Rupa
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INFINITY FOUNDATION SERIES
CONTRIBUTIONS TO HISTORY OF
INDIAN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

HIMALAYAN TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE WESTERN HIMALAYAN REGION

O.C. Handa

Himalayan Traditional Architecture

(With special reference to the Western Himalayan Region)

O.C. Handa

Rupa . Co

in association with

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

INDIA HAS HAD A LONG HISTORY OF CIVILISATION GOING BACK SEVERAL THOUSAND years. In the global mind this civilisation is largely associated with spiritualism, philosophy and religiosity. There is also an appreciation of great traditions that have continued till today: of performing arts in dance and music; of magnificent works in architecture, sculpture, painting; and of artisanal output of quality relating to crafts. However, over the last couple of centuries the image has been significantly one of poverty: surprising when John Milton in *Paradise Lost* had referred to 'the wealth of Ormuz and of Ind'. For many, it is a land of magicians and snake-charmers; of wild animals like tigers and elephants; of mendicants, and mystics. This image is changing today with India moving powerfully into the knowledge economy and becoming a power to reckon with. What is not known and appreciated is the extent to which a whole knowledge system, and particularly scientific thought, has been inextricably linked to the development of this ancient and continuing civilisation.

There are many reasons for this. An important one is that there has been no major work on the history of science and technology in India. This is not to say that no work has been done in this field; there is a great deal available relating to specific areas, and involving specialised discussion, more so concerning technology. But there is nothing covering science and technology as a whole, dealing with the many diverse areas that it covered, and particularly, its very different conceptual foundations, and also the extent to which it has underpinned the development of Indian society and civilisation. Because of this, in authoritative encyclopaedias (such as Encyclopaedia Britannica), Indian science and technology is dealt within a few hundred words. This must be contrasted with the situation in respect of China, following the great work of Dr Joseph Needham, who produced thirty odd volumes on the history of science

and technology of that country. This made a monumental impact in the academic repositioning of China as a scientific, rational and progressive civilisation. There is need for a similar effort with regard to Indian science and technology.

A further reason for the rather poor appreciation of the history of Indian science is that in the public eye, the development of science and technology is manifested through its innumerable technological artefacts that affect daily lives in society, and great scientific discoveries, both of which rapidly followed the developments that took place around a few hundred years ago in Europe with the birth of the modern, ongoing Scientific and Industrial Revolutions. As a result, the image of western science is so overwhelming that it swamps all earlier history.

In the West, there is major reference to the Greek origins of western philosophy and scientific thought. There was a strong coupling of Arab and Greek science, particularly as manifested in the historical library of Alexandria. It must be remembered that India was an open country, and had significant interactions with the Arab world. Also, western scholars of the pre-Christian era had information on India through reports of Greek origin. It is thus, that the 'Zero' and the 'Decimal place value system' became international and got referred to as the Arabic numerals; but these had their origins in India. Indeed 'Zero' has a deep philosophical meaning, that was characteristically Indian, denoting 'nothing or emptiness'.

There are many who, without a deep appreciation of the character of indigenously developed knowledge structures in India, often propagate the idea that science (which was so intimately interwoven with these knowledge structures) came to India from the outside through Islamic and Western conquests. The fact is that India absorbed all that came in from the outside (whether by invasion or otherwise) and gave freely of itself to the East and to the West.

The following reasoning may provide an indication why it has been difficult to compile a meaningful and reasonably comprehensive history of science and technology in India.

A great deal of knowledge transmittal in India has been through the oral tradition, having been conveyed through chants, hymns, poems and the like; this has been true even in mathematics. These do not remain in the written record, and much of it has probably been lost with the cataclysmic changes in Indian society.

What has been written has invariably been on palm leaf and such other materials, followed by paper recordings; this is particularly the case for the earlier period in history

prior to the advent of printing. A great deal of the source material on which writing has taken place, has been subject to ravages of weather and insects, since India is located in the tropics characterised by high temperatures and humidity. After printed books came into existence, which ensured the availability of many copies of a text, India has not had a great history in science and technology, except in the last century.

Even when written, this was in the language then prevailing, namely Sanskrit, particularly of the archaic variety, and other related languages; there was also the problem of scripts. In recent years, one finds that those who know these scripts and languages, particularly their older forms, have little knowledge or interest in matters that are scientific. Their interests largely lie in areas of literature, philosophy, religion and the like. In contrast, those who know science, and could contribute to a meaningful analysis of recorded history, have scant knowledge of the language and the scripts of the past and often little interest.

Finally, what was transmitted, even on matters that were scientific, was mixed up with a great deal of philosophy, religion and mysticism; often practitioners of science of those days were philosophers or those high up in the socio-religious hierarchy. Knowledge in ancient India was much less compartmentalised; it was characterised by a holistic approach. To extract that which would be regarded as science from this totality is not an easy task.

For all these reasons, the overall effort relating to writing of the history of science and technology in India has been a limited and scattered effort.

From what we know already, it is clear that there was a significant development of science and technology, covering a wide range of areas, with high creativity and originality, and over a long time-span. It is important to record and understand this. The purpose would not be to go back to the past from the viewpoint of claiming how great India was. Whilst there were many great discoveries made in India, which predate the same ones later made in the West, and now named after western scientists, the purpose would also not be to claim priorities or demand changes in attributions. What is important is to carry out proper historical work to understand the developments that had taken place and to record them appropriately.

There are two important reasons why this should be done. The first is from the viewpoint of understanding the nature of society in which science can flourish. Ultimately it is a thinking-questioning society that can give rise to science. It is from this angle that Jawaharlal Nehru constantly spoke about the need for society to be imbued with

a scientific temper, namely, society functioning on a rational objective basis, which can give rise to the development of science – with innovation, originality, and creativity. These qualities cannot arise in a society which is hierarchical and authoritarian. On this aspect Gautama, the Buddha had remarked:

Believe nothing
Merely because you have been told it
Or because it is traditional
Or because you yourself have imagined it
Do not believe what your teacher tells you,
Merely out of respect for the teacher
But whatever after due examination and analysis
You find to be conducive to the good, the benefit,
The welfare of all beings,
That doctrine believe and cling to,
And take it as your guide.

It is important to understand why, with so much creativity and originality that had characterised Indian science and technology of the past, those developments did not last or take off on a self-sustaining basis.

The second reason why one needs to look at the history of science and technology in India is that, to a great extent, the conceptual approach in it has been different from that which has characterised western development. It has tried to examine problems on a holistic basis. It has dealt with complexity. Thus the fundamental basis of the Indian system of medicine, referred to as Ayurveda, is very different from that which characterises the allopathic system. Ayurveda is a holistic system, which attempts to ensure harmony among the different components of the human body, and aspects of its functioning, including relationships with the outside world and inputs received. The approach is to ensure that the mind-body system remains in health, rather than in the treatment of disease. This involves a complex many-body synergy (including the treatment with medication, body discipline of *yoga, meditation* and the like) rather than the deductive, reductionist 'active principles' approach of allopathy; the latter has certainly yielded a plethora of miraculous results.

One is also amazed at the dimensions with which the ancients grappled with, and their many speculations on issues such as origins of the universe and cosmology that

are still with us. There is a great deal that one can learn from these excursions into their thoughts.

It is, therefore, important that any such history deals not only with technological issues that are related to societal needs but to science as a whole.

There have been a number of efforts to cover the history of science and technology in India. The Indian National Science Academy publishes a journal entitled *Indian Journal of History and Science* under the guidance of the Indian National Commission for History of Science. One of the other, very ambitious, ongoing projects in this area is that on the 'History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilisation' of which the general editor is Prof D.P. Chattopadhyaya. The series is projected to cover approximately seventy-five volumes, of which twelve have already been published. There are also many individual efforts such as the Sandeepani Science Gallery in Porbunder and innumerable publications that cover specific topics in science and technology such as copper and its alloys in ancient India; works on Indian medicine and medicinal plants; works on logic, where India was particularly strong, and so on.

I am glad that the Infinity Foundation has considered it appropriate to produce a series on the History of Indian Science and Technology (HIST). It is important that this effort covers not only areas of technology but also of science. It will have to bring together for this, scientists and historians of science, along with those concerned with philosophy, anthropology, religion, ancient Indian languages and many such other disciplines, who will have to interact strongly among themselves on the basis of available textual and other material. It has to be a holistic, interdisciplinary approach. This is a major task but well worth doing.

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NOTE ON INFINITY FOUNDATION

Facilitating Research, Publishing and Education in:
History of Indian Contributions to Science and Technology (HIST)

'In 1750 China accounted for almost one-third, ***India for almost one-quarter*** *and the West for less than a fifth of the world's manufacturing output... In the following decades... the industrialisation of the West led to the de-industrialisation of the rest of the world'.*

—Samuel Huntington, *Clash of Civilisations*, 1997: 86-87.

It is now largely forgotten that India held its prominent economic position referenced above because of its accomplishments in science and technology. The commonly taught history of India emphasises mostly kings, invasions and conflicts. The history of Indian ideas, if taught at all, is limited to religion, philosophy and popular culture. What is being often ignored is the well-documented evidence of India's significant contributions in metallurgy, civil engineering and architecture, water harvesting, shipping and ship building, textiles, medicinal plants, medicine, agriculture, forest management, management, astronomy and linguistics, among other disciplines.

By way of comparison, Joseph Needham's 30 plus volumes on Chinese history of science and technology have made a monumental impact in the academic repositioning of China as having a rational and progressive civilisation. This work is a premier reference in China studies world-wide. But no such equivalent exists for India, as explained below:

'Fear of elitism did not, happily, deter Joseph Needham from writing his authoritative account of the history of science and technology in China, and to dismiss that work as elitist history would be a serious neglect of China's past...'

'A similar history of India's science and technology has not yet been attempted, though many of the elements have been well discussed in particular studies. The absence of a general study like Needham's is influenced by an attitudinal dichotomy. On the one hand, those who take a rather spiritual — even perhaps a religious — view of India's history do not have a great interest in the analytical and scientific parts of India's past, except to use it as a piece of propaganda about India's greatness (as in the bloated account of what is imaginatively called 'Vedic mathematics', missing the really creative period in Indian mathematics by many centuries). On the other hand, many who oppose religious and communal politics are particularly suspicious of what may even look like a "glorification" of India's past. The need for a work like Needham's has remained unmet.'

—Amartya Sen, 1997

HIST is an important part of India's story because it has been the substratum of its civilisation's rationality and secular progress, the basis for pre-colonial Indian Ocean global trade, the foundation for building India's future knowledge society, and a key element in projecting *Brand India*.

Infinity Foundation, a private non-profit foundation based in Princeton, USA, launched its HIST project with the following objectives:

- Document and discuss the history of scientific and technological achievements in the Indian subcontinent until the end of the nineteenth century, because the period after that has already been well documented.
- Inspire creativity and self-confidence among our youth, refuting the popular notion that Indians were irrational and mystical. Replace colonial notions of intellectual dependency and revive India as a premier knowledge exporter.
- Bridge the socio-economic divide: It is often the rural and the underprivileged in India who have preserved key aspects of traditional knowledge, such as in medicinal plants, or traditional civil engineering and home building. By restoring legitimacy to traditional knowledge, which is decentralised and less capital intensive, we empower local/rural cultures, lifestyles and economies. If India hopes to create genuine alternatives to rural migration and the burden of high-density metro lifestyles, we need to re-engage with, and build upon, the strengths of traditional knowledge systems.
- Build India's brand, cultural capital and soft power: Ancient India's higher education and technological genius attracted the cream of Asian students to Nalanda, Taxila

and other Indian centres of learning. The alumni and visiting scholars spread India's cultural capital across Asia. Today, USA has a strategy to educate the future leaders of the world to gain influence globally. China has also embarked upon a strategy to export its higher education for geopolitical influence. If India hopes to preserve and expand its role in the information economy or in engineering design, she needs a civilisational or 'cultural brand' in the same sense as the following culture specific brands:

Japanese-ness	Quality
French-ness	Beauty/aesthetics: cosmetics, fashion, wine, Cannes, tourism
Italian-ness	Design, art, cuisine
British-ness	Justice, law, rationality
German-ness	Precision, manufacturing
Chinese-ness	Efficiency

In each of these cases, the soft power wielded by the country's brand has fueled economic expansion using its civilisational advantages. It is important to restore a realistic counter-balance to India's negative branding brought about by some of the thrusts of the social sciences until now. The following table is not intended as a generalisation but merely as indicative of some differences between two ways of seeking Indian culture – the one by social scientists and the other, by technocrats such as those pursuing HIST research.

Social Sciences on Indian-ness	HIST on Indian-ness
Mystical and otherworldly	Rational, innovative and creative
Frozen in time and backward	Pragmatic and progressive
'Caste, dowry, sati, conflict'	Multicultural and interdependent
Knowledge came from invaders	Indian knowledge systems
The British made us a nation	Many prior nations existed
Lacking self-esteem and afraid of future	Confident and competitive
Defensive and closed	Open and globalised

Once again, Indians are increasingly being acknowledged worldwide for their brainpower, but the *civilisational brand* is dominated by 'caste, cows, curry' images from anthropology.

Furthermore, many Indians have distanced themselves from what they see as 'baggage', bringing about disconnects with their own past. HIST is a secular and all-encompassing shared past for nation-building.

It is important to bring scientists and technologists into this historical research so as to stay focused on the evidence and not the politics. The goal is not to glorify but analyse objectively, in order to use the knowledge for present and future growth and to learn from past mistakes.

INFINITY FOUNDATION'S HIST PROJECT

Although Infinity's vision is to implement this unprecedented, composite and inclusive series, we would like to acknowledge and applaud many pioneering contributions and research done in this field, such as the following, and work with them to expand the discipline:

- 5 volume series on traditional agricultural practices by Indian Council for Agricultural Research;
- 2 volume series on History of Science by Dr D.P. Chattopadhyay;
- History of Indian Medicine by Dr S. Valiathan;
- Works of Indian National Science Academy; and
- many others.

The HIST project was started in 2002, after being conceived at the Foundation's Colloquium in Woodstock that was jointly convened by Infinity Foundation and Columbia University. So far, only the series on Materials and Technologies has been started. Two other series, one on Life Sciences and another on Theoretical Sciences, are envisioned for the future.

Annual project meetings have been held all over India to review progress, share research and foster collaboration. These meetings—in places as varied as Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, India International Center (Delhi), Kumaon University (Nainital) and Banaras Hindu University (Varanasi)—have also served as outreach to local colleges and to the general public by giving them a chance to interact with our academic scholars. It takes approximately three years to develop each volume (the final manuscript) and involves a team of scholars, in addition to the author(s).

TOPIC SELECTION CRITERIA

The following criteria were applied in selected topics for the series:

- Time period of focus should be sciences and technologies developed until the end of the nineteenth century.
- Topics must have empirically verifiable and significant Indian contributions.
- Subject matter experts should be available, *especially within India*. This helps the growth of research communities invested in such investigations and secures the roots of this work in India over time.
- Religion and 'stories' should be avoided as evidence, namely, no 'Pushpak Viman' to be included. The goal is an honest exploration, not glorification.
- The sources and scholar must be internationally credible.

The steps include rigorous peer review and editorial review at each step, and project administration by Infinity Foundation. Infinity Foundation owns the copyright.

About Infinity Foundation (IF)

Infinity Foundation is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit tax-exempt private foundation that was started in 1995 as a vehicle for its founder to give back to the Indian and American societies. For further information, please contact:

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Rajiv Malhotra
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EDITOR'S NOTE

A FEW YEARS BACK, IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR A STUDENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY OF A Western university, interested in non-literate traditional knowledge systems, to obtain permission to take up a dissertation on the topic or to muster up the necessary grants. However, now the Traditional Knowledge Systems (TKS) are gradually coming to be recognised in the West also.

Modern science can perhaps be dated to Newton's times. However, Traditional Knowledge Systems date from more than two million years ago, when *Homo habilis* started making his tools and interacting with nature. Laura Nader in her famous book *Naked Science* (Routledge: 1997) brought out a collection of essays, which show highly complex and systemised systems of traditional knowledge, be it for duck hunting, marine fishing or complex navigation in vast oceans and so on.

It is now recognised that western criteria are not the only sole benchmark by which other cultural knowledge should be evaluated. In countries with ancient cultural traditions, the *folk* and the *elite* science were taken as part of the same unified legacy and allowed to exist independently, without any hegemonic categorisations. On the other hand, colonisers systematically destroyed or undermined the local traditional science, technology and crafts of the lands and people they plundered, because of their intellectual arrogance and their insatiable desire to control and appropriate the economic means of production. Modern societies created hegemonic categories of science verses magic, technology verses superstitions, and so on, which were arbitrary and contrived. The term 'Traditional Knowledge System' was thus coined by anthropologists as a scientific system which has its own validity, in contradistinction to 'modern' science.

In India, however, there has not been such a dichotomy between the so-called Great (elite/*Margi*) and the Little (folk/*Desi*) knowledge traditions. The folk science is duly recognised as a non-literate traditional knowledge system. The folk knowledge tradition has a parental relationship to the *Margi* tradition, which is an elite, literate and systematised form of selective knowledge gleaned from the folk sciences. Folk science is an accumulation of knowledge through the millennia, gained through trial and error and experience. It is basically an empirical form of knowledge. We have the example of the Himalayan (Folk) Medicinal System where about two thousand Himalayan herbs are used, one-third of which in course of time, were incorporated into the elite *Materia Medica of the Ayurveda*. This theme will be explored in a separate volume under this series.

In India, we now have a vast amount of recent literature on the theory and practice of religious architecture, but somehow domestic architecture has mostly gone unnoticed by the literate tradition.

Dr O.C. Handa, the author of this book, combines in himself the expertise of a civil engineer and an archaeologist. He is a good photographer and an artist as well. Most of the sketches, drawings and photographs are his work. He has spent a lifetime in surveying and studying the architectural remains of the Himalayan region, particularly in the modern state of Himachal Pradesh. He began his explorations in the 1960s and continues to do so till the present day. He has travelled through very difficult and hazardous terrain for months together. Some of the sketches in the book show the dangerous paths, which girdled vertical cliffs that he had to negotiate. His accounts of the domestic architecture are permeated with empathy for the local, rural and tribal people. Through his acute observations he has recorded the innovations made by the people in constructing their dwellings. Some of the devices employed by them (for example, the *Katth-kuni* style) do not use the rigid joints, allowing the energy of the earthquake tremors to dissipate without effecting the structure. On the other hand, the ancient Kardar *Kothi* at Brahmaur was badly devastated by the Kangra Earthquake of 4 April 1905. Joints of cement, for example the RCC construction, get destroyed by earthquake tremors because of their rigidity.

Thatched roofs also provide non-rigid structures which also prevent extreme temperatures outside from affecting the interiors of the rooms. The architectural style and devices are conditioned by the local biophysical conditions. These styles are also determined by the availability of construction material, which differ from region to

region. In the Trans-Himalayan region, the houses are partly buried inside the ground as also in the mountainside behind them. This allows the house occupants to partake of the earth's natural warmth during long and freezing winters. But under the subtropical conditions they built houses on a linear plan allowing access to fresh air.

In course of time, the people learnt of the economic advantages of houses built upon a square plan, instead of a rectangular layout, as the perimeter of the latter type of house is more with no change in floor area, thus saving on building extra wall length. They have also been able to make use of such material as schist rocks which are so difficult to dress or stick to mortar.

Dr Handa tells us that the communities living in such environments decorate their houses with paints of coloured clays as well as use bas-relief and beautiful wood engravings with floral and animal motifs. All of these involve minute technological innovations and close observation of things around them.

As the objective of the HIST series of books, sponsored by Infinity Foundation, is mainly to record the History of Science and Technology, I am sure this volume will be a landmark in the documentation of non-literate traditional secular architecture.

D.P. Agrawal
Editor

PREFACE

SHELTER HAS BEEN ONE OF HUMANKIND'S BASIC NECESSITIES SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL, besides food and clothing. While nothing has changed significantly in man's food and clothing habits, he has been constantly improving upon his dwelling to make it more homely, protective and comfortable to suit his ever-changing lifestyle under various environmental conditions. In that quest, not only have the basic materials of construction and their usage techniques changed radically, but the planning and design parameters, functional imperatives and everything else too have undergone almost complete transformation.

Living in a self-created microenvironment within the four walls of his dwelling, man has isolated himself from his surroundings. He has not only created a yawning gulf between nature and himself, but today he even dares challenge it, and in that frenzy, occasionally falls into its inescapable traps. To harness nature in a sympathetic and symbiotic manner is one thing and to 'manage' it with anthropocentric psychology is another. Consequently, he finds himself at a loss where his moorings with nature and his inheritance are concerned.

In our age, the paradox of civilisation is that the web of publicity has so completely strangled our objectives and rational thinking, that we have developed a callous attitude towards traditional wisdom and the inherited value-system, which identified us with nature. In that benumbed state, we tend to fall into the quagmire created by the influential consumerist mafia. Today, everything sustainable is conveniently available 'readymade' in synthetic capsules. Thus, alienated from one's roots and detached from the earth, humans are as helpless and desperate today as they never had been. We are today incapacitated to differentiate between the fallacies of 'synthetic living' and the subtleties of 'natural living'.

Therefore, there arises a dire need to bring us out of that stupor and to make us conscious of our roots and surroundings before it is too late. A biblical dictum says, 'Go unto the rocks whence you have sprung', and it is high time for us to realise it and look for nuggets of traditional wisdom that lie scattered and neglected among rural folks, and find their relevance in the modern context. In our times, when fundamental studies related to the environment and the common people are being encouraged, it is imperative that the so far ignored and under-evaluated wealth of traditional wisdom be explored and redefined in the contemporary scenario for the betterment of the earth and humans.

The present study on the traditional Himalayan domestic architecture (with special reference to the western Himalayan region) is a humble effort to that end. I have been studying the traditional Himalayan domestic architecture from various angles, since the early sixties of the last century, to be precise. Having travelled extensively and intensively through the area several times, I collected enough field data – measurements, structural and architectural drawings and sketches, notes and photographs. However, to make that data up-to-date, I visited all those places several times again so that nothing was left incomplete. Many new buildings were studied, drawings were prepared anew and digital photographs taken (earlier I had only bromide photographs). Thus, I had to prepare afresh all the illustrative material for this work. Dr Madhu Jain also accompanied me to several places in the interiors. She prepared a fine oil painting of a village in Jaunsar area, in Dehradun, which I have reproduced in this work (Fig. 2.15). This study, spread over eight chapters, strives to explore and bring forth the surviving nuggets of traditional wisdom in the Himalayan interiors, which have since ages provided people with cost-effective, congenial, functional and eco-friendly dwellings in this mountainous region.

To show the effects of geological and geographical factors on the regional architectural idioms and the ethnic diversity, geological and historical information has been provided. Some of the architectural features recur in different regional idioms. All such peculiarities have been described in detail, even at the risk of repetition. In this book, the convention of using the singular form of the vernacular word for specific caste/communities, when referred to as individuals and groups, has been adhered to.

Although the ancient temples and monasteries of this region, especially the classical stone temples, have already attracted attention of scholars, archaeologists and architects for their antiquity and artistic grandeur, they have yet to take notice of the equally

important traditional dwellings of the common people. The traditional wisdom that has gone into their planning, and the functional aspects of these houses may prove valuable if integrated with the modern house building technology. Because, what the modern engineers and architects have been looking for – eco-friendly and *Vastushastra* compatible architecture – may be already available in the traditional knowledge of domestic architecture.

O.C. Handa

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I HAVE BENEFITTED IMMENSELY WITH THE HELP AND HOSPITALITY OF THE PEOPLE in the entire Himalayan interiors wherever I went during my fieldwork. That made the arduous task in the field not only pleasant, but also enjoyable. Despite my desire, it may not be practicable to acknowledge them individually. Therefore, I record with deep humility my gratitude to those unnamed benefactors. I must say with confidence, that the common people of the Himalayan interiors are among the most helpful and hospitable people in the world.

I had been longing to work on the Himalayan domestic architecture for many decades, but could not undertake such an onerous project until Prof D.P. Agrawal introduced me to the Infinity Foundation. Besides, I benefitted greatly from his valuable suggestions and persuasive support to meet the deadline. I feel deeply beholden to him for all that.

I am grateful to Mr Rajiv Malhotra, President of the Infinity Foundation for having facilitated financial support for this research project. My thanks are also due to my friends and well-wishers in the Infinity fraternity for all their warmth and love.

I must record my thanks to Dr Madhu Jain for permitting me to reproduce one of her oil paintings on the Himalayas – *Rural Setting, Chakrata, Dehradun* – in this book.

My grateful thanks are also due to Mr B.M. Pande, retired director of the Archaeological Survey of India for reading the manuscript and to Ms Sonya Singh for going through the book very painstakingly and seeing it through.

O.C. Handa

LIST OF FIGURES

All the sketches and photographs in the figures, except when mentioned otherwise, have been made/have been taken by the author.

1

THE GEO-ETHNIC MOSAIC

THE MIGHTY HIMALAYA, ORIENTED NORTHWEST TO SOUTHEAST, IN THE NORTH OF the Indian subcontinent, forms a magnificent crescentic crown over it. This curvature is abruptly acute towards the western segment, where the Himalayan mountain system is at its widest, and justifies the appellation of a 'scimitar' given to it in ancient literature (Datar 1991: 7). The characteristic width of its western segment is further accentuated by the awe-inspiring heights of its silvery summits and spiny ridges, stupendous valley glaciers, unfathomable river-gorges, complex geological structures and a rich variety of temperate and alpine flora and fauna.

THE MOUNTAIN SYSTEM

All the natural features of the Himalayas have imparted to it an exotic charm and divine aura as Kalidasa extols it in *Kumarasambhavam* (Sehgal 1959: 3):

Astyuttarasyam dishi devatatma himalayo nam Nagadhirajah,
Poorvaparaou toyanidhee vigahya sthitah prithivya iv manadandah.(1)
Yam sarvashailah parikalpya vatsamn merou sthite dogdhari dohadakshe,
Bhasvanti ratnani mahoushadheenscha prithoopadishtan duduhurdharitreem.(2)

These couplets when translated mean:

Far in the north Himalaya, lifting high
His towery summits till they cleave the sky,

Spans the wide land from east to western sea,
Lord of the hills, instinct with deity.
For him, when Prthu ruled in day of old
The rich earth, teeming with her gems and gold,
The vassal hills and Meru drained her breast,
To deck Himalaya, for they loved him best.

Geographically, the River Indus defines the Himalayan region on the west. The spiny ridges and silvery peaks of the trans-Himalaya Karakoram Range separate it from the highlands of Central Asia on the north and from the Tibetan plateau on the northeast. Towards the east, the gorges of the Tons-Yamuna form a natural border between this region and the Central Himalayan region, popularly known as Uttarakhand or Kedarkhand, which includes the newly formed state of Uttarakhand and the kingdom of Nepal. In the south, the undulating foothills of the Siwaliks (*Koh-paya* of the Persian scholars) broadly define its border with the Indo-Gangetic plains in Punjab and Haryana. This region is located approximately between 75° and 80° East, and 30° and 36° North. It largely forms the catchments for the Indus drainage system, but a small eastern part of it also drains into the Yamuna and the Ganga.

India has sovereignty over a major part of the western Himalayan region, covering an area of 283,799 km^2. Pakistan has administrative control over an area of 83,839 km^2 towards the northwest and some portion on the northeastern side is under Chinese occupation (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica* 1977, Vol. 8: 882)

The western Himalayan region under Indian sovereignty is administratively divided into three states: Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand (Figure 1.1). While Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh fall entirely within the geographical domain of the western Himalayan region, only a small part of Uttarakhand, west of the Yamuna, may be included in it, on the basis of biophysical and socio-cultural affinities. The state of Jammu and Kashmir is spread over a geographical area of 222,236 km^2 and it forms the northwestern part of the western Himalayan region. This figure includes 120,849 km^2 of the geographical area that is under dispute among India, Pakistan and China. At present the net total geographical area under Jammu and Kashmir within the Indian union is only 101,387 km^2 with a population of 10,069,917 people living in fourteen administrative districts. These are: (1) Kupwara, (2) Baramula, (3) Srinagar, (4) Badgam, (5) Pulwama, (6) Anantnag, (7) Leh (Ladakh), (8) Kargil, (9) Doda, (10) Udhampur, (11) Poonch, (12) Rajauri, (13) Jammu and (14) Kathua.

The state of Himachal Pradesh, with a population of 6,077,248 people, is spread over a geographical area of 55,673 km^2. The state is divided into twelve administrative districts, namely, (1) Chamba, (2) Kangra, (3) Lahul and Spiti, (4) Kullu, (5) Mandi, (6) Hamirpur, (7) Una, (8) Bilaspur, (9) Solan, (10) Sirmaur, (11) Shimla and (12) Kinnaur.

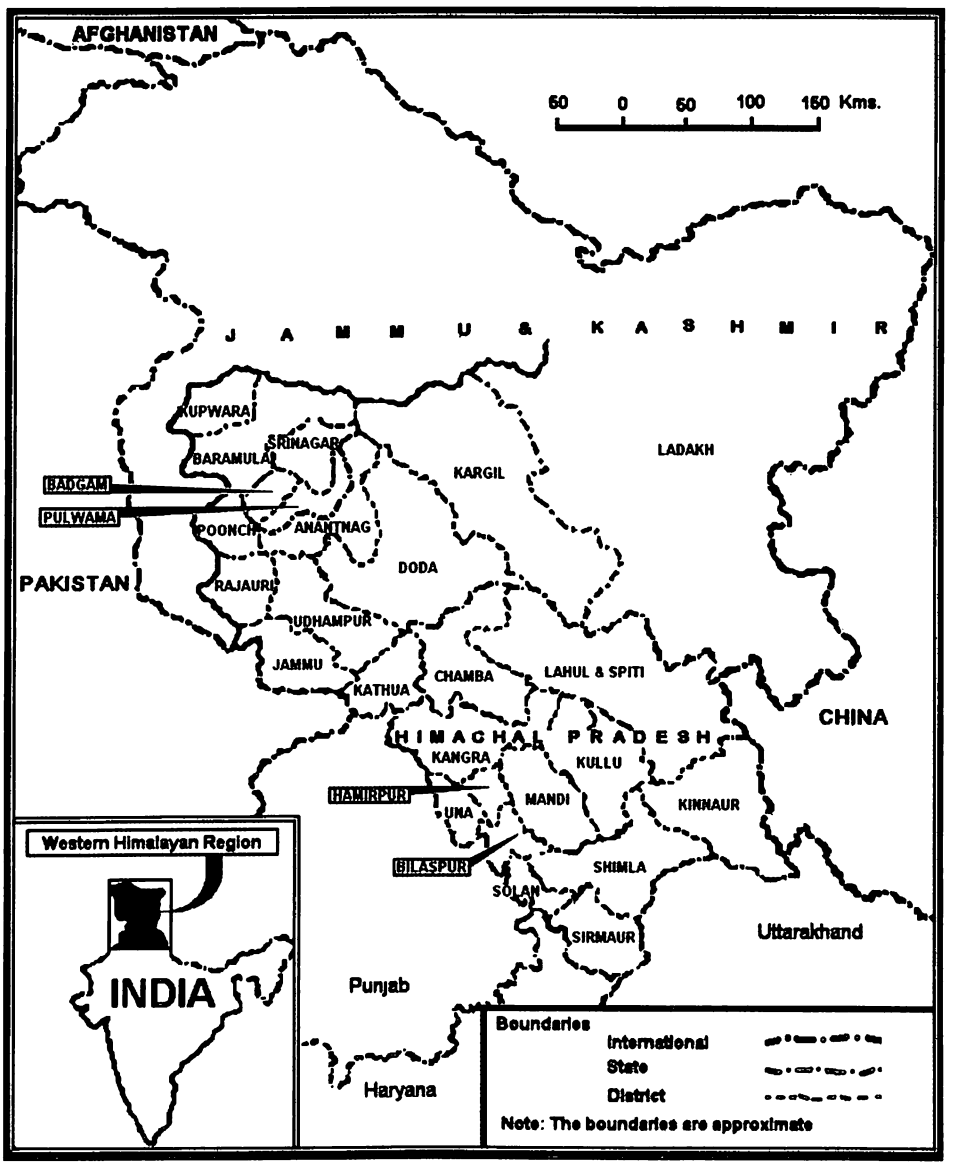

Fig. 1.1: Administrative map of the western Himalayan region

In addition to these two major states of the western Himalayan region, a very small area of only 890 km^2 in the Jaunsar-Bawar *pargana* of Dehradun District in Uttarakhand, west of the Yamuna, may also be included within the geo-cultural sphere of the western Himalayan region (Banthia 2002).

Politico-administrative divisions notwithstanding, the entire western Himalayan region has a long and common history of social, religious, cultural and economic coherence. This uniformity may be seen profoundly reflected in the ethno-cultural milieu, age-old identical religious beliefs, socio-cultural habits, art and architectural forms and styles. Nevertheless, the quintessential local characteristics may also be identified here in the popular ethos under the localised biophysical and geoclimatic conditions in different terrains, further accentuated by the sub-regional, socio-cultural peculiarities and conditioned by various extraneous influences. This mosaic-formation has imparted colour and charm to the religious and cultural life of this region. Thus, the variegated and spectral cultural pattern of this region exhibits inherent overall coherence and unity in diversity.

The western Himalayan region forms vast catchments for the Indus river-system. All the perennial snow-fed rivers of this system – the Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Satluj – either originate in this region or traverse through it. These rivers generally flow diagonally from the northeast to the southwest. However, the Indus is an exception to that rule, for, though flowing in the northwestern direction for most of its length in the trans-Himalayan snow-desert in the Ladakh region, it abruptly turns in a south-westerly direction at the foot of *Nanga Parbat* (8128 m), piercing the Great Himalayan Range. Besides, this region also forms a major watershed for the Yamuna, and it contributes fractionally to the Ganges. Thus, the eastern part of this region also contributes to the Gangetic river-system. The western Himalayan region is a vast elevated natural water-storage system that perennially feeds most of the rivers of the Indo-Gangetic plains.

Defined by these rivers and their numerous tributaries, the western Himalayan geographical expanse is composed of numerous range-systems. Nestled among these ranges, depending upon the geological formations, there are several wide and open valleys and sub-valleys of great grandeur and natural exuberance, and unfathomable dark and deep ravines and gorges. All these valleys and gorges are characterised not only by the different geo-climatic conditions and biospheres, but also by the very striking ethnic, social and cultural diversity among the people who inhabit them.

The western Himalayan mountain system (Figure 1.2) has broadly been delineated into different ranges, characterised by their geological peculiarities and geo-altitudinal aspects. These are: (1) the Siwalik Range, (2) the Outer Himalayan or Sub-Himalayan Range, (3) the Mid-Himalayan Range, and (4) the Great Himalayan Range.

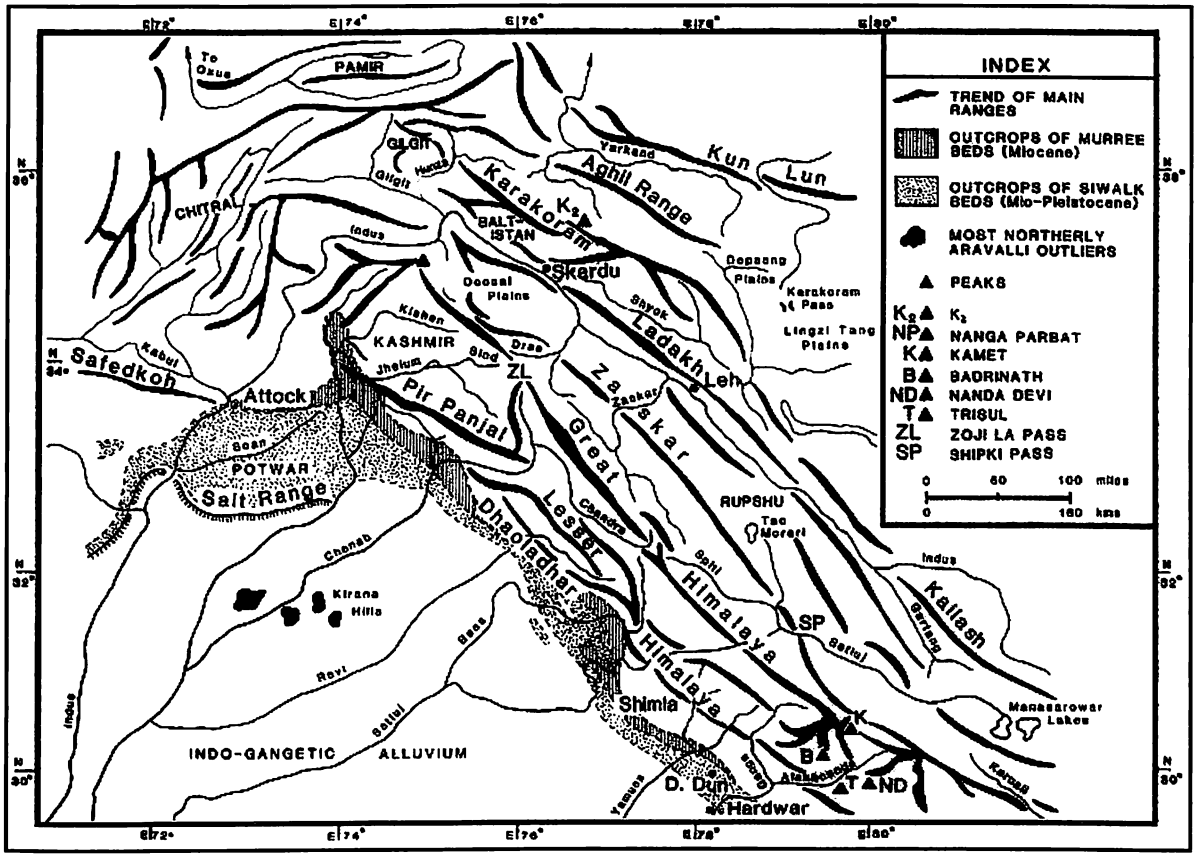

Fig. 1.2: Physical map of the western Himalayan region (based on data by D.P. Agrawal)

The Siwalik Range

The southern and outermost sandstone ranges of the western Himalaya are the Siwaliks which roughly mark a natural border between the plains of the mainland and the mountainous country of the western Himalaya. In the Siwaliks, the undulating stretches of the shallow structural basins abutting on the Dhauladhar are as wide as 100 km in the Jammu and Kangra region.

The range-system of the Siwaliks runs parallel to the main Himalayan mountain system from the northwest to the southeast, forming beautiful glens in between. This range does not rise beyond 1100 m in height. These hills are steeper towards the plains and ascend gently northwards, forming wide and flat undulating basins, the *tarai* or *doon*. These *doon* can proudly boast of unsurpassable grandeur in their verdant vales, gurgling streams and enchanting lakes, all these set at their luxurious best.

The Outer Himalayan Range or Sub-Himalayan Range

The outpost of the Himalayan mountain system is the Outer Himalayan Range. It is anchored in the Gundgarh Peak on the Indus in the extreme northwest, and following a southeastern course, it ends up in the Ganga watershed, south of the Baspa Valley in Kinnaur. The entire length of this range is around 500 km. Several rivers – Jhelum, Chenab and Ravi, amongst others, penetrate it before it enters Himachal Pradesh.

In Himachal Pradesh, the Beas cuts this range into a fantastic gorge at Larji and the Satluj, around Wangatu in the lower Kinnaur. Thus, this range is broken vertically into several sub-ranges and ridges east of the Kangra District. All these sub-ranges and ridges are identified by their distinct geological and geographical characteristics or by their local names.

The Sub-Himalayan Range is at its loftiest between the rivers Beas and the Ravi, where its most conspicuous landmark – the Dhauladhar (*Dhavalagiri*, that is, White Mountain) – soars up in an abrupt sweep to 4930 m. Thus, it stands as a formidable obstruction for the south-westerly monsoon clouds, which release most of their moisture over the Kangra area, before rising dry and high enough to cross northwards. Therefore, the southern slopes of Dhauladhar are some of the wettest places in the subcontinent. This range roughly marks a boundary between the districts of Chamba and Kangra.

The southern slopes of Dhauladhar provide catchments for the Beas River, which flows down the beautiful valley of Kullu and meanders through the undulating Kangra structural basin. Dhauladhar remains covered with snow for most part of the year, affording no access across it, yet the sure-footed Gaddi have been frequenting its precipitous passes with their animal wealth (popularly known as *dhan*), during their seasonal migrations ever since they found permanent homes for themselves in the upper reaches of the Ravi Valley in Chamba, popularly known as the Gadderan.

The Mid-Himalayan Range

The Mid-Himalayan Range rises in the extreme west, starting at the confluence of rivers Swat and Panjkora, and continues for about 750 km eastwards up to Uttarkashi in Uttarakhand, where it ends up as a cluster of the Yamunotri massifs. This system consists of ridges defined into four distinct massifs, namely, (1) the Swat Range, (2) the Pir Panjal Range, (3) the Lahul Range, and (4) the Bushahr Range. Of these, the Pir Panjal Range is the most significant one.

The magnificent Pir Panjal Range looks far more prominent than the Great Himalayan Range further northwards, because beyond the Dhauladhar Range, the silvery peaks and ridges of this range present a bewitching spectacle of the Himalayan mountainscape, obscuring the main Himalayan range. The Pir Panjal Range is spread between the Kishanganga gorge in Kashmir in the west and the Deo Tibba in the east in the territory of Himachal Pradesh. This range enters the Chamba District in Himachal Pradesh, and runs eastwards to form the headwaters of the Beas and its tributaries in Kullu District. The northern slopes of the Pir Panjal Range form the watershed for the Chandrabhaga River in Lahul and Spiti districts. In Kashmir, this river is known as the Chenab. The famous Banihal Pass (2832 m), the lowest point on this range, provides a fair-weather passage from the mainland to the Kashmir Valley: later a tunnel (the Jawahar Tunnel) made its way through it at 500 m below the pass. The Jawahar Tunnel now provides all-weather access to the valley.

The Pir Panjal Range forms a natural barrier between Kullu and Lahul; the only (seasonal) communication link is through the Rohtang-la (4100 m). Towards the northwest, it isolates the Pangi Valley from the rest of the Chamba District, with only an occasional fair-weather access through various passes across it. Of these, the Sach Pass (4368 m) and the Telangi Pass (4575 m) are well-frequented.

The northern slopes of Pir Panjal Range form a watershed for many rivers. Of these, the Jhelum River rises at Verinag at its base on the north, and besides the Beas towards the south.

The Great Himalayan Range

The Great Himalayan Range is a maze of ranges, which after reaching their climax, declines gradually towards the northeast, in numerous parallel sub-ranges and ridges to the edge of the Tibetan plateau. The main part of the Great Himalayan Range rises high

above the snowline and forms a magnificent crescentic crest of the Himalayan mountain system. It is a zone of perpetual snow and dazzling heights (Figure 1.3). Some of the world's highest peaks are located in this range, for instance, the Dhaulagiri (8172 m), the Annapurna (7943 m), the Mount Everest (8850 m), and so on.

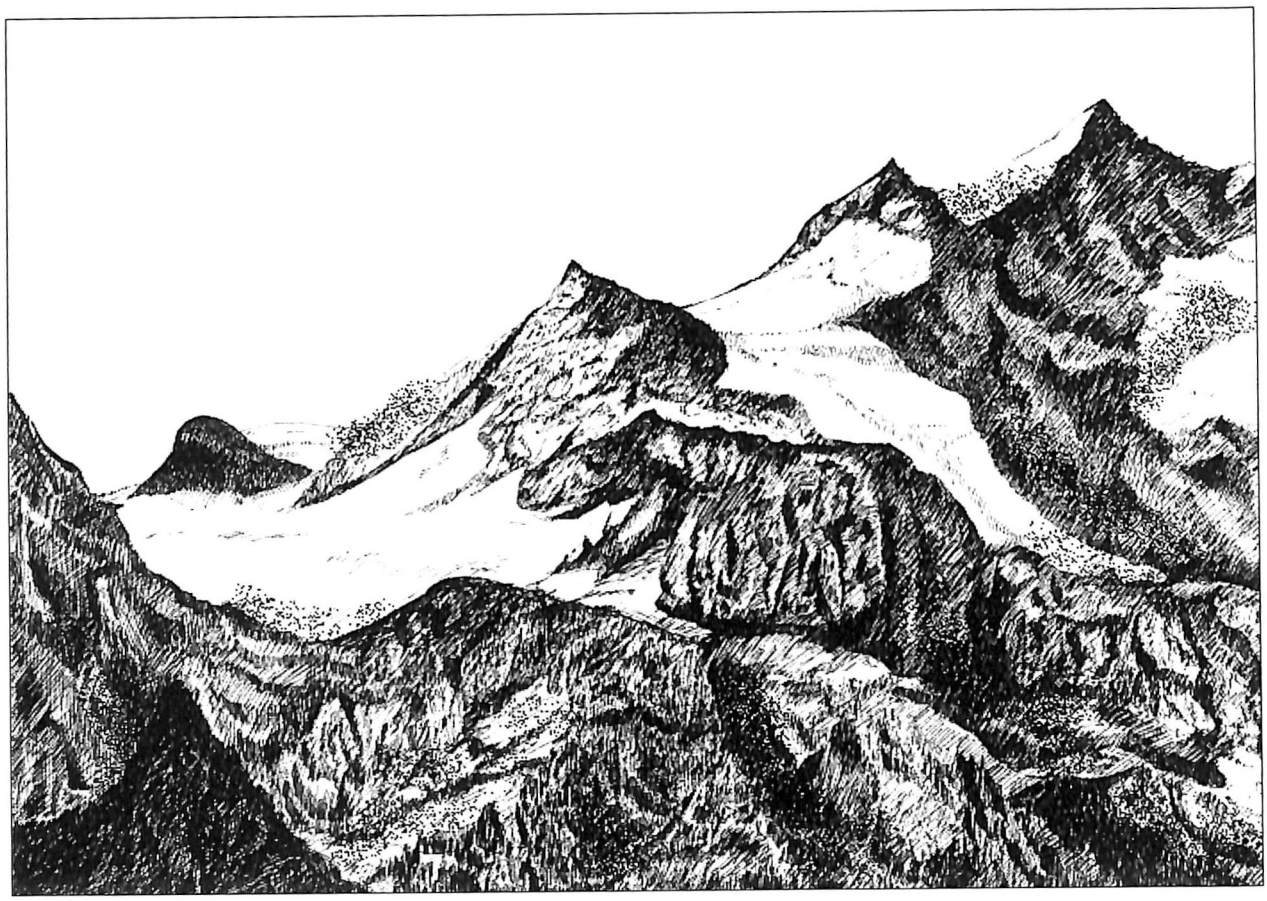

Fig. 1.3: The Himalayan grandeur

In the western part, *Nanga Parbat* or Diamir (8182 m) is the highest peak, followed by Shilla (7027 m) and Leo Pargail (6791 m) north of the Satluj above the Nako Peak and Gurla Mandhata Peak (6716 m) of the Ladakh Range. This range is dissected by the rivers Satluj and Pare towards the eastern extremity of Kinnaur and by the Indus at the foot of *Nanga Parbat* (8128 m), respectively. The length of this part is about 1040 km between Monomangli (Gurla Mandhata Peak – 6716 m) and the headwaters of the Gilgit and the Kunar.

The Great Himalayan Range demarcates a physical and ethnic boundary between Ladakh, Spiti and the upper Kinnaur towards the northeast and Kashmir, Chamba, Lahul, Kullu and the lower Kinnaur towards the southwest, isolating the Tibetan Buddhist segment from the non-Buddhist one. The entire region to its northeast, including Ladakh, Spiti and upper Kinnaur is Buddhist-dominated and the region on the southwest, including Kashmir, Chamba, Lahul, Kullu and lower Kinnaur, is preponderantly non-Buddhist in issues of faith. While in Kashmir, the Muslim population is in the majority, the Hindu population predominates in Chamba, Lahul, Kullu and lower Kinnaur. In Lahul, however, Buddhism also has a considerable impact.

The Great Himalayan Range and its northeastern sub-ranges form a natural demarcation between the two climatic and geographical zones. To the north and the northeast of the range, the cold and dry climate in the treeless tableland of Tibet predominates against the temperate and monsoonal climate and luxuriant vegetal growth on the mainland side towards the south and the southwest.

BIOPHYSICAL REGIONS

Separated by the aforementioned ranges, the vast and variegated geographical expanse of the western Himalayan region may be demarcated into four distinct biophysical zones, depending mainly upon the temperature, altitude, precipitation, normal intensity and direction of wind, climate and the geophysical aspect of the range/system. These factors play a very crucial role in the composition of vegetation even within the same biophysical zones. These biophysical zones are the (a) Tropical Zone, (b) Subtropical Zone, (c) Temperate Zone, (d) and the Alpine Zone. While discussing these biophysical zones, the tropical and subtropical zones have been clubbed together under one heading, the *Tropical Zone;* the subtropical species of the thorny and semi-desert vegetation found in the steppe forests form an insignificant part of the western Himalayan biosphere.

Further, the influence of the western Himalayan range-system is not only relevant to the creation of different biophysical zones, but it has also overwhelmingly influenced the geo-ethnic and socio-cultural mosaic of this region, which is clearly reflected in the domestic and religious architecture of this region. Thus, these zones also define various ethno-cultural areas. Thus, the characteristics of the tropical zone are confined

to the foothill belt of the Siwalik region bordering the plains. This foothill belt also has a distinct ethno-cultural and architectural identity.

Temperate biophysical conditions extend over a vast inner mountainous area between the Outer Himalayan, the Mid-Himalayan and the Great Himalayan ranges. However, this area is characterised by very complex ethno-cultural patterns, confined to different river-valley systems. Incidentally, this area is the most relevant to the present study of the quintessential features of traditional domestic and religious architecture that flourished here. The temperate biophysical zone may be divided into two ethno-cultural regions: (1) between the Outer Himalayan Range and the Mid-Himalayan Range, and (2) the Mid-Himalayan Range and the Great Himalayan Range.

The alpine biophysical conditions are largely relevant to the vast snow-desert northeast of the Great Himalayan Range, characterised by a distinct type of ethno-cultural scenario and a very different type of domestic and religious architecture.

Based on the aforementioned considerations, the entire western Himalayan region may be broadly delimited into four ethno-cultural regions, namely, (1) Siwalik Region, (2) Sub-Himalayan Region, (3) Mid-Himalayan Region, and (4) Trans-Himalayan Region.

The Siwalik Region

As far as the western Himalayan region is concerned, the tropical biophysical condition has little relevance, for no such condition exists here. The sparse subtropical thorny and semi-desert vegetation may be found mixed with the stretches of *sal* (*Shorea robusta* Robx. ex Gaertn. f.) and other tropical deciduous species in the steppe forests. The undulating rolling foothills of the Kyarda Doon in Sirmaur District once had a reputation for flourishing flora and gregarious fauna in its congenial dense forests. However, most of those forests have been ruthlessly felled to meet the needs of ever expanding human settlements. Thus, the green cover is being depleted incessantly. Further westwards, the undulating stretches and the rolling hills formed by the shallow structural basins extend as wide as 100 km in the Kangra region, where the *sal* trees are confined to the forests at a lower altitude towards the southwest, mixed with numerous tropical and subtropical species. However, the *sal* trees here are bushier and statelier than the ones in the Kyarda Doon and further eastwards. In the higher reaches, the resinous *cheer* pine (*Pinus roxburghii* Sarg.) abounds on the mountain slopes, giving place to temperate forests on the higher reaches of the mighty Dhauladhar Range that isolates this subtropical biophysical zone from the temperate bioclimatic conditions towards the northeast. The

sal, though fine-grained, is a hard wood: therefore, it is not preferred for structural use as much as the deodar. However, owing to the higher cost and scarcity of deodar wood, *sal* has become commonly used structural wood for the houses in Kyarda Doon. *Cheer* wood, being highly resinous and porous, is rarely used for structural work. Nevertheless, people use it for secondary structures.

In ancient times, this region was divided into various *janapadas;* the ruling houses, some of which – the Audumbar, Trigart, Vamaki, Kadda, Kunind and Yaudheya – are known by their coins. However, the circumstantial evidence suggests that the Kunind or Kulind formed the bulk of the population in this region. This fact is well-established from a specific name for their territory – *Kulindopatyaka*, that is, the bounding foothills demarcating the Kulind territory – in the *Vishnupuran*. The Kunind or Kulind of the ancient times are the Kanet of today. They still form a major substratum of the agrarian population in the *tarai* region.

The communities, which subsequently settled in the outer parts of the western Himalayan region, coming from the Indian mainland in the process of a northward thrust, constitute the upper stratum of the heterogeneous population in this region. The Brahman, Khatri, Rajput, and others, are among such latecomers. Most of these communities are now identified by their different generic titles, but the ones who settled in the Duggar or the Jammu-Kangra area (Figure 1.4) are known as the Dogra. Among them, the Dogra Rajput firmly established themselves in the Siwalik foothills between the Chenab and Satluj. However, they had to face resistance from the native population of the Kanet (also known as the Ghirth in Kangra and Jammu area), but the Dogra ultimately succeeded in prevailing upon them. The acrimony caused due to the Rajput infiltration into Kanet territory is reflected in their inter-caste social behaviour: the Kanet were considered outcasts in the Dogra social setup until recently. However, that feeling exists no more, and the term 'Dogra' now carries generic connotation for all classes of people living in the Dogra land – the *Duggar khetra* – or the *tarai* belt, between the Chenab and Satluj.

It is significant to note that most of the classical stone temples of the *tarai* region are concentrated in the Dogra territory. In the later Mediaeval period, many dome-shaped temples were built in the Dogra land under the patronage of different Dogra kings. Most of these temples, made of *lakhauri* or *nanakshahi* bricks in lime mortar, carry magnificent murals. These temples are a class by themselves, representative of 'Dogra architecture'. This architectural style spread eastwards in a wide area up to the Yamuna.

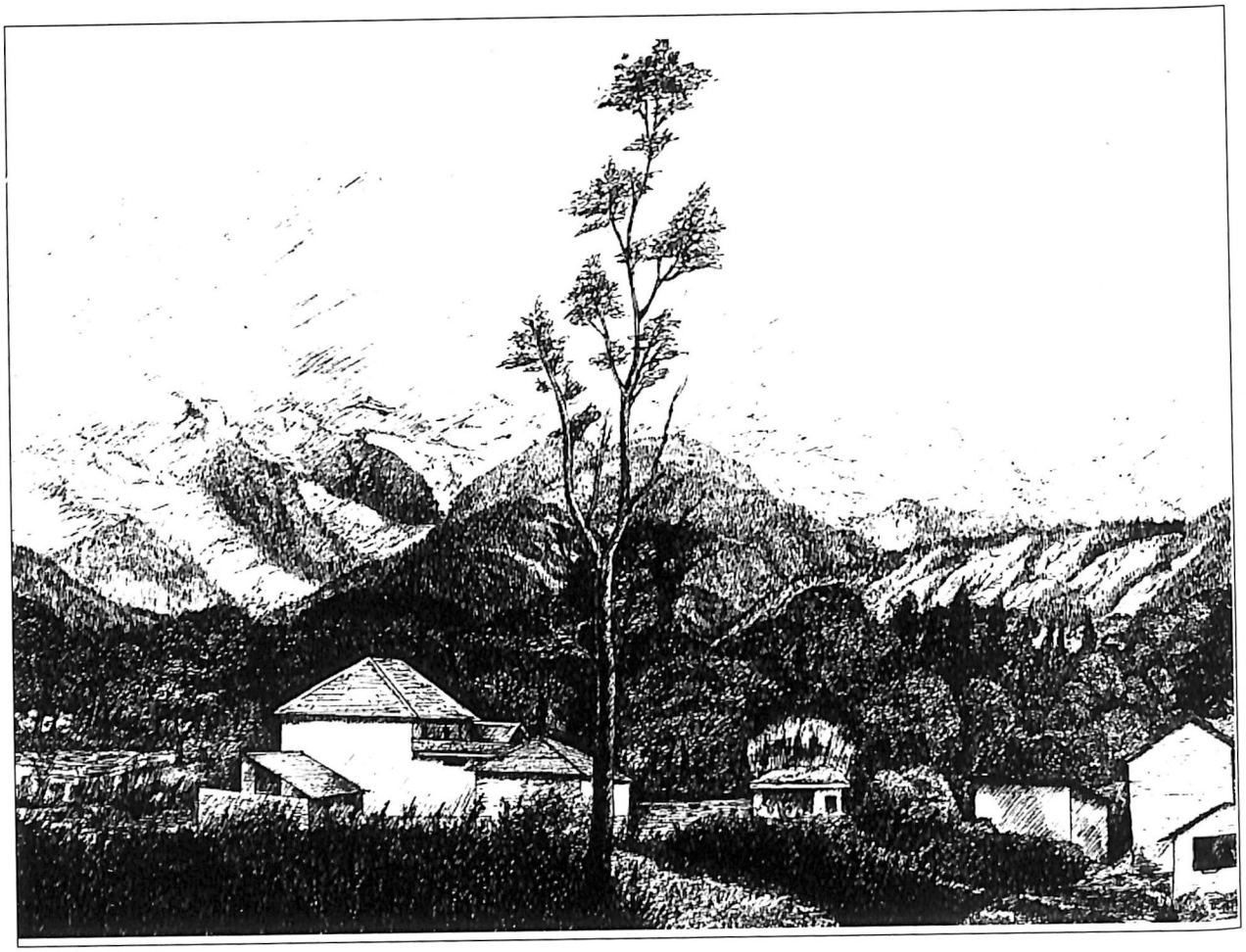

Fig. 1.4: A rural setting in the Jammu-Kangra region

The Kanet dominate large areas of the *tarai* belt east of the Satluj up to the Yamuna, and their population has further spilled over even into the inner Himalayan valleys, where they mingled with the majority Khasha population.

The lifestyle that has developed in the *tarai* area due to its proximity with the mainland has largely semi-urban features. Although the mainstay of livelihood here has been agriculture, yet small shops and stalls of all descriptions set around the village squares may give an impression of a suburban atmosphere. This feature is conspicuous in the western part in the Dogra land, where petty shops may be found interspersed between the houses aligned in clusters along the streets in the villages.

Since structural sandstone of high quality is amply available in the *tarai* belt from various quarries, there has been extensive use of stone in building works – forts, palaces,

houses and temples. In fact, it is in this area where most of the classical stone temples are concentrated. The high structural quality of the fine-grained stone of this region may well be adjudged from the fact that, on the north of the Vindhya Range, one finds a colossal rock-cut temple, complex only in this belt at Masrur in Kangra District. Further, it was from Baijnath, a famous temple town in Kangra, that the renowned sculptor Ramkinkar carted huge blocks of stone to carve out the colossal statues of Kuber and Yakshi, installed at the Reserve Bank of India building in New Delhi. The schist deposits on the slopes of Dhauladhar provide some of the finest quality slates, with which almost all the traditional residential houses here are roofed.

The Sub-Himalayan Region

The temperate biophysical zone is widely stretched between the Sub-Himalayan and the Great Himalayan ranges. The Sub-Himalayan Range and its numerous offshoots, jutting out southwards, define the southwestern extremity of this biophysical zone. Towards the northeast, the timberline at about 3350 m on the southwestern slopes of the Great Himalayan Range, defines the limit of the temperate zone. The temperate geo-climatic conditions extend to the middle part of the western Himalayan region. In Jammu and Kashmir, the temperate geo-climatic conditions exist in almost the entire state, excluding the trans-Himalayan districts of Kargil and Leh (Ladakh), and in Himachal Pradesh, the districts of Chamba, Mandi, Lahul and Spiti, Kinnaur, Solan and Sirmaur districts; the entire geographical area of the Kullu and Shimla districts is covered with temperate jungles.

This area is rich with a variety of temperate forests at lower heights, containing conifers and broad-leaved trees. These forests extend from the floor of the valleys to an average height of 3350 m, followed by an alpine zone of oaks and conifers higher up. The deodar (*Cedrus deodara* Roxb. Loud.) or the Himalayan Cedar is the most valued timber species of the temperate biophysical zone, and is the staple material for building and construction. The geographical range of deodar is very vast. Although it normally flourishes between 1900 m to 2700 m above sea level in the temperate zone, in the western Himalayan region, its forests extend from about 1370 m to 3350 m. Thus, even on the southern slopes of Dhauladhar, its dense growth may be seen along the crest and further down on the slopes and spurs. Deodar also grows at higher altitudes in the interior river valleys of the Chandrabhaga, Ravi, Beas and Satluj and along tributaries of the Yamuna and Ganga.

Besides deodar, many other coniferous and broad-leaved species also flourish in this temperate zone, depending upon the local variations in relief and climate, as well as exposure to sun and wind, for these factors considerably affect variation in the floral composition. The notable species for structural purposes are: the *lewar/shur* (*Juniperus excelsa* Bieb), *tooni/ tunh* (*Toona ciliata* Roem.), *shamshad/mohru/khursoo/kharshoo* (*Quercus semicarpifolia* Sm.), *akhrot* (*Juglans regia* L.), *bhurjpatara/bhoj-patra* (*Betula utilis* D. Don), *bankimu/kow/wee* (*Olea ferruginea* Royle), *rous/riunse* (*Cotoneaster bacillaris* Wall.), *kakkasingi/kakare* (*Rhus succedanea* L.), *thuner* (*Taxus baccata* L.), *brass/bruass* (*Rhododendron arboreum* Sm.), amongst others.

The sub-Himalayan region roughly includes the northern part of Jammu area in Jammu and Kashmir, the southern part of Chamba and Mandi, Kullu and Shimla districts and the Giri-par (that is, trans-Giri) area of Sirmaur District in Himachal Pradesh. In Uttarakhand, the Jaunsar-Bawar area of Dehradun District may also be included in this region. Topographically, this region is formed by the numerous cascading and meandering streams, narrow and steep valleys and steppes, running in different directions at altitudes of about 900 m and above. Because of the ravines, the sunny hours in the deep valleys of this region, where most of the habitable areas are located, are shorter. The higher mountain ranges around also receive copious snowfall during winters, which are comparatively longer and more severe in the deeper valleys. However, where the valleys open up, as in the Kullu and Rohru areas, the scenic grandeur of nature may be found at its luxuriant best.

In this tract, one finds a heterogeneous amalgam of various ethnic communities, such as the Gujjar and the Gaddi, though the Khasha command an overwhelming majority. The Gujjar and the Gaddi are not native to this region, having been in the western Himalayan interiors only since the early Mediaeval period. However, the Khasha are known to have occupied the Himalayan interiors up to Nepal, much before the Aryans were seen in the Indo-Gangetic plains. They settled in the western Himalayan region in various localities, where they developed numerous local peculiarities. Thus, as part of the broad racial characteristics and religio-cultural traits, local peculiarities also became manifest among them, and they became known by different local generic identities.

These ethnic communities – the Gujjar, Gaddi and Khasha – have played a very important role in the assimilation of various art and architectural influences from diverse sources, which they could blend to formalise a unique idiom in the wooden architecture typical of the western Himalayan region. The Khasha contribution in that process has

been so definitive that the wood-based architecture of the central part of the western Himalayan region can aptly be defined as Khasha architecture.

These communities will be briefly discussed in the context of their contribution to the development of domestic and religious wooden architecture of this region in the following sections.

The Gujjar

The Gujjar moving with their herds of buffaloes and makeshift household belongings from the Himalayan steppes to the north Indian plains are a common sight. The range of their wanderings is very large. Having pursued a very laborious and rustic nomadic living for many centuries, the Gujjar are now completely oblivious of their hoary and glorious past, when the writ of their ancestors, the imperial Gurjar swayed over the major part of northern and western India.

With the data so far available, a section of scholars, including K.M. Munshi, is of the opinion that the Gujjar are the autochthons of India, who descended from the Yadav. A clan of Gujjar even calls itself Nandvanshi. According to Alexander Cunningham, the Gujjar tribe existed even before the birth of Christ. Due to unknown reasons, they are believed to have migrated from peninsular Gujarat to northern India and settled in the dense jungles on either side of the Ganga and the Yamuna.

Foreign scholars, especially those from Georgia, opine that the Gujjar belonged originally to Central Asia, particularly to Georgia. Georgian scholars Prof Georgi Chogoshvili of the Georgian Academy of Science and Prof Levan Maruashvili of the Georgian Institute of Geography claim that there exists a remarkable similarity between the Gujjars and the inhabitants of Georgia (known as *Gurjarstan* in Persian).

According to Rudolf Hoernle, during the earlier part of the sixth century CE, the central Asiatic races, the Huns and the Gujjar, whose exact interrelation is not yet known, invaded India. Although many Hindu kingdoms and ruling houses in the Indian mainland – the Pushyabhuti of Thanesar, Maukhari of Kanauj, later Gupta of Malwa, Maitraka of Valabhi, amongst others – offered resistance to Gujjar expansionism, yet many other Hindu kingdoms indulged them for their own gains. Thus, the Gujjar could swarm over a vast area in north India, and extend their hold in the southern peninsula as well. According to Vincent Smith (cited in Rose 1970, Vol. III: 300), the Solanki (Chalukya), Parihar (Pratihar), Parmar and Chauhan, the four so-called *Agnikul* clans of the Rajput, were originally the divisions of the Gujjar, to which Rudolf Hoernle

adds the Tomar and the Kachhwaha. While the Chalukya went towards the south, the main chunk of those dominating hordes settled in Punjab and Rajputana. They asserted their might to establish their kingdoms along the Thar Desert in Rajasthan – Takka kingdom in Punjab, west of Ravi, in Mandor; Bhinmal in Marwar, in Jaipur, Gwalior and in the Punjab Himalaya. Ultimately, all the petty north Indian Gurjar kingdoms were integrated by the Pratihar of Kanauj, a branch of Bhinmal (Marwar) dynasty. The Pratihar established their empire over the whole of northern India, from the border of Bihar to the Ravi River in Punjab and the interiors of Western Himalaya. Rajashekhar, the court poet of Mahendrapal, speaks of Mahipal, a Pratihar king of Kanauj, having conquered Kuluta, the kingdom in the inner Beas Valley during the tenth century CE. After perpetual warfare with indigenous princes in north India, they were ultimately absorbed into the Rajput population. The Gurjar found mention in the *Harshacharit* of Banabhat, and they were widely described by Hiuen-Tsang in his travels.

During the middle of the seventh century CE, one of the Gurjar clans, the Pratihar, emerged dominant, followed by the Parmar and Chauhan, and the imperial Pratihar-Gurjar of Kanauj around the middle of the eighth century CE. In the mid-ninth century CE, the Gurjar rose to imperial heights in north and western India under their patriarch Bhoj I. However, after his demise, his son Mahendrapal I not only maintained his father's empire, but expanded it eastwards. His son Mahipal extended it deeper into the western Himalayan interiors. The imperial Gurjars ruled uninterruptedly for about four centuries, after their rise in the sixth century CE. During this period, not only did they hold their kingdom together, but also buttressed it against foreign aggressions, until Kanauj fell under the attack of Mahmud of Ghazni. However, the next three centuries saw them gradually declining due to internal strife and external aggression. By the turn of the thirteenth century CE, the Gurjar were nowhere to be seen in the Indian political scene.

The contribution of the imperial Gurjar and their scions in moulding the socio-cultural and art history of the western Himalayan region has been considerable. However, it has been little acknowledged or appreciated in most writings on cultural history, notwithstanding the fact that the credit for the best wooden architectural and sculptural specimens in the western Himalayan region goes to them. The original part of Lakshana Devi Temple and the image of Lakshana Devi may be cited as examples in this regard. Further, it was under the aegis of the imperial Pratihar-Gurjar that the art and architectural traditions of the mainland and the Brahmanic cults proliferated

in the mountainous western Himalayan region. In fact, most of the soldierly Gurjar clans established petty Rajput kingdoms in the mountainous parts of northern India after the disintegration of the imperial Pratihar. Many of them even adopted different Rajput titles to glorify themselves and to be at par with the blue-blooded Rajput aristocracy. Thus, the petty neo-Rajput kingdoms in the western Himalayan region could maintain cordial contacts with their Rajput counterparts in the north Indian plains and establish matrimonial relations with them. This relationship was responsible for not only introducing north Indian art and temple architecture in the western Himalayan region, but also for the proliferation of the Brahmanic pantheistic system. The Brahmanic dominance not only eclipsed and distorted the character of autochthonous nature-based belief systems of the people, but also spread the Mahayanic pantheistic system.

There are conflicting views about the declining days of the Gurjar. According to one, the Gurjar got fragmented into two segments, one segment somehow managed to retain their hold on small territorial pockets. That segment came to be known as the *Rajput*. Incidentally, the term 'Rajput' appeared for the first time in Indian history in the context of Mahmud's raids. In support of that view, one comes across many subcaste names, which are common to both communities – the Gujjar and the Rajput – in the plains. The second segment, uprooted from its land, took to nomadism and adopted buffalo husbandry as its profession. It is believed that they fell to the proselytising tyranny of Aurangzeb and embraced Islam. Having remained incessantly under pressure of harassment, the nomadic Gujjar took to the mountainous interiors of Jammu, where they adopted a transhumant lifestyle. Nevertheless, most of them still recall their Hindu ancestry and follow certain Hindu practices. It is believed that some Gujjar groups spread from Jammu to the neighbouring districts of Chamba, Mandi and Kullu. They came to be known as the 'Jammuwala Gujjar'.

Despite the fact that the Gujjar have now been living in the mountains and valleys of the western Himalayan region for a very long time, they have neither been able to take roots in the soil, nor imbibe any socio-cultural influence from their surroundings or contribute on their own. Under that state of abject self-confinement, the Gujjar lifestyle has remained unchanged and stagnant in a primitive state, which fact is subtly reflected in their rustic *kotha* and *myhara*, in which they live with their livestock, their uncouth dress manners and artless ornaments.

The Gaddi

The Gaddi are a traditional community of the western Himalayan region, about whom fact and fiction, history and mystery have been blended so intricately and repeated so often that what has come down from the oral traditions perpetuated by the Brahman and Rajput Gaddi, is regarded as their authentic history. The ancient history of Chamba (that is, of the Brahmpur kingdom) is paradoxically identified with the history of the Gaddi (Figure 1.5) notwithstanding the fact that they played no role at all in the ancient Brahmpur polity. Scholars have put forth different theories about their origin and arrival in the upper Ravi Basin. All those may be grouped into four time-brackets. According to one tradition, which Mahesh Sharma (*The Indian Express* 8 April 1993) revealed in his paper in the *Cultural History of Himachal Pradesh*, 'the earliest account of Gaddi migration came during the reign of Meruvarman, ca 680 CE, who needed Brahman priests for the new temples he had erected. The earliest immigrants belonged to the Gautam *gotra*, closely followed by a family of Saraswat Brahmans of Bhumipal *gotra*, emigrating from near Bhopal.' Three other explanations are listed below:

(1) One oft-repeated tradition holds that Brahman and some Rajput clans migrated to the upper Ravi Valley during the regime of Ajaivarman (c. 760-80 CE) in eighth century CE (Punjab Government 1996 b: 71).

(2) There is a popular saying among the Gaddi, '*Ujadeya Lahore, te baseya Bharmaur.*' It means that after Lahore was deserted (possibly by Muslim invasion) Brahmaur was inhabited. Some Rajput and Khatri clans from the Indian plains are also known to have settled there during the regime of Aurangzeb (1658-1707 CE) in the seventeenth century to escape persecution (Punjab Government 1996 b: 137) – a very convenient pretext to explain settlement of various princes, castes and clans in the western Himalayan interiors.

(3) According to Ibbetson and Maclagan (Rose 1970, Vol. II: 257), there existed a shepherd and goatherd community of *Gadaria* in the Yamuna zone of Punjab. They later became known as the *Kambalia*, because they adopted weaving of blankets as their occupation. Rose (1970, Vol. II: 257) also writes that there existed a Hindu Gaddi community among the Saini and the Muslim Gaddi in a vast area around Karnal, Delhi and Ambala, a long time ago. To add to what Rose has said, the Gaddi of Brahmaur claim to have migrated to the mountainous interiors of the Ravi Valley in the twelfth century CE and, in fact, they are the

descendants of the old *Gadhaiya*, who were spread out in parts of northwestern India (Goetz 1969: 102).

Fig. 1.5: A Gaddi family on the move

The first three of the aforementioned theories may give rise to certain doubts about their credibility, when examined in the broader socio-cultural composition of the Gaddi community below:

(a) The tradition of Brahmans having come to Brahmpur from near Bhopal during the reign of Meruvarman is hardly sustainable, because during those days Brahmpur was under the paramount influence of Kashmir not only politically, but also in the spheres of art and religion. On the other hand, none of the epigraphic records indicate that the rulers of Brahmpur or Chamba ever recognised the supremacy of Kashmir. That may suggest that the Kashmiri hold over those kingdoms was neither stringent nor permanent (Vogel 1994: 97). It is indicated that sometime around 1120 CE, King Udayavarman (c. 1120-40 CE) of Chamba

threw off the Kashmiri yoke for good, taking advantage of the internal strife and the Muslim invasion of Kashmir (Punjab Government 1996 b: 63, 81). But how could the Brahman priests of Bhopal, enjoying royal patronage and comfort at Brahmpur, adopt the non-Brahmanic transhumant shepherding?

(b) If the people who migrated to the interiors of Ravi Valley (from the mainland in the eighth century and then again, after a gap of one thousand years in the seventeeth century) were Brahman, Rajput and Khatri, how could they have renounced their different traditional occupations and opted for the radically different occupation of goat and sheep herding? It will appear rather surprising that sheep-herding had never been the principal occupation of even the native Lohar, Baddhi, Hali, and of some other communities in this mountainous tract.

(c) There could be a possibility that some Brahmans followed the fugitive cadets of the ruling houses, from the mainland to Brahmpur, but then why should those Brahmans renounce their comfortable and lucrative ancestral vocation and adopt a completely non-Brahmanic and lowly vocation of shepherding? Further, one does not hear about the existence of a Gaddi community in the classical Brahmpur kingdom from the numerous epigraphic evidences. Most likely, even the Brahman families, which had once settled in Brahmpur with their fugitive patrons, also followed them to the new capital town at Chamba, and possibly no one was left at Brahmpur even to attend to the liturgical dispensation at the temples. That situation is indicated from the *Brahmaur Copperplate Inscription* of c. 950 CE of King Yugakaravarman (c. 940-60 CE), which does not refer to any Brahman priest, but relates to the Narasimha temple. The text (Vogel 1994, I: 164) of the copper plate states, 'He [the king] informs all officials, every *raja*, *rana*, chief-justice and all house-owners. Be it known unto you, neighbouring country people, landholders and others, who are the eighteen elements of the state. On [the temple of] Narasimha founded by the Queen, the illustrious and divine Tribhuvanarekha, is by a formal libation of water (?) this grant bestowed. Having understood [this], let all the servants of the king, named and unnamed, observe it, so that on the authority of the charter issued by us, he (the grantee) should live and cause [his tenants] to live, without paying a tithe [to the Raja]. Let no one offer obstruction.'

Thus, the first three of the four aforementioned theories about the immigration of Gaddi from the mainland to this region are hardly sustainable. Now, there is a

fourth theory, that of Ibbetson and MacLagan (Rose 1970, Vol. II: 257). A glance at the socio-political scenario in the north Indian mainland during the twelfth century CE would reveal that the country was then passing through the turmoil of internal unrest and external invasions. Different Rajput kingdoms had arisen in western and central India after the collapse of the Pratihar empire. These kingdoms strived to divide among themselves the imperial heritage of the Pratihar, which instilled fear and insecurity in the minds of the common masses. The plundering raids by the Muslims under Muhammad Ghauri had further aggravated the situation at that juncture (Majumdar *et al.* 1963: 277). Under such a volatile condition, the nomadic shepherds might have become soft targets of ruthless loot and killing of their flocks. The unrest in the *tarai* area due to intermittent warfare pushed them further into the Kangra Doon. The people of Kangra, reeling under the shock of the devastation unleashed by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1009 CE, were already apprehensive of the terror-ridden situation in the neighbouring plains. Thus, having sensed fear and insecurity even in the Kangra area, most of those shepherds might have crossed the Dhauladhar and found a safer haven in the upper reaches of the Ravi Valley, while a few of them stayed back in the Kangra interiors, in the western slopes of Dhauladhar. Vijayvarman (1175-? CE) was reigning at Chamba at this juncture.

Whether the ancient Gadaria, Gaddi or Gadhaiya community were the ancestors of the Gaddi community from this region may not be known until proper research is done, but it may be said with due certainty that the present-day Gaddi are the descendants of one of those casteless nomadic-shepherd groups of the Indian plains, who once lived around the Barmer area of Rajasthan. This fact may be inferred from the handmade and block-printed cotton fabric, mirrors, cowries and shells that the Gaddi use for their costumes and ornamentation. Significantly, the use of such printed cloth, shells, and cowries, is unknown to the other ethnic communities of this region, while these articles have traditionally been in use among the nomadic communities of Rajasthan since ages.

According to a popular tradition among the Gaddi of Brahmaur, Jaistambh, a scion of a ruling house of Rajputana, became a wandering sadhu on being banished from his home. While wandering, he happened to reach Kharamukh in the interiors of the Ravi Valley below Brahmaur. Jaistambh found a cave at that place and sat there for meditation to solicit the blessings of Lord Shiva. The Lord was pleased by his arduous penance and devotion, and granted him a set of *topa*, *chola* and *dora*. The three articles eventually

became his outfit, and his followers too adopted the same attire. These fugitives came to be identified as the Gaddi. The tradition is interesting, for it subtly indicates that before Jaistambh and his companions reached Brahmaur, they were not aware of the Gaddi dress. Incidentally, there is mention of another Jaistambh (Punjab Government 1996 b: 69), who was the third and youngest son of Maru (*c.* 540-50 CE). He is known to have collaborated with his father to establish the Brahmpur kingdom. These customary practices and traditions may bring into focus the fact that the present-day Gaddi essentially had their roots in Rajasthan.

The ancestors (womenfolk) of present-day Gaddi used a particular type of hand-printed cotton fabric in their homeland in Rajasthan. This particular type of cloth has been the traditional manufacture of the Chhimba – a traditional caste of dyers – of Barmer. With the exodus of the shepherding clans from Rajasthan to the north Indian plains and the Siwalik foothills, some of the Chhimba of Barmer also settled at Samba in the Jammu region. Some of them later settled in the villages near Shahpur-Hatali at the foot of Dhauladhar to cater to the demand of their nomadic Gaddi clients. The descendants of those traditional dyers still live in Village Hatali and the adjoining villages in Bhattiyat tehsil of Chamba and the neighbouring Kangra District. They earn their livelihood by hand-printing (block-printing) coarse hand-woven cotton cloth for the *launcharis* of Gaddi women (Handa 1998: 267-68). The Gaddi women are so fascinated by the hand-printed cotton fabric produced by the Chhimba, that this printed fabric has become an intrinsic part of their dress. Dressed in the colourful and frilled *launcharis* made of that cloth, the Gaddi damsels are considered the most beautiful of the hill women for their rosy complexion, sharp features, shapely oblong face and graceful, supple and tall bodies. It was the beauty of Nokhu Gaddin, which captivated the Katoch king of Kangra, Sansar Chand. As a testimony of their love, life-size standing images of Nokhu Gaddin and Sansar Chand, representing Parvati and Shiva respectively, may be seen in the Sansar Chandreshwar Temple in the legendary hilltop palace-complex at Tira-Sujanpur.

Although a Gaddin needs no ornament for her body, for her graceful features, proverbial modesty and chasteness have been her best ornaments; she has an inherent penchant for jewellery, mostly drawn from nature. Among these are the semi-precious stones, wild beads, cowries, shells, feathers, mirrors, tinsels and coloured threads – all crafted by herself. Such items of adornment are drawn, so to say, from almost all corners of the globe. For, the Gaddi have been wandering about almost everywhere

and are keen to liberally imbibe influences from other people. Obviously, besides a flock of goats and sheep, a Gaddi always aspires for a lovely Gaddin, as the following folksong reveals:

Gaddi charanda bhedan,
Gaddani dindi dhup.
Gaddi jo dinda bhedan,
Gaddani jo dinda roop.

Translated, this song means the following:

Gaddi herds goats and sheep,
Gaddin adores (Shiv) with incense.
Gaddi is blessed with sheep,
Gaddin with beauty par-excellence.

In fact, a flock of sheep and goats is an integral part of a Gaddi's personality, as beauty is part of a Gaddin's.

Thus, having been driven away from their native roots and now living in the highlands of the Ravi Valley for centuries, the Gaddi still wear skin-fitting cotton clothes. They use woollen clothes only as outer garments. This may point to their origin in the cotton culture of the mainland. Against it, the indigenous communities of this region belong to the wool culture. The typical attire of a Gaddi is his proverbial *chola*, a loose woollen overcoat that he wears as an over-garment on his coarse cotton shirt. The indigenous folks in the Himalayan interiors have also been wearing the local variants of that *chola* since ages. The *pheran* of Kashmir, *chola* of Gaddi and of the Kulluvis and *loiya* of the Mahasavis are broadly the same age-old doublets with minor local variations.

Nevertheless, the Gaddi's *chola* is a class by itself. This all-pervasive overcoat is long enough to reach below the knees. Numerous items are tucked in its lappets. Significant among these are needles, threads, flint-cotton, and so on. The *chola* is so tied with *dora* at the waist that it becomes roomy enough above the waist to create a space (called *khukh* from Hindi *kokh*, that is, the womb) to store essential items. The *khukh* serves as an incubator for the newborn lambs when the Gaddi are on the move. In the innumerable folds of the *dora* are stowed a *kulhari* (an axe), a *bansuri* (flute), a *runka* (flint-iron), a *mandua* (leather pouch), his favourite *chilam* (a small hookah), a *darat* (an iron sickle) and a host of other items. Most of these indispensable items are decorated

in a simple manner with coloured threads, wild beads, cowries, and so on, turning these commonplace items into splendid pieces of folk art. In and around the *chola*, a Gaddi may carry 40 kg to 50 kg of load and still feel comfortable while walking with his *dhan* or *mal*, that is, wealth – that is how a Gaddi regards his flock of goats and sheep. A Gaddi always carries his load on his back (never on his head like a Gujjar), for miles and miles on the tough mountainous tracks unmindful of rain or shine, heat, cold, day or night without any visible signs of fatigue on his face. The Gaddin is in letter and spirit his better half all through thick and thin. She always equally shares the burden of his tiresome work without a trace of remorse. Perhaps nature has cast the bow-legged body of a Gaddi in a mould different from that of other human beings.

As mentioned before, since the Gaddi originally came from the 'cotton culture', one would find close to their bodies, only cotton garments. The ostentatious woollen over-garments are what they 'borrowed' and 'imitated' from the native communities. However, those costumes and ornaments have now remained exclusively with them for centuries; and Gaddi have now become the rightful claimants of this exotic outfit.

The ancestors of the present-day Gaddi established their new home in the upper Ravi Valley, which eventually came to be known as the 'Gadderan', that is, the home of the Gaddi. In the Gadderan, they initially lived in a compact casteless community, as they had been in the mainland, pursuing their nomadic shepherding vocation. Nevertheless, because of the vast experience and practical wisdom acquired by them during their wanderings in the mainland, they have become very practical. Therefore, to establish their superiority over the native communities – the Koli, Rihara, Lohar, Baddhi, Sippi, Hali, and so on – they feigned to be part of the Hindu caste-system and defined themselves as Brahman, Rajput and Khatri; all upper castes. Thus, a stratified social setup, based on the Hindu caste-system developed among them, minus its rigidities. None of them either adheres to their caste-based occupation or follows the orthodox Brahmanic dogmas, but stick only to the caste labels. Sheep and goat rearing became their full-time vocation; and even today, this is the major support of their agro-pastoral economy. Traditionally speaking, only the upper three castes of the Hindu caste-system come within the ambit of the Gaddi social setup, the native folks are excluded as outcastes and non-Gaddi (Punjab Government 1996 b: 137).

Thus, the people belonging to indigenous communities, such as the Koli, Rihara, Lohar, Baddhi, Sippi, Hali, and so on, are not customarily regarded as Gaddi. Interestingly, while the Gaddi have been maintaining that caste-based facade for others,

they have been practising endogamy within themselves. Brahmans can intermarry with the Rathi, Rajput and Thakur by both forms of marriage. Similarly, Khatri may intermarry with the Brahmans. However, of late, the caste-lines are being redefined and inter-caste marriages are being discouraged to maintain class identity. Nevertheless, under modern awakening, neither is the caste-system being strictly followed nor are the low-caste people being excluded from the Gaddi social setup. Even polygamy has become an accepted institution in the Gadderan area, and all traditional inhabitants of the Gadderan area are defined as the Gaddi. Thus, *Gaddi* has come to stay as a generic identity rather than a class or community distinction.

Because of the sterling qualities of their character, the rulers of Chamba trusted and favoured them over all other subjects of Chamba and granted them certain privileges and preferences. For instance, none of the Gaddi was subjected to *begar* (menial duties), but they owed military service to the kingdom. Gaddi landholders could avail of the special privilege of approaching the Raja directly: bypassing the feudal bureaucracy, if ever they felt that injustice had been done to them. Gaddi had the special advantage of conducting trials of any persons of their community without referring cases to the magistrate at Chamba. Gaddi paid a *bachh dasrit* cess (a special land tax) to the state that ensured that no non-Gaddi could marry a Gaddi woman or keep a Gaddi widow. In case, a Gaddi woman was charged with adultery (which was very rare), she was tried by the *drubiyal*, who exacted a penalty according to the custom (Punjab Government 1996 b: 273-274). The rulers of Chamba had so much confidence in them that most functionaries in the harem were Gaddi. Customarily, on the eve of the coronation of a new ruler, each of the 'nationalities' in the state participated, but on the first day, the raja was dressed and crowned as a Gaddi (Newell 1961: 5). All these privileges created strong ties between the Raja of Chamba and the Gaddi.

In the process of socio-cultural fusion with the native people, and under the prevailing geo-climatic conditions in the highland interiors of Ravi Valley, the Gaddi have imbibed many peculiarities of the native stock through a process of assimilation. Accordingly, their dress, food and living habits have undergone complete metamorphism. Thus, although the present-day Gaddi may not ethnically belong to the earlier, indigenous inhabitants of this area, yet having lived with them in the same environment now for centuries, they have developed strong cultural affinities. Since the ancestors of present-day Gaddi had been nomadic shepherds in their native region in the plains, they found no difficulty in adopting similar occupations as the native folk in the highland tract, where agriculture has never been a sustainable proposition. That may explain why it is

difficult to define Gaddi as an indigenous community, so the term 'tribe' (an abused term) associated with them is a misnomer based on an erroneous use of sociological parameters.

The Gaddi are largely confined to the Gadderan area in the mountainous interiors of Ravi Basin, but they have spilled over to the southern slopes of Dhauladhar in the Chamba (Bhattiyat tehsil) and Kangra area, where they have established their *doghari*, that is, second homes. Such dwellings are known as *dohchi* (Punjab Government 1996 a: 26) at other places in the region. Earlier, those slopes used to provide wintering grounds for their flocks, and a transit-place on their uncharted wanderings in the *doon* and further afield. It may be conjectured that their maiden exodus to the interiors of Ravi Valley from the mainland might have taken place along the mountain tracks across the passes on the Dhauladhar Range, and not through the formal valley route leading to Chamba and from there to Brahmaur along the upstream course of the Ravi River. The tenacious Gaddi have been following these very mountain routes on their seasonal errands ever since, mostly bypassing Chamba.

The Gaddi are among the most colourful, romantic and interesting people in the entire Himalayan region. Being by nature the most affable, liberal and open-minded people, they are readily one of the friendliest people in the world, content with themselves in their own environment and way of life. For such noble qualities, they are usually addressed as *mittar*, a friend. In fact, Gaddi and *mittar* are used synonymously in the local parlance. The other term used for Gaddis is *pohal*. However, both these terms signify different meanings. While the term Gaddi is a generic distinction for the people centred in the Gadderan area, the term *pohal* (called *phogala* in Lahul area) is an occupational distinction for the Gaddi or non-Gaddi shepherd and flock-masters, who generally follow a transhumant or migratory routine. Not all Gaddi are from the Gadderan area, but most of them are *pohal*. The Gaddi *pohal* move between the mid-Himalayan valleys and the outer Himalayan *tarai* belt with the change of season, and no place from Jammu to Dehradun and beyond is out of their reach. That transhumant psychology is overwhelmingly reflected in the planning and architecture of their residential houses, which shall be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

The Khasha

Spread over a vast area in the Himalayan mountainous expanse from Kashgar in the west to Nepal in the east, the Khasha have been a majority race in the western

Himalayan region since the earliest times. In earlier times, they might have remained dominant in the plateau of western Tibet, and subsequently they might have extended their territorial influence down to the Pir Panjal ranges and the inner tracts of Nepal. In this context, the comments of Grierson quoted by Rose (Grierson 1966-68, Vol. IX, Part IV: 373 cited in Rose 1970, Vol.1: 54, fn. 1) that the Khasha and Tukhara were the Iranian inhabitants of Balkh and Badakhashan is significant. He also asserts that the Khasha are the Aryan-speaking people, identified with the people speaking Paishachi language of the Hindukush. The Khasha might have come into closer contact with the India-bound Aryan tribes in that country from where they imbibed certain influences and developed certain common ethnic traits. While in case of the Aryans, the original pastoral traits were superseded by the more sophisticated culture that they developed on adopting settled living in the Indian mainland; the Khasha, confined to the Himalayan interiors, continued with their original pastoral occupations, customs, beliefs and traditions.

The Khasha charted the course of socio-cultural history of this region much before the Aryans were seen in the Indian plains. Having generally remained at the substratum in the socio-political setup since the establishment of the feudal system in this region, they have been responsible for moulding the social, cultural, religious and artistic temperament of this region in their own unassuming and subtle manner by imbibing influences from everywhere in the globe. The decorative devices reflected on their wood-based domestic and religious architecture most eloquently exhibit all those influences in a very subtle manner. Therefore, it would be appropriate if the architectural traditions formulated and patronised by them were defined as Khasha architecture.

The Aryans and the Khasha had originally been pastoral nomads, who had to brave violent blizzards and snowstorms on the high Himalayan mountain passes. In order to ensure safety for their herds from the fury of these elements, they deified them as Rudra, and started propitiating him on the mountain passes by making offerings of stones – the only conceivable offering in that unearthly place. One can still find even today the rituals being performed on the high passes. In the course of racial-cultural fusion between the Khasha and the earlier ophiolatrous communities in the interior valleys, the *Rudra* and the *Nag* cults blended to formalise a unique mountain pantheistic system, in which ophiolatry prevailed. Consequently, the *Nag* cult in the western Himalayan region is more dominant as not only the god of subterranean entities – lakes, rivers and fountains, but also of the weather, rain and clouds. Interestingly, the *Nag* is the most popular device of architectural woodcarving in the wooden temples of this region.

The Khasha do not find any mention in the *Rigveda*. That may suggest that in that nascent period of Aryan colonisation in India, either the Khasha were not considered distinct from the Aryan stock or, being confined to the Himalayan fastness, they escaped the notice of the Rig Vedic Aryans as they remained confined to the Siwalik *tarai* belt and the adjoining Indian plains in the beginning. This assumption also finds support in the fact that the Rig Vedic Aryans did not have precise and specific knowledge about the Himalayan mountain system, and the people who nestled in its numerous valleys.

The Khasha, on the other hand, due to their prolonged and close association with the earlier races and communities living in the interiors, imbibed numerous traits, customs and manners of their native counterparts, under which their lifestyle underwent considerable transformation. These native peculiarities in the Khasha social system made them stand strikingly apart from the Aryans, who had developed and adopted a settled way of life during their stay in the Indian plains. Thus, both of them having started from the same point diverged into two entirely different directions.

Later, when the Aryans embarked upon massive territorial aggrandisement, and the Khasha encountered them, they were also considered as *Malechh* by the Aryans. As the dominance of the Aryans increased in the inner Himalayan valleys and socio-cultural contact was established with the native communities, the Khasha came to be mentioned repeatedly and variously in later Vedic literature. This mention indicated their induction into the Aryan social setup along with the Jhal, Mall, Nat, Karan and Dravid as the *vratya kshatriya*. In the *Brihat Samhita*, the Khasha are mentioned with the Kulut, the Tangan and the Kashmira. Their occupation of Madhyadesh is also mentioned in the *Puranic* literature. Bringing those native communities within the Kshatriya fold in that age might have been a very thoughtful move on the part of the Aryans to raise a fighting force of the non-Aryan warrior-classes for their territorial expansion under the prevailing socio-economic circumstances. This introduced martial traits in the Khasha social setup, which eventually led them to the evolution of an organised administrative system in the vaguely defined geographical boundaries. The martial traits in the Khasha, however, remained confined to the inter-clan skirmishes among different *khoond* (Khasha warrior clans). There is no instance in history, where they were involved in territorial aggrandisement beyond their mountainous territory. Nevertheless, they stood *en masse* against any aggression inflicted on them. The Khasha, as a race, have been very peace-loving, easy-going, content and self-sufficient people living within their own means and

resources in the western Himalayan region. Elsewhere, one learns about them working as mercenaries. The administrative system evolved by them was a theocratic oligarchy, the *janapada*, which developed out of a compromise between primitive cult-based living and the Aryan monarchical setup. The *Mahabharata* also confirms the fact by identifying Khasha as one of the indigenous oligarchies in the north.

Later, due to the extensive racial-cultural fusion among different communities of the Himalayan region, a uniform socio-cultural system became manifest, in which the Khasha had a predominating role. Thus, the western half of the interior Himalayan region up to Nepal came to be regarded as the *Khasha-desh*, that is, the land of the Khasha, wherein they organised themselves into small village-level theocratic oligarchies. They might have developed into a martial race, asserting their influence over a vast area. This possibility is indicated in the *Kavya Mimansa* of Rajashekhar, which records an instance of the defeat of Ramagupt against a Khasha king. An ancient rock inscription, discovered at Salanu on the left bank of Tirthan River in the Banjar Valley, records the event. It records an episode of an encounter of Ramagupt with a Khasha (or Shak) king, named Chandreshwar Hasti. The names of numerous places in this region, like Khashadhar, Khashapat, Khashawad, Kharshali, and others, associated with the Khasha, may also lend credence to the thesis that the Khasha wielded considerable influence in the interiors of the western Himalayan region, for a time long enough to leave impact in the form of place-names after them. However, the various traditional *janapada* and *gramrajya* started coming under threat of invasion and pressure with the rise of the Guptas in the mainland. The Guptas strove to bring the mountain theocracies and oligarchies under their imperial yoke. In that endeavour, they succeeded only in securing token allegiance from them. However, the process was almost complete under Samudragupta. After the suppression of the various *gramrajya*, the western Himalayan interiors were virtually swarming with people belonging to different occupational backgrounds and cultures, who came along with the regents of the imperial lords or as fugitive cadets from the mainland. These incursions greatly disturbed the demographic structure of the region and rendered the Khasha helplessly outsmarted. The establishment of a dynastic feudal system by the immigrants also dealt a serious blow to their socio-political setup. In the new administrative setup, the Khasha were gradually relegated to secondary and menial positions, while the Brahman, Rajput, Khatri and other people of higher castes among the immigrants succeeded in gaining higher social and political positions. In the process of racial-cultural fusion between the immigrants and the Khasha (Figure 1.6),

the institution of polygamy also kept the latter in an inferior position. Therefore, to alleviate their lot from such a status, the Khasha have been adopting pseudo clan-titles of immigrant upper-class communities.

The Khasha are a great race – simple-hearted, colourful, self-contained, non-aspiring and innocent to a fault. Because of these qualities, they have not been able to rise above

Fig. 1.6: A Khasha couple

the social substratum even in their homeland despite their chivalrous character. They are very fond of merry-making, singing and dancing. During their fairs and festivals, men and women attired in their traditional best, hoisting their colourful scarves, swords, *dangara*, axes, and so on, perform various kinds of group and solo dances to the music of their traditional orchestra. The pageant of colours and ornamentation on such occasions is an enchanting sight. The Khasha folklore and songs are rich in innumerable sanguinary and romantic episodes of regional history. Despite the historical importance of the Khasha folklore, these have so far remained unnoticed and unrecorded. The *bars* folksongs of the Giri-par (trans-Giri) area of Sirmaur District of Himachal Pradesh and the adjoining area of Uttarakhand, record some of the little known, yet very important episodes of the political history of this region.

The mainstay of Khasha economy is agriculture. However, cattle herding, goat and sheep breeding, and so on, also form important occupations. In fact, these people, belonging to the wool culture, have been meeting much of their requirement of clothing from the flocks of their goats and sheep. Besides, many of them supplement their income by gathering herbs and other forest produce. The horticulture boom has brought prosperity to these people, because some of the finest apple orchards lie in the mid-Himalayan belt of this region, where the Khasha population predominates.

THE MID-HIMALAYAN REGION

The temperate biophysical environment of this region is to a great extent identical to that of the region in the south, that is, the sub-Himalayan region, discussed earlier. Under reduced precipitation, the climate here remains largely semi-arid, and the regular snow line draws nearer over the barren, rocky peaks and ridges, which tend to come closer, narrowing the width of valleys and making them deeper and darker. Therefore, the villages are set not on the valley-floors, but generally higher on the spurs of steep mountain slopes. Under the prevailing temperate and semi-arid conditions, the summers are milder and shorter, giving longer lease to more severe winters. The alpine forests, especially in the valleys of Pangi and Lahul have become thinner. This has resulted in shortage of timber, because it is not easily available in the forests and hauling it from the distant forests through the trackless slopes is extremely arduous. Under such conditions, the architectural forms and structural arrangement of the residential houses, temples and monasteries, are entirely different. In a single room all-purpose dwelling

unit, mostly made of thick walls of rough stones and mud, and roofed with mud layers, there are lesser and smaller external openings to keep the interior warm. However, in the wooden temples, roofed with an abnormally high-pitched gabled roof covered with wooden shingles, lavish use of wood may be seen.

The inner mountainous region is divided into different valleys, sub-valleys and terrains, formed by the intermediate sub-ranges, which more or less tend to link the two main mountain systems – the Mid-Himalayan Range and the Great Himalayan Range. Thus, in the northwest, the vale of Kashmir presents a very heterogeneous amalgam of many ethnic strains that have been pouring into it since earliest times. In the Chandrabhaga Gorge lies the Pangi Valley, across the Rohtang-la is the Lahul Valley formed by the rivers Chandra and Bhaga, and towards the east, is the lower Kinnaur in the Satluj Valley. The main ethnic community in the Pangi, Lahul and lower Kinnaur areas are the Khasha, who spilled over from the adjoining regions, bringing those terrains within the fold of *Khasha-desh*. These valley-regions shall be discussed separately in some more detail.

The Vale of Kashmir

The Vale of Kashmir, located in the extreme northwestern corner of the western Himalayan region, is surrounded by a spectacular array of mountain ranges, rising one above the other. These ranges provide an idyllic backdrop to the natural scenic beauty spread on the valley-floor. The Great Himalayan Range encloses it on the north and the northwest, and the Pir Panjal Range separates it from the Indian mainland on the south and the southwest. The Kashmir Valley is spread longitudinally from the southeast to the northwest in a boat-like structural basin at an average altitude of 1555 m above sea level. Of its approximately 13,000 km^2 geographical area, swampy stretches, lakes, rivers and streams cover more than fifty percent. Along the foot of the Great Himalayan Range flows the Jhelum, feeding the Wular Lake. Jhelum River and its innumerable tributaries have been responsible for shaping the topography of the valley; by dissecting the *karewa* deposits and forming the formation of terraces and lowland swampy areas and several lakes such as the Wular, Manasbal, Anchar, Dal, Haigam and Hokarsar, besides highland lakes such as Gangabal, Sheshnag, Tarsar and Marsar, Kounsarang, Alpathar, Butapathri, Nilanag, Naranag, and so on. These natural water bodies have not only imparted an exotic charm to the Vale, but innumerable tales and legends have also been woven around them. These form a very significant part of the classical and popular lore centred on the serpent cult.

The Vale of Kashmir, hauntingly beautiful as it is, has been the land of paradoxes and ironies throughout its history. Its salubrious, scenic and bounteous setting amidst the wild grandeur of soaring and silvery heights – like an 'emerald set in pearls' – attracted repeated invasions. The venturesome hordes ravaged and plundered it, but eventually they became a part of its socio-cultural milieu. It is said that one who came to this valley could hardly leave it unless forced to do so by a powerful invader. In fact, this valley has served as a most congenial and convenient quarantine place for a multitude of venturesome races, which poured into the Indian subcontinent from Central Asia, the Middle-eastern world and the west. The Khasha, Aryans, Greeks, Maurya, Kushan, Hun, Jat, Gurjar, Persians, Pathan, Sikh, Rajput and British, all converged into its sunbathed, lush green and floral ambience in different periods. While some of them made it their permanent home, the others moved further on their ventures and expeditions. Thus, many empires rose, flourished, fell and disappeared altogether. Most of the invading races, keen to perpetuate their own religion and culture, groomed local culture according to their own aesthetic tastes and preferences. In that process, they obliterated the material evidence of preceding cultures, leaving no trace behind, except what is found in ruins or learns from the folklore and literary sources.

Kashmir remained under the non-Hindu rule of the Sultans from 1339 CE to 1586 CE, the Mughals from 1586 CE to 1752 CE and the Afghans from 1752 CE to 1819 CE. During that period, lasting for almost five centuries, the area remained subject to dire political and religio-cultural turmoil. The alien rulers not only destroyed the material evidence of the past culture, but they also strove to replace the contemporary socio-cultural environment of this valley with alien deportment. Consequently, what is to be found today by way of art and culture of Kashmir is only a few centuries old, and it represents an amalgam of the extant native traditions and the alien ones that the foreign rulers from Central Asia implanted.

In this process of implantation, either many bolder aspects of the ancient and traditional Kashmiri culture got suppressed under the later, predominating vigorous influences or have become extinct. Such has been the fate of most of the splendid ancient religious cultural and artistic traditions. The artistic and religious cultural ferment of this valley has always remained volatile under the successive influx of newer thoughts and ideas, and the skills and techniques to render them in plastic form. Nevertheless, the succeeding schools subtly imbibed many finer aspects of the preceding cultures in their fold. That reconciliatory process has been continual at the popular plane, notwithstanding the antagonistic and stubborn attitude of some of the rulers of Kashmir.

Thus, in spite of invasion after invasion, and plunder after plunder; the process of construction and cultivation has been an incessant corollary. In this process, innumerable artistic and cultural currents have met and fused to create a unique artistic, socio-cultural and religious environment, which cannot be defined within the formal and conventional religious-cultural identities. Not only is the present-day population of the Kashmir Valley an ethnically mixed stock, but also their customs and manners, art, architecture and craft, all present a quintessential form of culture, in which the natural grandeur of the valley has also contributed significantly.

With centuries of association with the environment of the valley, the people here have acquired a peculiar sensitivity to the nuances of the colourful ambience of this 'paradise on earth'. It is eloquently reflected in the art and architecture of the valley. The local flora and fauna have also contributed liberally to embellish the secular and religious

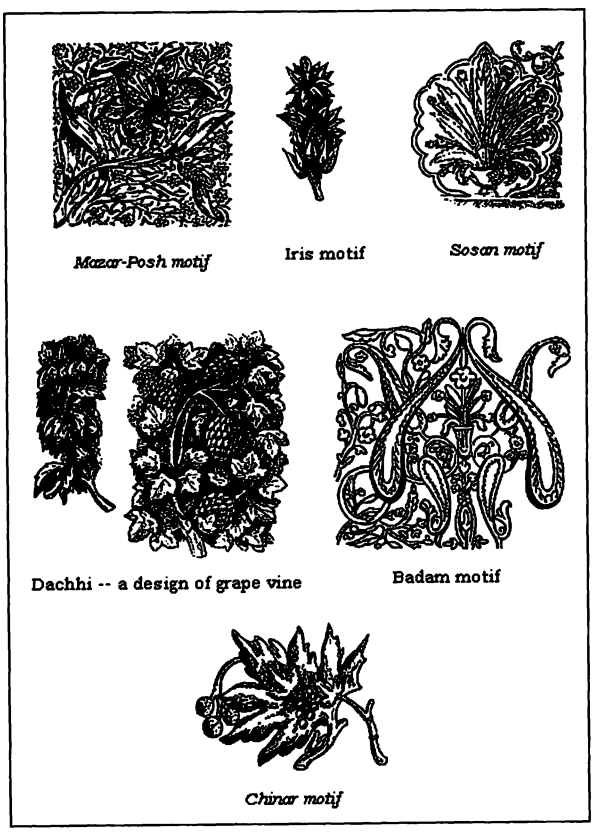

Fig. 1.7: Kashmiri woodcarving designs
(based on photograph in MARG, March 1955, Vol. VIII, No. 2)

architecture with different devices and motifs (Figure 1.7). The Kashmiri architects and artisans have used them very ingeniously and creatively in their architecture.

Nurtured by such diverse traditions, the Kashmir Valley proper has the distinction of establishing its own sub-regional 'composite' cultural identity, flavoured with various racio-ethnic strains, drawn into it from all directions. That composite cultural identity or the 'composite culture' is defined as 'Kashmiriyat' in popular parlance. This aspect is well reflected not only in the socio-cultural behaviour of the people, but also in their art and architecture, which, although generally has distinct local peculiarities, is essentially cosmopolitan and international. Thus, the type of architecture that developed in Kashmir has traits of all the preceding racial-cultural traditions. The term 'Kashmiriyat' may imply certain sinister political designs in the context of politico-psychological happenings since the days of Harsha (1089-1101 CE). From that time onwards, the people have meekly tolerated not only alien dominance in the socio-political matters but also the oppression of the Hindu religious institutions by the rulers. Nevertheless, Kashmiriyat also signifies a harmonious blend of Oriental and Occidental (Central Asian) ideals and values in the realm of art, architecture and culture that have been the vital and basic components in moulding the 'composite culture' of Kashmir. In it may be seen the harsh contours of different orthodox religions and sects being mellowed. Here, neither a Hindu is as staunch as in the rest of the country, nor a Muslim as fanatic, or a Buddhist as orthodox as elsewhere. In fact, a sublime catholicity pervades all sectarian ideologies. The principal Muslim shrine, Hazaratbal, is, in fact, a legacy of the Buddhist tradition in which relics are worshipped, and so is the holy cave of Amarnath, a sacred symbol of Hindu-Muslim faith and amity. This unifying quality may even be found in the names, numerous sacraments, customs and manners of the people. In fact, the Muslims of Kashmir, who constitute 92 percent of the total population in this valley, feel proud of their pre-Islamic Hindu inheritance and that is how they find their roots here. One may hear people saying in a lighter vein in Kashmir, '*Pandit ji Namaz padne gayen hain*': translated, it means 'the Hindu priest has gone to read Namaz'. The sub-regional socio-cultural traditions and art and architectural influences of Kashmir have permeated wider and deeper in the contiguous parts of Himachal Pradesh up to the Beas Valley and radiated further, as far as the Yamuna Valley. The wood-based secular architecture and the wooden temples of this region (and the stone temples as well) eloquently acknowledge these contributions of the Kashmir Valley in their decorative (Figure 1.8) and architectural elements, wherein the fusion of Kashmiri artistic and

architectural influences with the ones introduced directly from the Indian mainland may be noted.

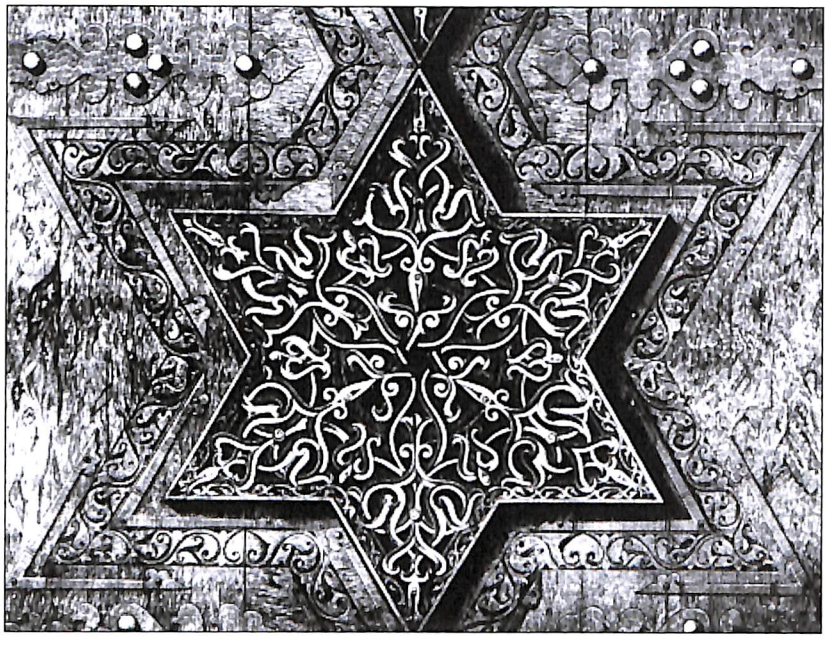

Fig. 1.8: Woodcarving on the doorway of the mosque of Madani, Srinagar (based on the photograph in MARG, March 1955, Vol. VIII, No. 2)

However, it may be clarified that Kashmir has also received wholesome architectural influences from the Indian mainland, and the blend of those influences with the alien traditions formed a sub-regional Kashmiri style. Those influences were crystallised in the popular and classical traditions of Himachal Pradesh and its easterly neighbour, Jaunsar-Bawar, where that gave rise to a distinct sub-regional character. This sub-regional identity is known as 'Pahari' in popular usage. Thus, in the western Himalayan region, two sub-regional identities may be found – the Kashmiri and the Pahari – under the strong coalescing age-old socio-cultural affinity, deeply ingrained in innumerable popular traditions.

The Chandrabhaga Gorge

Confined between the Great Himalayan Range on the north and the Pir Panjal Range on the south, the Chandrabhaga Gorge, also known as the Pangi Valley or Chenab Valley, is one of the most inaccessible terrains of the western Himalayan region. Until

recently, it could only be reached through the seven treacherous glacial passes, ranging between 4300 m and 5200 m above sea level on the Pir Panjal Range. Of these, Sach Pass (4414 m) is the most frequented one in fair-weather conditions for a brief spell during the summer months; for the rest of the year, it remains frozen and inaccessible. So forbidding had been the path across this pass to the Pangi Valley, from the capital headquarters of the erstwhile Chamba state at Chamba, that the officials sent on tour to this area were given special allowance by the state under the head 'funeral expenses'. Now, a fair-weather vehicular road from Udaipur in Lahul to the Pangi area is available, but even this road, with all the dangers of sliding rocks and deep and dark Chandrabhaga, does not ensure safe passage.

The inhabitants of Pangi Valley are known as Pangwals, but the original inhabitants of this area might have been the Khasha. However, in the course of time they were outnumbered by the other people coming to this valley from the neighbouring areas under different compulsions, for instance, it is told that the rulers of Chamba used to condemn criminals to banishment in this landlocked prison. Thus, the present socio-cultural milieu of the Pangi Valley presents an ethnic conglomeration. These people, confined between the high mountain ranges, have remained cut off from the outside world for centuries. Nevertheless, they feel closer to their Kirati counterparts across the Great Himalayan Range in Zanskar area of Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir and the Lahulis in the upper Chandrabhaga Valley for their socio-economic dealings, than to the Churahi of Chamba on the opposite side of the Sach Pass. This isolation has imparted distinct local characteristics to them. Hinduism and Buddhism have continued to coexist in this terrain, though both are much debased and lax. There still exist several Bhot villages, called *Bhatori*, in the Pangi Valley. Sural Bhatori, Udhan Bhatori and Kumar Parmar are some of those *Bhatori*. The Hindu temples and the Buddhist monasteries are patronised by the followers of both the religions without any distinction, as in the Lahul and lower Kinnaur areas. These people regard the shrines of Guru-Ghantal (Guru Gandhola) and Trilokinath as much Hindu temples as Buddhist *gompas*. It is believed that Padmasambhav (*Guru Rim-po-che*) consecrated both the shrines. Trilokinath temple is an important edifice of the *shikhar* style, which, with the Bodhi temple of Gaya, has retained its Buddhist identity to this day. The architecture of this temple is based purely on the classical canons of north Indian temple architecture. It may be claimed with due certainty that this temple is one

of the very few surviving relics of Indian Buddhism, and that too situated in such a remote and far-flung interior. In the old Buddhist tradition, this shrine is called *bihar* (Sanskrit *vihar)* – a monastery. It is likely that this region might have remained under the strong influence of Indian Buddhism during the Kushan age, much before Tibetan Buddhism was introduced from the north.

The Lahul Valley

Going eastwards from Pangi Valley along the upstream course of Chandrabhaga, one enters the Pattan Valley. Presently, this area forms a part of the Lahul subdivision of the Lahul and Spiti districts of Himachal Pradesh. The Chandrabhaga River is formed at Tandi by the two snow-fed perennial rivers – the Chandra and the Bhaga. The valley formed by the Chandra River is known as the Chandra Valley or the Rangoli, and the Bhaga River forms the Bhaga Valley or the Gara. Thus, the habitable patches in the Lahul Valley are spread in three distinct valley-areas – the main Pattan Valley and the two forking subsidiary valleys – the Rangoli and the Gara. The distribution of population in these valleys is essentially characterised by different ethnic traits and socio-cultural mores.

The ethnic milieu of Lahul Valley is complex and heterogeneous. Scholars have put forth different theories about the demographic structure of this area. Most of them are conjectural, based on the contemporary social features, and with a strong Brahmanic bias. Most of the indigenous people of this valley define themselves as Brahman, Khatri, Rajput, Thakur, Swangala and Kanet, and so on, besides menial communities such as Dagi, Lohar, Barara, Sunyar, Sippi and Hesi, and so on. In fact, so intense has been the racial-cultural fusion in this area that it may presently be impossible to identify a particular racial strain among them. However, these caste-distinctions are not as rigid as in the mainland, being rather flexible. Inter-marriages among the higher-class communities are common; there is no strict distinction among the menial communities either. The conciliatory and flexible attitude may indicate that neither most of the caste-labels, especially the Brahmanic ones, belong to the people by tradition nor are these very old. In fact, these were implanted in this area by immigrants from the mainland during the Mediaeval times. However, the distinction between different communities is reflected in the dress of these people. For instance, the Buddhist women remain bare-headed, while the Swangala, Sippi and Lohari women wear *rnontasi* – a saucer-like head-dress, quite similar to the *joji* worn by the Pangwal women.

The people of Rangoli and Gara Valleys present a mixture of the Khasha and Kirat ethnic traits. In fact, Lahul has been a perpetual buffer zone between the rival kingdoms of Ladakh, Guge, Kullu and Chamba since the distant times. It had been changing hands from one kingdom to the other during different periods of history. Consequently, there has been an intense and complex racial-cultural fusion in this land. That has disturbed and diluted the distinctiveness in the ethnic traits of the original inhabitants of this valley beyond recognition, giving rise to unique and quintessential local socio-cultural mores and peculiar manners among its inhabitants, comparable to no other community of the Himalayan region. The Lahuli can outwit anybody in resourcefulness and practical wisdom. Therefore, it is not without reason that Lyall found them solid, conservative, quick-witted, eminently shrewd and sensible (Lyall 1874: 212). Harcourt (1972: 72-73) also found them to be 'shrewd and sharp traders, with far more intelligence and desire for knowledge than have the people of Kooloo'. Further, according to Negi (1976: 113), 'of all the tribals in Himachal Pradesh, those in many of the villages of the main Lahul Valley and some villages of the side valleys are, today, the shrewdest businessmen and the wisest in certain worldly matters'.

Being such a heterogeneous people, the Lahulis today present a conglomeration of diverse influences, almost in every aspect of their social, cultural and religious life, in which neither Hinduism nor Buddhism nor the autochthonous cults have their distinctive existence, but all have contributed to form a multi-cultic system. That distinctiveness has also been reflected in their food habits and costumes. Certain distinct features may also be found in the Lahuli domestic architecture – for instance, the portable *Labuli chullha*, with multiple cooking stands, which the Moravian missionaries developed and popularised among the people in the nineteenth century. This *chullha* has many advantages. It is installed in the middle of a room, and people can sit and sleep around it and keep warm. Secondly, many dishes can be prepared on it simultaneously and kept warm. Thirdly, it leaves the room smokeless, yet warm. However, the consumption of fuel wood in it is far more than in the conventional hearth.

The Lower Kinnaur

Kinnaur—the land of the fabled Kinnar—forms the northeastern border district of Himachal Pradesh. Located in the head reaches of the Satluj, it demarcates the international border with Tibet (China). This high-altitude mountainous district is divided into two almost equal halves by the Satluj, which enters the district from northeast and, running almost parallel to its northern boundary, leaves it at the southwestern end.

In Kinnaur, two distinct ethno-religious societies may be identified in two different segments, demarcated broadly by the Pangi Nala, next to Village Telangi near Reckong-Peo, the district headquarters of Kinnaur. In fact, Kinnaur is the region where Hinduism of the mainland and Buddhism of the Tibetan world, meet.

The people in the upper Kinnaur, on the northeast of Pangi Nala, are Buddhist by faith and follow its Tibetan form. Biophysically, this trans-Himalayan area belongs to the Alpine zone, which will be discussed next.

In the lower Kinnaur, southwest of the Pangi Nala, semi-arid temperate biophysical conditions prevail. The mountain slopes here are richly covered with a high quality deodar forest, ensuring an inexhaustible supply of timber for building construction. Due to the abundance of quality wood, the art of woodcarving is highly developed and profuse here. The multi-storey residential houses of the people as well as the temples here are lavishly made of wood from foundation to roof, and these are profusely carved. However, important buildings, like the towering citadels and palaces, are made of sturdy composite walls of timber and stone. Such timber-and-stone walls are locally known as the *katth-kuni*. Elsewhere (see Chapter 7 for different types of walls) this type of wall shall be dealt with in detail.

The people of lower Kinnaur follow numerous autochthonous cults, intertwined with Buddhist and Brahmanic traditions. The Tibetan Buddhism entered this area from upper Kinnaur, where it is predominant. However, it gradually became feebler downstream, giving way to the Brahmanised indigenous cultic traditions. This is the land of autochthonous cults, woven around the *Naga*, *Narain* and *Maishur*. However, the archaic characteristics of these cults have been incessantly undergoing transformation under the dominating influence of the Brahmanic beliefs and practices, and losing their traditional vigour. Among the native cults, the cult of *Maishur* is the most dominant one. The *Maishur* cult has been projected as the local version of classical Shaivism by many scholars with a Brahmanic bias, but there is a need to examine this cult in a wider spatio-temporal context. For that purpose, the correlation of this cult with the cult of *Mahasu* of the Giri-Pabar-Tons catchments in Himachal Pradesh and Jaunsar-Bawar *paragana* of Dehradun District in Uttarakhand will be essential.

The bulk of the population in lower Kinnaur belongs to the Khasha stock. Some families of caste Hindus had also settled in the Sangla Valley during the Mediaeval period. None of these families is Brahman, though they might have been responsible for introducing and perpetuating Brahmanic traditions in this area. All the natives of

Kinnaur are generally addressed as 'Negi'. The term 'Negi', in fact, has been a designation for the administrative functionary under the past feudal setup, equivalent to *Mehata* or *Kayasth* in the mainland. Traditionally, only the upper-caste natives of Kinnaur could use this appellation, and its use was not allowed for the lower-class people, such as the Domang or Chomang. However, this term has lost its traditional import, and it is now applied in a generic sense for all inhabitants of Kinnaur. Nevertheless, traditional selective use of this term has been noted in the Mahasavi cultic region in Himachal Pradesh as well as in Uttarakhand.

The people of Kinnaur have generically been named as *Kinnar* in classical literature. In the hyperbolic narratives of the epics, *Puranas* and other Sanskrit literature, the Kinnar have been known variously. The appellations like *ashvamukh* and *kimpurush* given to the legendary Kinnar in classical literature may indicate that the people of mainland had only an imaginary and hypothetical knowledge about these people during that age, giving rise to various tantalising fantasies about them. However, it is indicated in the *Mahabharata* that the Kinnar offered tribute to the Pandavas, which may indicate an Aryan dominance over them. However, the dominance, if any, would have been extremely feeble.

While Brahmanic India felt contented in the voluptuous imagery of the singing and dancing Kinnar damsels, the Buddhist missionary-adventurers took the Kinnar seriously. They established a purposeful rapport with them. Under the aegis of Kanishka (78-101 CE), the Buddhist missionary activities were extended far and wide in northwestern India. The specific penal provision (*prajika*) for the *bhikkus*, who indulged in sex with the Kinnar damsels, lends credibility to the Puranic references to the Kinnar as amorous beings, given to singing and dancing. That also indicates that the Buddhist *bhikkus* were active in the Kinnar territory as early as the first century CE, or may be even earlier, as the Chinese annals tend to suggest. How far the *bhikkus* succeeded in their proselytising endeavours may not be known, but evidence suggests that the Kinnar largely remained wedded to their animistic cults, and the influence of Buddhism could only be seen in the adoption of certain humane qualities by the numerous demonical deities of Kinnaur.

The Kinnar, along with the Gandharva, appear in many forms in visual art. They have been depicted in the wall paintings of Ajanta and in numerous stone sculptures. In all those works, they have been projected as amorous beings, indulging in dance and music. However, it remains to be seen if the present-day inhabitants of Kinnaur are the descendants of the ancient Kinnar, who might have lost their ethnic identity in the racial-cultural fusion with the Khasha, or if the ethnic traits of the legendary

Kinnar are still intact in the present-day Kinnaurias. This inquiry notwithstanding, the inhabitants of upper Kinnaur are very fond of music and dancing, and their colourful costumes and ornaments instinctively remind one of their celestial roles as the divine musicians and dancers. The facial features of the people living in the lower Kinnaur indicate a blend of the Khasha and the Kirat (that is, the Mongolian) characteristics.

THE TRANS-HIMALAYAN REGION

Biophysically speaking, the entire trans-Himalayan region, northeast of the Great Himalayan Range or the Great Divide falls in the alpine zone, which broadly begins above the timberline between 3200 m and 3570 m (average 3350 m) and extends up to 4180 m in the western Himalayan region. Spread on both sides of the Great Himalayan Range, this biophysical zone constitutes a sizable geographical area of the two western Himalayan states, Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. While the alpine biophysical conditions prevail only over the higher altitudinal reaches on the southwestern slopes of the Great Himalayan Range, they extend to the entire trans-Himalayan snow-desert. In this zone, species of the wet and moist alpine vegetation are found. Among these, the junipers, willow (*Salix alba* L.), locally known as the *chung*, and poplars (*Populus ciliata* Wall and *Populus nigra* L.), locally known as the *yarpa*, are widely distributed on the steep and rocky slopes, especially on the sunny aspect. However, the upper Kinnaur area, though falling in the trans-Himalayan highland tract, is an exception. The biophysical conditions in this area, though harsh, are not as stark as in the neighbouring Spiti and Ladakh. The landscape here looks greener and the people are comparatively more prosperous. In this trans-Himalayan tract, people use every bit of wood of any kind in various manners for structural purposes.

This highland snow-desert 'possessed of a necklace of radiant snow mountains' is one of the most elevated regions on earth. Spread over Leh (Ladakh) and Kargil districts of Jammu and Kashmir, a major portion of the Lahul and Spiti districts and the upper segment of Kinnaur District in Himachal Pradesh, this area is drained by the Indus River and its tributaries in Kargil-Ladakh area, and by the rivers Spiti and Satluj in Lahul, Spiti and Kinnaur districts. High altitude, climatic isolation and the blinding glare of the snow and ice deposits on the ranges have produced some of the harshest living conditions on earth in this tract, where freezing cold persists even in shade, during the nights, and in scorching heat under the sun. That abrupt variation

in temperature has turned the sand particles here into microfine dust of countless hues, which whirl and float in the air at the slightest agitation. In order to insulate their bodies against such elements and dust, the people here apply copious coatings of animal fat on their bodies and faces. The author could realise the importance of this 'makeup' only when, on his first trip in September 1977 to the Baralacha Pass (4891 m), he found his exposed skin cracked all over and ears and nostrils choked with dry microfine dust. Not only does the rarefied air at this height cause difficulty in breathing, but the microfine dust also chokes the respiratory system. No wooden structure can be found in this vast rarefied snow-desert, which looks more lunar than earthly. The buildings – residential houses and monasteries – are all made of rammed earth and boulders, even the multi-storeyed tall structures are no exception to this rule. In fact, due to the stark shortage of wood in this region, its use is a bare minimum. Nevertheless, this region can proudly boast of having some of the oldest and most magnificent living monasteries of Tibetan Buddhism in the world. The ancient Tabo *chos-khor* in Spiti completed one thousand years in 1996 CE. It is in this rarefied tract that most of the western Himalayan Buddhist monasteries, built in the Tibetan style of monastic architecture, are located.

The winters in this region are very long and severe, but, strangely, people here are most active during those chilling days: they do not remain glued to the fires to doze, but keep themselves busy with numerous handicrafts, social functions and feasting. The monasteries also become agog with numerous celebrations – festivals and ceremonies – during those wintry days.

Come summer, and the snow starts melting on the peaks by the end of May. The water finds its way through countless gurgling rills into the narrow terraced fields on the mountain slopes and in the valleys. Nature seems to wake up from its long spell of hibernation and puts on a green mantle. Coming through the rarefied atmosphere, the sunrays in summer in this region are powerful enough to ripen barley and other farm-produce. Though brief, summers are the most enchanting in this region. The mountain-slopes present an ethereal spectacle of vast green steps as though descending from heaven. The stately poplars majestically swing in the summer breeze in their ceremonial green robes and trees are laden with apples, pears and apricots. It is in this time of the year when one finds all types of off-season vegetables – cabbage, turnip, carrot, cauliflower and others – of extra-large size.

The Mongoloid Sino-Tibetan speaking people largely inhabit the trans-Himalayan region. They occupied the highland trans-Himalayan tract north of the Great Divide

around the middle of the first millennium BCE. These people have been known as Kirat in later Vedic literature and are associated with the other mountain dwelling indigenous communities of this region.

Ptolemy includes the *Kirhedai* or *Kirrhodoeies*, that is, Kirat, among the tribes of Sogdiana (present-day Soghd). He locates them in *Uttarapath*, the northern sector. It is unlikely that the Kirat socio-cultural influence remained confined only to the plateau beyond the Great Divide. These boisterous people are known to have influenced the local population in the mountainous region down to the mid-Himalayan valleys, by introducing some of the practices of their animistic religion, for example, the *Bon-Chos* and the *Bhunda* performance, so common in the Khasha region in the mid-Satluj Valley. Similarly, the institution of *khoond* and the cult of the Pandava among the Khasha may be a Kirat legacy. Besides, there are two well-recorded instances in history about the Kirat (or Kira) invasion of the sub-Himalayan region. One of these is related to the plunder of Brahmpur (Brahmaur in Chamba), and the other of their presence in the upper Kangra area around modern Baijnath, which was named after them as 'Kiragram'. The Baijnath *Prashasti* inscription explicitly records that identity. The primitive religion, the *Bon-Chos*, of the Kirat people had to face a two-pronged onslaught since the eighth century CE. First, it came under pressure of Buddhism introduced by the Padmasambhav-Shantarakshit team on the 'roof of world' in 749 CE. Secondly, Brahmanism from the mainland dominated it. Nevertheless, that religion could survive in isolated pockets in Ladakh, Spiti and Kinnaur. The Buzhan of the Pin Valley in Spiti still follow that religion.

Besides the Kirat, there are some other indigenous communities inhabiting this region. Among those, the Mon, the Dard, the Hunja, the Changpa, the Drokpa and the Buzhan are the significant ones. The Mon may be regarded as the trans-Himalayan cousins of the Khasha. The Mon population may also be found among the people of the remote Hangrang Valley of Kinnaur. The Mon strain may also be found in the area around Poo. The Dard are the original inhabitants of Dardistan or Baltistan. They are known to have settled in Ladakh during the reign of Singhe Namgyal (c. 1590-1635 CE), the most powerful king of Ladakh. The Hunja migrated from the Gilgit region and settled in Zanskar. It is also suggested that they may be the isolated descendants of the Huns. The Changpa are the nomadic highlanders of the Changthang Plateau. Some consider the Drokpa as the purest survivors of the Aryan race. They are concentrated on the northern bank of the Indus. The Buzhan are the inhabitants of Pin Valley in Spiti. Ethnic distinctions notwithstanding, all the inhabitants of the trans-Himalayan snow-desert are ardent followers of Tibetan Buddhism.