i) Pent roof or chalet roof style: The initial temples of Himachal were constructed in this style. Temple is either square or rectangular in plan having an entrance portico in the front. These temples were made up of stone and wood, having a pent roof made of stone tiles. These temples have intricately carved carvings in wood. Lakshma Devi temple at Brahmaur is the most important example of this type.

ii) Nagara style: These temples are built during 8th to 11th century. The architecture style of Nagara temples is adopted from plains and it resembles with the “Shikhara” style temples of the South India. Structure of the temple is of trabeated style in which stone pillars and beams are the main structural members supporting the roof. Rich stone carvings are the main characteristic of these temples. The type of carving detail depends upon the time of construction of temple. Bajinath temple is the one of the most important example of this type.

iii) Pagoda style: These temples are rectangular in plan, stone and wood are used in conjunction to form structures having successive roofs placed one over the other making them as multi-storied edifices. This style is much influenced from Chinese or Tibetan architecture. The interiors of these temples are richly decorated with wooden carvings. These woodcarvings were frequently replaced, when decayed, by replicating the old ones. Similarly the Pagoda roofs are also repaired, partly replacing the decayed portions. The temples at Nirmand, Nagar, Mandi etc come under this category.

iv) Rock-cut Cave Temples: These temples are monolithic structures with profuse carvings both on external and internal face of walls. In Himachal Pradesh a very few examples of rock cut temples are present. Some of the rock-cut temples which are located in the remote areas of Himachal Pradesh has Shiv linga enshrined. The rock-cut temples at Masroor, is one of the finest example of its type.

v) Buddhist monasteries: The layout of monasteries is simple and functional with their plans based on quadrangle pattern having built up area along the sides leaving...
courtyard in the centre of the complex. The initial monas-
teries have no separate cells for monks but later individu-
al cells were built for the monks. Open courts have been
used for accommodating the devotees. The facades of in-
teriors are decorated with paintings of bright and vibrant
colours.

vi) Tower style: this temple style is mostly adopted in
the higher mountainous regions and also term as hill style
temple. When the pent roof structure is raised to three or
more storeys, so that projected beams from the walls form
a cantilever structures over the veranda, it takes a look like
a tower. These temples are built on a square high plinth.
The different floors can be reached by a stepladder, which
is connected by a notched tree trunk. These temples have
sloping roof with gable windows. Best example of this
style is the Temple of Bhimkali at Sarahan.

BHIMAKALI TEMPLE COMPLEX AT SARAHAN
Bhimakali temple is the best example of tower style Tem-
ple situated/ constructed with wood and stone in Him-
layas. The temple complex at Sarahan is set against the
incredibly beautiful backdrop of high ranges and forested
slopes. Bheemakali Temple complex was constructed by
the Bushahr dynasty, who ruled from Sarahan before inde-
pendence. The new palaces of the royal family are situated
adjacent to the temple. The temple is approximately 800
years old, is dedicated to this great female power that was
called Bhimakali and is one of the representatives of 51
Shakti Peeths [2]. The temple has influence of Hindu and
Chinese architectural style. It has slanted slate roofs, gold-
ten towers, pagoda(s) and carved silver doors.

Site Planning
The sacred temple complex measures approximately one
acre. Site chosen for the temple is sloping and has a to-
tal slope gradient of about 9 meters. Whole of the temple
complex is constructed as a series of courtyard encircled/
enclosed by buildings. This is design as a combi-
ination of 4 courtyard constructed at different levels (fig
1 &2). The highest/ topmost courtyard has two temples,
temples of goddess Durga and Kali which are famous or
known for their unique architectural style. Second court-
yard has Raghunath temple and other buildings. King’s
palace is situated in the third courtyard. Fourth and low-
ernmost courtyard which is constructed subsequently have
Nar Singh temple (which is constructed with stone having
Shikhara on top with wooden sloping roof) canteen and
guest house for the pilgrims. Supporting buildings and
residential accommodation for support staff was provided
on the periphery of the temple. These different levelled
courtyards are accessed by highly decorated and richly
carved gates having series of steps in front.

Fig 1: schematic site plan of Bhimakali temple complex,
Sarahan.

Fig 2: Panoramic view of the complex

Building Design
Main temples are designed as the amalgamation of In-
dian and Chinese architectural style, with Buddhist and
Hindu influences and bronze statues of both religions in
the shrines (fig 3,4). Buildings are rectangular in the plan
having thick walls constructed in kath-kunni style. A narrow
stone staircase is provided to access the upper floors. At
the fourth floor level, floor is protruded out of the lower
floor on wooden brackets/ cantilevers. At this level the
outer walls are made up of cidar/ deodar wood which has
nice and intricate carving. To reach the uppermost level
(fifth floor) which houses the state of goddess Bhimakali
a wooden staircase is provided. The uppermost/fifth floor
is further project more over the floor below. Slanting roof
constructed with timber and covered with locally available
slates is provided [3].

The second temple has only one projected floor at upper
level. This temple is devoted to goddess Durga. Lower
floors of the temple have walls constructed with wood and
stone whereas, upper floor has intricate woodwork on the
exterior facade.

Raghunath temple built on a high platform in the second
courtyard is a combination of linear building and vertical
projected mass (fig 5). The chamber where idol is placed
projected over a slanting slate roof of remaining build-
ing. This projection of cuboid over slanting roof presents
a magnificent composition. This composition is further en-
hanced by pagoda roof on the top of cuboids.
The Nar Singh temple present in the complex is an example of Shikhara style temple. This style is modified by providing sloping roof around the temple for parikarma. King’s palace in the complex is a linear building which has access from third courtyard (fig 6). Projected balconies on upper floors are provided to have panoramic view of the valley. These balconies are supported on wooden beams protruded out of the stone or kath-kunni walls. Highly carved arches are used in the balconies as an integrating element in order to exhibits an architectural masterpiece.

Building Form

Temple complex has a variety of building forms. The two main temples constructed in uppermost courtyard are the finest example of tower style temples and combination of Indo-Chinese architecture. The building form is rather simple but elegant. It is a combination of slanting pagoda roof over a cubical base. This cubical base has five storeys. Upper storey of the temple is projecting over the lower stories. The verticality of lower stories is broken by series of coursed of wood and stones. On the upper stories richly carved windows/ openings are provided in woodwork expresses the skill and accuracy of the craftsmen of the region wooden sculptures are used on brackets to support projected upper floors [4].

Method of Construction

The walls of the buildings presented in the complex are constructed in kath-kunni style (fig 7). It is an indigenous style of construction which is evolved in western Himalayas. In ‘Kath-kuni’ or ‘Kath-kundi’ style a mesh of interlocking horizontal cedar (locally deodar) sleepers/ logs is created. In this mesh dressed or raw stone are packed without any mortar. Absence of vertical members for wall construction is a characteristic of this style. With inherent elasticity, the design has an enormous seismic response. There have been instances, when tremors have dislodged the stones from the frame, and later, have been hammered back into the intact mesh of wood houses.

The upper floors of the temples which are projected over the lower floors have exterior walls made of carved wood. Sloping pagoda shaped roofs are covered with locally available slates. These slates are fixed on deodar wood trusses. Roofs in this complex have a distinct character and forms a very interesting skyline.
Access Gates
There are four main gate/gateways at different levels in the complex, which provides access to different courtyard or these are the circulation linkages in between different courtyards (fig 8,9). First gate is constructed to provide access to lowermost level which contains Nar Singh temple, administrative office and guest house. This gate has richly carved gold plating. The second gate is made of wood and is covered with intricately carved silver foils/covering. This gate provides access to third courtyard where king’s palace is located. Third gate is constructed to provide access to Raghunath temple. The fourth gate which is a simple structure made of stone and covered with slates is the main door that leads to two main temples. This gate is known as Shri Dvar.

Materials Used
Whole of the complex is constructed with the use of mainly indigenous/locally available materials. Locally available sand stone and deodar/cidar wood are the two main building materials which are used in the complex for wall construction. Natural slates are quarried from nearby slate mines and used as main roofing material over the wooden roof trusses.

Carvings/ Details
Whole of the temple complex have rich carvings in wood work and silver work (fig 10,11). Door frame is thick in size and have detailed carvings in wood or in silver. Shutters are thicker in size and majorly idols of different gods and goddesses are carved on them. Staircase balusters, balcony railing, brackets to support upper floors, wall panelling are made of wood and having very interesting floral and decorative patterns carving. Bronze kalsha is provided on the roof top of every temple. The most interesting decorative feature in the main temples is wooden wind chime which moves to and fro / oscillates while wind flows.

Conclusion
Bhimakali temple at Sarahan is the magnificent example of hill architecture in India. It shows the expertise of craftsmen in terms of building design, material handling, construction techniques and aesthetics. This temple even today acts as an inspiration for architects/designers to design new buildings (especially mid-rise) in hill towns. Many buildings designed and constructed in Shimla have borrowed their concepts, form & features from this magnificent temple.

REFERENCE