

# VALLEY OF GODS

An Exhibition of Photographs by Virendra Bangroo and Krzysztof Stronski

at AIFACS, New Delhi

To mark the golden jubilee celebrations of the diplomatic relations between India and Poland, All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, the Embassy of the Republic of Poland and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts organized a photo exhibition "Valley of gods" by Virendra Bangroo and Krzysztof Stronski. The event was inaugurated by H.E. Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to India Dr. Krzysztof Majka on 24th November 2003 at 5.30 in AIFACS gallery in New Delhi. The opening function was attended by eminent scholars artists and diplomats of various countries. In the inaugural speech H.E. appreciated the subject chosen by the photographers and emphasized the that such joint efforts bind two culturally distant nations.

It may be recalled that the first Indian art exhibition in Poland was organized by AIFACS in 1954 with the delegation of 5 Indian eminent artists: late Shri Barada Ukil, late Shri K.K. Hebbar, late Shri N.C. Bhattacharya, late Shri Kamal Sen and late Shri Harkrishan Lal.

Virendra Bangroo and Krzysztof Stronski have been making joint efforts in highlighting lesser known areas in the Himalayas. Their last year exhibition titled "Malana - Shangrilla in the Himalayas" was held at the IGNC in New Delhi and some of the photographs from the exhibition are available on the [www.ignca.nic.in](http://www.ignca.nic.in). The publication on Malana is presently under process.

Virendra Bangroo was born in Srinagar, Kashmir. He has traversed the length and breadth of Himalayas. Art historian, artist and a trained museologist he has designed number of museums for the Indian Army and curated a number of exhibitions. Presently he is working as a documentation officer in IGNC.

Krzysztof Stronski was born in Poznan, Poland. He an assistant professor at the Institute of Linguistics in Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan. He came to India three years ago and began working at Delhi University as lecturer of Polish language and culture. Eager traveler in India he has visited many of the tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh.

The present exhibition "Valley of Gods" was entirely devoted to Kullu Valley called popularly Valley of Gods. According to Krzysztof Stronski the beauty of the Kullu Valley is not only its nature and landscape but also people whom he considers the real gods. Virendra Bangroo, who has been exploring the valley since his childhood, sees change in outlook and environment which is not going well with the ecosystem of the region.

The exhibition comprised three segments i.e.: the landscapes and the scenic beauty; temples and shrines; and the colourful festivals. It focused on two main festivals attended by Virendra Bangroo and Krzysztof Stronski, namely festival in Malana and Kulu dussehra. The pine cones hanging on the display panels were added to the aesthetics of the exhibition. The central attraction of the gallery was the replica of a palanquin studded with golden umbrellas, jewellery and the masks decorated with flowers.

## **Kullu**

Kullu is also known as the "Valley of Gods" despite the facts that gods are worshipped all over Himachal Pradesh. This is because the tradition of worshipping gods is very ancient in the valley and the number of

gods is quite large - over 300. Each village has a god, in some villages there may be two or more gods. The form of worship of gods is different and unique here. Here the gods act as moving beings rather than being statues fixed within the temple. Each god has his own temple but they are generally devoid of any statue.

Gods are represented by rathas (palanquins), studded with metallic mohras (faces), adorned with variegated cloth lengths and flowers, and lifted on the shoulders by two men. Women have hardly any role to play in the affairs of the gods. The rathas are accompanied by band of deity's musicians, attendants, followers and carriers of symbols of royal or divine artifacts etc. The rathas often become animated or possessed of spirits and show various human moods and behavior like anger through rushing frantically, or happiness by dancing in a leisurely manner, meeting with friends, etc. besides actually speaking through the medium of gurr (priest) an answering to various queries of the devotees.

The gods of Kullu can be classified into three classes. The first are the ancient rikhis and pious women of epic character .The second type belonging to the Naga (serpent) class and the third must be tribal chiefs and heroes.

The gods in the form of holy spirits have had their presence in the valley since times immemorial. They not only control their areas of influence but also the daily routine of the inhabitants. The spirits maintain their influence by entering the physical body of chosen men called gurr whom the people consult regarding their ailments, their perplexities and otherwise. On festive occasions people become ecstatic as they join in the singing and dancing along with the holy spirits. This scene is captivating in the extreme.

## **Tharah Karadu, Tharah Narayan**

There is a famous saying in Kullu about the gods: tharah karadu, tharah narayan. Narayan, of course, stands for Vishnu who is worshipped as a god in many villages. Tharah literally means eighteen, but scholars have interpreted it in several ways: as multitude or an auspicious number, etc. The scholars' interpretation is based on the original eighteen gods:

- Shamsar Mahadev (near Anni)
- Sukirni (Banjar)
- Trijugi Narayan (Dayar)
- Kasoli Narayan (Kasol)
- Jagtham (Barshaini)
- Bhaga Siddh (Pini Kais)
- Sinhmal (Gohar Kais)
- Girmal (Banogi)
- Manu Rishi (Manali)
- Thirmal (Dhara Kais)
- Ishvari Narayan (Ajimal Soel)
- Jeeva Narayan (Jana Naggar)
- Jamlu (Malana)
- Ambal (Chachogi)
- Shubh Narayan (Rumsu)
- Harshu Narayan (Hallan)
- Shandil (Shalin)
- Gautam Rishi (Goshal)

The term karadu similarly has been given several meanings but its origin can be easily traced in the Sanskrit word karanda denoting basket.

## **Naga**

Kullu is a great center of naga worship. An entire class of the gods belongs to this category. Just as there is the story of tharah karadu, tharah narayan, there is a term of tharah nag, and there is similarly a story about the origin of the nagas in Kullu. The nagas worshipped in Kullu are the offspring of baski or basu as the ancient serpent king is commonly called by people.

The total number of nagas worshipped in Kullu is estimated to be considerably greater than eighteen, and indeed, must be four times that figure.

## **Paras Ram**

Paras Ram is an epic character. He is believed to have visited Kullu much before the founding of the kingdom. He settled five villages here, one of which is Nirmand, on the right bank of Satluj, where he is revered till today as a god. He must have reigned supreme before the advent of Raghunathji. Interesting ancient traditions and customs like Bhunda festival, celebrated after a gap of twelve years with which the legend of human sacrifice or animal sacrifice is also connected, survives at Nirmand till today.

## **Jamlu**

Jamlu is one of the mightiest deities of Kullu. His abode is Malana, a remote and secluded village. This aloofness enables him to maintain independence for himself and his subjects. There are several other abodes of Jamlu, either representing himself or some other minor god of the same name, in the district. Jamlu is said to be a brother of Gepang, the god of Lahaul.

Jamlu god is independent in that he neither pays tribute to the Raghunathji temple in Sultanpur, nor attends that temple, or pays his respects on the Dussehra, as most of the other Kullu deities are compelled to do. Jamlu does not have his own ratha but his relics in the form of musical instruments are worshiped and displayed on festive occasions.

There is also a legend connected with Akbar, the Emperor, and some scholars believed that at Malana there was a minute golden image of Akbar. Others believe that there is an elephant model gifted by Akbar. There is a custom in Kullu to offer small models of golden or silver statues of animals such as horse or elephant to the gods as a present for fulfilling their wishes, or giving grants to them.

## **Raghunathji**

Raghunathji is the chief deity who presides over Dussehra festival and other gods come in Dussehra and pay homage to him. It is said that once all the gods of Kullu, numbering around 360, attended the mela but the number kept on dwindling with the passage of time. In the last decade the number was reported to be around 120 - 130.

The statue of Raghunathji was brought from Ayodhya during the reign of Jagat Singh in the middle of seventeenth century. At the same time Vaishnavism was also introduced in the state.

## Dussehra

The proceedings of Kullu Dussehra starts only in the presence of the goddess Hadimba. The Hadimba Devi reaches Kullu all the way from Manali on the first day of Dussehra. The moment she reaches Kullu, the palanquin of Raghunathji is brought out to the festival square and put in the ratha. She is very much revered in Kullu and also called the grandmother of king of Kullu.

The other deities also come to pay homage to Raghunathji in his temple in Kullu. Around four o'clock in the afternoon all the deities being carried on the palanquins gather on the main festival square. Some of them enter the square rocking frenziedly and the devotees holding them rejoice, singing and dancing often going into a trance. The ratha with Raghunathji is pushed forward by fervent crowds towards another square. All the deities follow their master. This is how the festival begins.

On the seventh and the last day Raghunathji is called for Lanka Dahan (burning of Lanka). The idol of Raghunathji is kept in the ratha. The bushes are gathered and burnt as representing the Lanka of King Ravana. The masks of Ravan, Kumbkaran and Meghnath are tied with the arrowhead and burnt in the fire.

The festival apart from the dance, drama and rituals has a commercial aspect also. Traders from various parts of the district come to Kullu to sell their commodities, craftsman also find an opportune time to display their skills.

For the last 10 years the number of gods attending Kullu Dussehra is estimated at around 130. The list of deities with the place of worship in the brackets is given below:

- Adi Brahma (Khokhan, Rohalgi)
- Arji Pal (Jhokri, Kothi, Hurang)
- Arji Pal (Nargi, Kothi Maharaja)
- Asha Puri (Kandi, Tahsil Banjar, Kullu)
- Ayadu Mahavir (Shohul, Kothi Bunga, Up Tahsil Sainj)
- Ayadu Nag (Dehuri, Kothi Bunga, Up Tahsil Sainj)
- Bala Tripura Sundari (Naggar)
- Bali Narayan (Bashkola, Kothi Baragarh)
- Balidhu Dev (Kais)
- Banshira (Kanon, Kothi Bunga)
- Banshira (Siddhava, Kothi Manglaur)
- Barahi (Mauil, Kothi Shainshar, Up Tahsil Sainj)
- Bhaga Siddh (Narogi, Kothi Kotkandi)
- Bhaga Siddh (Pini)
- Bharatha Devi (Galchhet, Kothi Mandalgarh)
- Bhatanti (Naggar)
- Bhuhni (Baula, Kothi- Shikari Tahsil Banjar)
- Bijli Mahadev (Mathan)
- Brahma (Kanon, Kothi Bunga, Up Tahsil Sainj)
- Burhi Nagan (Ghiyagi, Kothi Kharagarh, Tahsil Banjar, Kullu)
- Chaman (Chyavan) Rhishi (Najan, Kothi Kotkandi)
- Chambhu (Kasholi, Kothi Daul, Tahsil Nirmand)
- Chamunda (Nashala, Kothi Naggar)
- Chhamahun Nag (Baragran, Tahsil Banjar, Kullu)
- Chhamahun Nag (Daliyara (Kotla), Kothi Bunga)
- Chhamani Narayan (Chhaman, Kothi Kais, Phati Khashauri)
- Chotru Nag (Shodha, Kothi Raghupur, Tahsil Ani, Zila Kullu)

- Darvasa Rhishi (Palgi, Kothi Bhalahan)
- Dashmi Varda (Kais)
- Dev Gauhri (Bari Tuni, KothiKais, Kharahal)
- Devi Phungni (Shirarh, Kothi Rayasan)
- Devta Jamlu (Sis)
- Dhumbal Nag (Halan, Kothi-Baragarh)
- Docha-Mocha (Gazan-Karjan)
- Garg Rhishi (Rot)
- Gargacharya (Lashni)
- Gauhri Deu (Bagan, Kothi Maharaja)
- Gauhri Deu (Buai, Kothi Maharaja, Phati Barahar)
- Gauhri Deu (Dachani, Baragarh)
- Gauhri Deu (Damchin, Kothi hurang)
- Gauhri Deu (Dhalpur, Kullu)
- Gauhri Deu (Hurla, Kothi Kotkandi)
- Gauhri Deu (Janahal, Kothi-Khokhan)
- Gauhri Deu (Pangan Kothji Raysan)
- Gauhri Deu (Phojal, Kothi Hurang)
- Gautam Rhishi (Manihar, Kothi Kotkandi)
- Gautam Rhishi, Dev Vyas and Kanchan Nag (Gaushal, Kothi Manali)
- Ghatotkach (Siddhma, Kothi Manglaur, Tahsil Banjar)
- Hari Narayan (Kathi, Kothi-Hurang)
- Hirma Hadimba Devi (Manali)
- Hurang Narayan (Daral, Kothi Hurang)
- Hurang Narayan (Gadiyara)
- Jamlu (Chaknani, Kothi Maharaja, Phati Piz)
- Jamlu (Ursu, Kothi Kotkandhi, Kullu)
- Jamlu Devta (Havai)
- Jamlu Devta (Shyah)
- Janasar (Raih, Kothi Banogi, Phati Maneshi, Uptah Sainj)
- Jehar (Nijan, Kothi Kotkandi)
- Juanu Mahadev (Juani, Kothi Kais)
- Jvala Phojan, Kothi Hurang)
- Jvalamukhi (Shamshi, Kothi Khokhan)
- Kaila Vir (Kamand, Kothi Maharaja, Phathi Kharihar)
- Kali Nag (Karal Kothi Mandalgarh)
- Kali Narayan (Jonga, Kothi Maharaja, Phathi, Barahar)
- Kali Ori (Archhani, Kothi Naggar)
- Khodu Mahadev (Dhara, Kothi Chaihni, Tahsil Banjar)
- Khodu Mahadev (Trehan, Kothi Kotkandi)
- Lakshmi Narayan (Koliberh)
- Lakshmi Narayan (Rayla, Up Tahsil Sainj)
- Lomash Rhishi (Pekhari, Kothi Nuhanda, Tahsil Banjar)
- Mahamai (Kacchaini, Up Tahsil Sainj)
- Mahaviir (Uali, Ser, Kothi Khokhan)
- Mahavir (Manglaur, Kothi Manglaur, Tahsil Banjar)
- Mangaleshvar Mahadev (Chheaur, Kothi Kotkandi)
- Markandev Rhishi Manglaur (Manlaur, Kothi Manglaur)
- Markandey Rhishi (Balagarh, Kothi Shikari, Tahsil Banjar, Kullu)
- Nag Dev (Suchehan, Kothi Banogi, Up Tahsil Sainj)
- Naina Devi (Sundar Nagar, Zila Mandi)
- Narad Muni (Ninu, Kothi Kotkandi)
- Narayan ((Bari Shilh, Kothi Rayasan)

- Narayan (Meha, Kothi Baragarh)
- Neitra Devi (Khashambhali Dhar, Kothi Khokhan, Phati Bhulang)
- Pajhari (Bahu, Tahsil Banjar, Zila Kullu)
- Panchali Devi (Panjali, Kothi Pahtehpur, Tahsil Banjar, Kullu)
- Pandir Rhishi (Katheugi)
- Pasha Kot (Shelri, Koothi Mandalgarh)
- Patrunu Nag (Paghona, Kothi Bunga)
- Paunj Vir (Lot, Kothi Maharaja, Phati Barahara)
- Paunz Vir (Bakhli, Kjothi Khokhan, Phati-Shilihar)
- Pirhu Than (Pirdi, Kothi Maharaja)
- Ranpal (Mauhal, Kothi Khokhan)
- Rupan Pal (Paha, Kothi Maharaja)
- Rupnu Pal (Tari Ra Gran, Kothi Khokhan)
- Sakirni Deu Shringi Rhishi (Bagi, Tahsil Banjar)
- Shabri (Shuru)
- Shaprara Narayan (Ashni)
- Shaprara Narayan (Bharogi, Kothi Kotkandi)
- Sharpal (Bonsu, Kothi Maharaja)
- Shyama Kali (Dalasni, Kothi Bhalahan, Phati Rot)
- Surajpal (Bara Bhuin, Kothi Kotkandi)
- Tarunu Nag (Bhagona, Tahsil Banjar)
- Than Narayan (Bhutthi)
- Trijugi Narayan (Diyur)
- Tundi Devi (Bhulang, Kothi Khokhan)
- Tundi Vir (Dalasani)
- Vasuki Nag (Thati Birh, Kothi Gopalpur, Tahsil Banjar)
- Vir Varadhi (Kareri, Kothi Maharaja)
- Vyas Rhishi (Kuinr, Kothi Raghupur, Phati Vishaladhar, Tahsil Ani, Kullu)