

# Himachal Folk Art

June 27, 2019

## The Exhibition-Unknown Masterpieces of Himachal Folk Art

**Culture** – Art forms

Recently The Minister of State (I/c) of Culture & Tourism, Govt. of India inaugurated the exhibition titled “Unknown Masterpieces of Himachal Folk Art”, at the National Museum, New Delhi. The Exhibition is being jointly organised by the National Museum, New Delhi and Home of Folk Art (Museum of Tribal, Folk and Neglected Art), Gurugram in which more than 240 artefacts are on display.

**The present exhibition aims to** highlight the Folk art tradition of Himachal Pradesh. Prior to being carved out as an independent state, Himachal Pradesh was known as the Punjab Hill States, the term coined by the British administrators. The arts and crafts of this state give us some idea of what must have existed in the plains of Punjab, the province that had to bear the brunt of perennial invasions and warfare from the north-western frontiers of India.

## Key features of Himachal Pradesh Art and Culture

- Like other parts of India, in Himachal Pradesh also, two stylistic streams of art and culture – classical or courtly (the Great Tradition) and folk (the Little Tradition) – were nurtured by the natives from the earliest times.
- Although no examples of art or craft objects are extant prior to the 3rd century BCE, the figures of Hindu deities engraved on the coins issued by the chieftains of the *janapadas* (republics) such as the Kunindas, the Malavas, the Audumbaras, etc. attest to the fact that the iconographic precepts governing the deities such as Shiva, six-headed Karttikeya or Kumara, Gaja-Lakshmi,

Krittika, Rishi Vishvamitra, etc. were fully evolved by the 3rd century BCE ; that contemporaneously, the sculptors must have shaped identical images in the round in wood, stone and metal.

- Evidently, the tradition of sculpting images of the deities and *rishis* (seers) – to the latter are dedicated numerous wood and stone shrines erected on the sites where they had meditated dotting the entire length and breadth of this state – was in existence and continued in subsequent centuries.
- The stone statues of Vishnu and numerous reliefs carved in the Sarnath style and discovered from the Ambika Mata and Parashurama temples in Nirmand in Outer Saraj in Kulu district, popularly known as the Kashi of the Himalayan region, dated to the 4th-5th centuries CE testify to this phenomenon.
- So do the free standing wood statues of Surya and one of his attendants Dandi and Pingala, and four door frames featuring elegant, flowing forms of Hindu goddesses executed in Gupta and post-Gupta style, i.e. late 6th-early 7th centuries CE.
- These were enshrined in the wooden temple of Surya that has been reconstructed and dedicated to Docha-Mocha (a village deity) in Gajan hamlet in Kulu valley.