6 arms, holds Shankha, Chakra, mace, lotus/bow/sword; or her two arms are in <i>varada mudra</i> and <i>abhaya mudra</i> , wears cylindrical crown called <i>kirita mukuta</i>	

7	Kaumari	Rides a peacock, 4-12 arms, spear, axe, bow, cylindrical crown	
8	Indrani	Seated on elephant, depicted as dark-skinned, 2-4 arms, thousand eyes, armed with <i>vajra</i> , goad, noose and lotus stalk, <i>kirita mukuta</i>	

Each panel of the woodcarving consists of two Devis, presented without any specific sequence, occasionally accompanied by depictions of winged-cherubs, trees, birds, and animals. The inner four triangular panels showcase winged-Peri figures, whose portrayal closely resembles that observed on the ceiling of the Chamunda temple (Fig. 6.77) discussed earlier. These Peris are attired in the Mughal fashion, adorned with flowing *patakas*, and each holding, in a clockwise manner, a wine decanter, a rabbit, a peacock, and a betel-leaf container. A comparative analysis reveals the similarity of these Peri figures to those found in the Lahore fort. This observation suggests that the influence of Mughal typology persisted in the works of Chamba painters even after a century of migration.



Fig. 6.77 Comparison of Shakti Dehra Peri figure (left) with the Chamunda Temple woodcarving (centre) and the mural at Lahore Fort, Pakistan (right)

The third square comprises of the decorative motifs, especially the Timurid 12-pointed star rosette banner and the Najmat-al-Quds, which surround the depiction of four Kirtimukhas decorated with floral patterns (Fig. 6.78). The representation of the Kirtimukha appears to be derived from a relief panel in the shrine of Raja Udai Singh.



Fig. 6.78 Comparison of Shakti Dehra Kirtimukha and ten-pointed star rosette (left) with the Kirtimukha and ten-pointed star rosette in the Udai Singh shrine (right)

The adorned wooden column (Fig. 6.79) situated at the entrance of the Mandapa merits particular scrutiny. Notably, this wooden column stands as one of the earliest extant examples of its kind, as no comparable structures have been discovered in sites predating the construction of the Shakti Dehra temple. Despite this uniqueness, the column's design and ornamentation bear resemblances to the architectural innovations popular during the reign of Shah Jahan, as evidenced by the presence of similar columns in the Agra Fort.

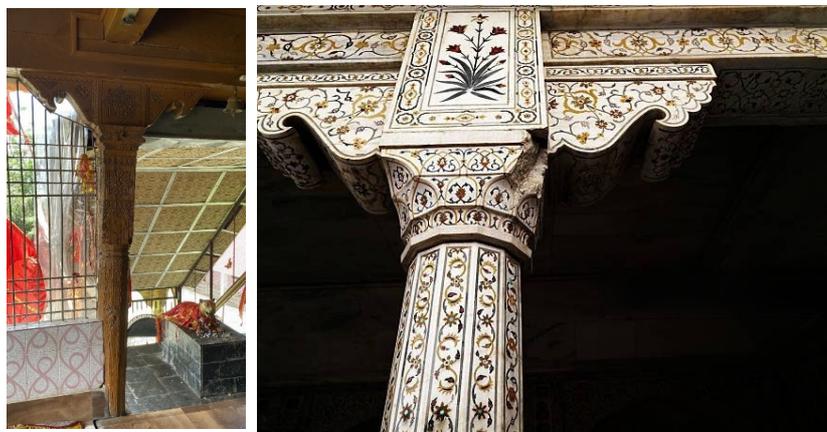


Fig. 6.79 Design of the south-eastern column of the Shakti Dehra Temple (left) and its comparison with a column in the Agra Fort (right)

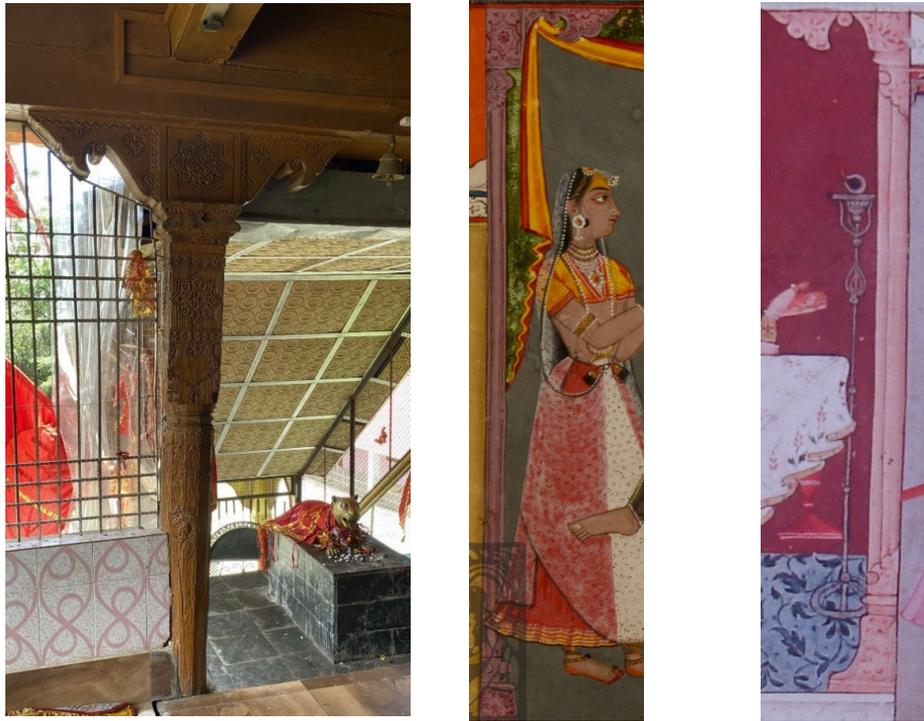


Fig. 6.80 Design of the south-eastern column of the Shakti Dehra Temple (left) and its comparison with a column in Chamba painting (centre and right)

Nonetheless, it becomes apparent that the embellishment of the pillar can be traced back to the painting tradition, for two primary reasons. Firstly, the woodcarvings were executed by painter-carpenters, indicating an inherent connection between the technique of painting and woodworking. Secondly, had an architect trained in the Mughal tradition journeyed to Chamba, the influence of Mughal architecture would likely have permeated other components of the regional architecture as well, which is not the case. Therefore, the transmission of decorative elements to the wooden column in question is more plausibly attributed to the interplay between the painting tradition and carpentry expertise rather than direct architectural importation. This column-type is also a popular architectural motif in Chamba paintings belonging to different periods and rendered by artists exhibiting diverse stylistic traits (Fig. 6.80).



Fig. 6.81 Wooden panel on the western wall, Shakti Dehra Temple



Fig. 6.82 Wooden panel on the eastern wall, Shakti Dehra Temple

Two prominent wooden panels are positioned on each side of the sanctum sanctorum, denoted as Fig. 6.81 and Fig. 6.82. The western wall panel Fig. 6.81 is organized into three distinct registers. The top register portrays Kichaka in a yogic posture, while the middle register is divided into two sections: an elephant depicted on the left and Krishna playing the flute on a pedestal shown on the right. The bottom register features a Dvarapala brandishing a bow and an arrow, accompanied by a small Gana figure supporting the quiver. The panel exhibits a strong adherence to the sculpture tradition and showcases characteristics consistent with the work of a skilled traditional woodcarver.

The wooden panel on the eastern wall Fig. 6.82, however, in all likelihood is carved by a painter, as not only the visual language bear strong influence of painting tradition, but the technique employed by the designer is also low-relief, in contrast to the high-relief carving done by the woodcarver of the western panel. There appears neither a remote connection between the two panels, nor they appear to be complementing each other. Ordinarily, it is expected for the eastern panel to represent another Dvarapala to

support the one on the western panel. However, the panel appears to be divided into two registers, designed in the form of the Mughal cartouche. The top register is laden with the depiction of a royal musician clad in the court apparel, strumming the Rabab. The bottom register consists of a woman carrying an infant on her shoulders. The installation of two contrasting wooden panels at the entrance to the sanctum sanctorum remains an enigma.

6.6 Woodcarvings of the Chamunda Devi Temple at Devi-Kothi



Fig. 6.83 Chamunda Devi Temple at Devi-Kothi, Churah



Fig. 6.84 Eight-pointed Najmat al-Quds star on a column in Devi-Kothi temple

The third wooden temple in continuation of the tradition of painters designing the woodcarvings is the Chamunda Temple at Devi-Kothi (Fig. 6.83), a village in the Churah tehsil of Chamba. A Takri inscription on the entrance of the temple reveals that the structure was laid in the year 1754 by Raja Umed Singh (r. 1748—64 CE) and it is built in accordance with the architectural plan and layout of the Chamunda Temple at Chamba. The ceiling of the circumambulatory path surrounding the sanctum sanctorum is laden with woodcarvings based on the depiction of deities of the Hindu pantheon and ascetics; as well as elements of Perso-Islamic mythology, including Peris, Simurghs, Centaurs, and several composite birds and animals. The elements previously discussed, such as the Najmat-al-Quds, Timurid cartouches and arabesque

floral patterns also appear in the ceilings and columns of this temple as well (Fig. 6.84).



Fig. 6.85 Swastika patterned wooden panel in the Devi-Kothi temple



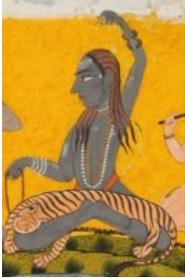
Fig. 6.86 Swastika tile-pattern detail from a Parijata Harana painting

A total of 24 wood-carved squares embellish the ceiling of the Mandapa and the circumambulatory path³⁰⁵, with each square comprised of one central quadratic, encompassing an eight-pointed star; surrounded by four rectangular panels, bearing wooden bas-reliefs within a Mughal cartouche. Hence, the entire ceiling of the temple (including the Mandapa and the circumambulatory path) is decorated with five times twenty-four, 120 reliefs. The arrangement of each of the square is similar to the pattern of Swastika (Fig. 6.85), which appears identical to the ‘Swastika’ tile-patterns as seen in a number of Chamba paintings (Fig. 6.86). A fastidious care is maintained by the painter-carpenters in the arrangement of the figures as not to point their feet disrespectfully towards the cubic sanctum sanctorum.

A brief comparison of a number of figures in the bas-reliefs of the ceilings and their typological source in the painting tradition is given in the following table:

³⁰⁵ Fischer, E., V.C. Ohri, and Vijay Sharma. 2003. "The Temple of Devi-Kothi: Wall Paintings and Wooden Reliefs in a Himalayan Shrine of the Great Goddess in the Churah Region of the Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh, India." *Artibus Asiae. Supplementum* 43, 38.

Table 6.3 Comparison of Devi-Kothi bas-reliefs with paintings

No.	Devi-Kothi Bas-Relief	Painting Detail
1	 <p data-bbox="786 698 903 728">Hatha Yogi</p>	
2	 <p data-bbox="810 1135 880 1164">Narada</p>	
3	 <p data-bbox="799 1545 893 1574">Balarama</p>	

4



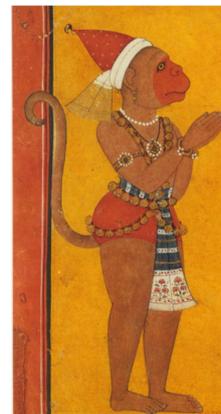
Lakshmana



5



Hanumana



6



Sita



7	 <p data-bbox="778 689 911 719">An attendant</p>	
9	 <p data-bbox="794 1081 896 1111">A Demon</p>	
11	 <p data-bbox="756 1482 935 1512">Vishnu on Garuda</p>	

Conclusion

The confluence of painters, sculptors, metalsmiths, and carpenters in collaborative efforts culminated in a syncretic fusion of diverse artistic procedures, facilitating a multifaceted exchange of iconographic and typological elements. Notably, the painters adeptly integrated decorative motifs drawn from regional cultural contexts. The comprehensive observations presented in this chapter yield a significant revelation:

within the artistic domain of Chamba, distinguished by a conglomeration of painters hailing from diverse origins, iconography emerges as a pivotal criterion uniting these varied stylistic expressions. Furthermore, the progressive intensification of painters' involvement with a range of artistic mediums serves as a reflection of their escalating renown and eminence among their fellow craftsmen in Chamba.