The worship of Vishnu did not come suddenly to the hills. It was certainly not the original faith of the people of these parts; we have seen that their adherence to the cults of Shiva and the Devi, or their local gods and goddesses, was strong and went back to very early times. But quite early in the history of the hills, Vaishnavism had made its appearance there. Bhagavatism may be a more accurate description of this phase of the faith, and its inspiration may have come from the plains, but there are clear indications that "devotion to Krishna", as the Chamba inscriptions say so often, was a matter of some importance to many persons. There is also the evidence of images and temples. The adoration of Vishnu appears thus to have been far from unknown, even if there was only a sprinkling of it over the hills. What is more important, there appears to have been no break or sudden cessation in the Vaishnava movement which comes up in this matter to the end of the 16th century.

In the 17th century, however, Vaishnavism entered a new phase in the hills. It had already, in the plains, developed a popular aspect by making the two incarnations, Rama and Krishna, as the centres of
attention. And there is little doubt that at this point of time a determined attempt was made to win more people of the hills also over to Vaishnava belief. But the inspiration came once again from the plains; the faith was, in its entirety, an importation. It is a matter of some significance to point out that to Vaishnavism, as it now came from the plains, no original contribution was made in the hills. Neither in devotional poetry nor in literature was any original Vaishnava work produced here of which we have any knowledge. The general and convenient statement which is often made that no original movement ever grew up in the hills, and that all developments are mere reflections of happenings in the plains, is perhaps not accurate. But in the matter of faith, quite clearly, the content of Vaishnavism was not enriched by any saint or scholar who rose in the hills. Not only is there a complete absence of any manuscript of significance in the various collections - and a very large number of these have been seen for the purposes of the present study -, which show the rise or growth of a literary or religious movement; there is no other sign of any commotion or tumult. There is in fact no indication in the hills of what in the plains has been called the "Hindu Renaissance". The Bairagis who went about in the hills areas did not give to the people any great literature. All that they seem to have succeeded in doing was to
acquaint them with the doctrine of **bhakti** and the ritualistic aspect of the Vaishnava faith. The literary efforts of Narayanji of Pindori are, at best, of indifferent merit, and nothing is known of anything written by Shri Krishnadas Payahari on any other ascetic. No Vallabha or Surdas, nor a Kabir, or a Mira Bai, arose in the hills. The question of a "Hindu Renaissance" in the hills may not have arisen partially because the society was already almost exclusively Hindu and had not been subject to the same strains and stresses as the Muslim-dominated society in the plains. But whatever the explanation, the fact remains that the hills do not betray any sign of mental upheaval in the 16th century or earlier. There is only a registering of impulses which reached from the plains. There is no excitement of local origin.

When Vaishnavism arrived in the hills in an 'organised' manner as it may be called, in the first half of the 17th century, it obviously ran into considerable opposition. In its early phase Vaishnavism had been absorbed and was co-existing with the more widely prevalent faiths of the people of the hills. But the attempt at the introduction of popular Vaishnavism met with resistance and we have examined the difficult path of conflict which Vaishnavism had to tread here. Whether it was introduced by the Bairagis
or temple priests, or the Rajas who embraced it sometimes to fall more in line with the culture of the plains, the people took to Vaishnavism only in a gingerly manner and with so many modifications that in the process they altered the very character of the faith that they partially adopted. In any case it is reasonably certain that Vaishnavism did not make a clear conquest of the hills. It fought a hard battle, on the other hand, and whatever gains it made were not permanent. One does not see any evidence, therefore, of a wave of Vaishnavism coming and sweeping over the hills, submerging everything beneath it. Vaishnavism clearly did not take the popular imagination by storm.

Even if we assume that the interest taken in Vaishnavism by the Rajas or by some other sections of the society of the hills in the first half of the 17th century was enthusiastic, where, one asks, is that flush of fervour of which was born a great artistic expression? The "outburst of painting" which takes place in Udaipur of the 16th century may be related to the strength of Vaishnava faith. But an efflorescence, a sudden blossoming, as it were, of artistic expression in the wake of a new-found vision of faith did not take place here in the hills.

An interesting fact that has a bearing on the relationship between Pahari Painting and Vaishnavism
is that the earliest pictures from the hills are not Vaishnava. They are at least not Vaishnava in the sense that they do not treat of Vaishnava texts, nor do they celebrated any great Vaishnava legends. Among the early Vaishnava themes, in fact among the earliest themes of any description from the hills, are perhaps portraits of Rajas. There are also some stray pictures of Vaishnava content from the 17th century, but there is no evidence of the artists of the hills being compulsively led to expressing their delight in a new faith. Portraits, actual or imaginary, however much they might occasionally indicate the Vaishnava faith of a Raja, scarcely represent a vision or enthusiasm of the kind that we have in mind. What is interesting, on the other hand, is that the first major sets of Pahari painting treating of Vaishnava themes proper, the precise material upon which theories about the intimate connection between Vaishnavism and the rise of Pahari painting are raised - do not come till the beginning of the 18th century, which is more than half a century later than the arrival of popular Vaishnavism in the hills. This distance, or gap, needs to be emphasised. We have clear evidence of Vaishnavism arriving in a given period of time, but there is no evidence of it having given birth, at that time, to a new style of painting. For nearly fifty years after Vaishnavism had arrived in the hills in an
organised manner, all that was being produced were portraits, stray pictures of diverse themes, Shakti illustrations and the illustration of texts on rhetoric which brought in the figures of Krishna and Radha but did not celebrate their love with that sentiment of bhakti which underlies Vaishnava belief. It becomes difficult then to see any correspondence, or synchronisation, between the arrival of Vaishnavism in the hills, as we understand it, and the rise of Pahari painting. The connection between Vaishnavism and Pahari painting is not, therefore, as direct perhaps as it is sometimes believed to be. In any case it is not causal.

The situation in the 17th century, apart from it being significant that Vaishnavism never succeeded in becoming the predominant faith of the hills. It made large gains; there were, at least initially, strong centres of Vaishnavism all over the hills and there were perhaps both converts and missionaries. But it did not, ever, command the unquestioned allegiance of the people. It did clearly become a major sect, and an interaction between it and the other, earlier, sects followed. But the assumption that Vaishnavism became so identified with the religion of the people that in their art could be seen reflected its strength or extent, is perhaps not valid. Even in the Rajas whose conversions is said to have
led to its spread, Vaishnavism aroused possibly only thin emotion. We have noticed the position regarding Kripal Pal of Basohli, under whom the navaka and the navika of the Rasamanjari verses were cast in the mould of Radha and Krishna, Kripal Pal did not bend his faith exclusively in the direction of Vaishnavism. On the other hand, in a portrait of his which indicates his personal faith, he appears as a Shaiva. The curious position of the personal faith of Sansar Chand has also been considered. He made gifts of land "out of devotion to Krishna", celebrated the Janmashtami festival, listened to Brijbhasha songs, endowed the Murlimanohar temple. But he also irreverently smoked a hookah in the presence of a deity in the temple, worshipped in the Devi temple, got the Gauri Shankar temple built inside his fort, and took his oaths by the Goddess who is the family deity of the Katoches and whose domain the hills are believed to be. The situation in Chamba, we have seen, is not very dissimilar. Prithvi Singh who imports the idol of Raghuvira into Chamba and becomes its first devotee, has himself painted as wearing a Shakta tilak, and endows temples of the Chamunda Devi. Chhatar Singh who follows him is by no means a Vaishnava, nor are his brothers of that inclination. The position as far as religion is concerned was thus extremely fluid, and apparently not only did the adherence to faiths change from Raja to Raja within a State; the personal leanings of the
individual Rajas were never so emphatic as one would sometimes imagine.

Another possibility of seeing a firm, casual relationship between Vaishnavism and painting could be that if the patron was not so devout or so determined a Vaishnava, the artist was. But this does not also correspond with those facts of which we have definite knowledge. The personal faith of the artist, if it turned definitely in one direction at all, centred around the worship of the Devi. We have also evidence about some artists being Shaiva, but we have no clear evidence about the personal belief of any artist from the hills being distinctly Vaishnava. At best the painters might have been as eclectic in their belief as most people from the hills, but this would not make them out as being ardent Vaishnavas.

When we come to the general people, the situation is again much the same. Their Vaishnavism, where existent, is scarcely strong, and when in their hour of need they summon faith to their assistance, it is to their local gods and godlings, or to Shiva or the Goddess, that they resort. The worship of Vishnu or one of his incarnations does not appear to fulfil the immediate 'necessity' of religion, as it were. Vaishnavism seems to have been the governing passion of only very few persons.
And yet there is, or can be, no denying the Vaishnava content of a great deal of Pahari painting. Not only were a large number of Vaishnava sets produced, for the first time in the beginning of the 18th century, they became recurrent themes of Pahari painting in succeeding decades. The *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavata Purana*, the *Gita Govinda*, hold the centre of the stage, in a manner of speaking. The fact that this happens in a society the adherence of which to Vaishnavism is neither deep nor exclusive is, however, not as inexplicable or paradoxical as it may first appear to be. And the explanation of the situation seems to lie in the fact that all these Vaishnava texts possess overpowering narrative interest. The legends about the gods are so intensely human that in them the reader, or in the case of paintings the viewer, finds an immediate sense of identity. The emotions that the gods experience, or the situations in which they are often placed, are instantaneously recognisable. It is not a matter of accident that out of the ten *Avatars* of Vishnu, the two around whom most Vaishnava belief centres, Rama and Krishna, were those that took human form and lived, in a sense, 'ordinary' lives. The Buddha can be counted as an *avatar* of Vishnu out of this consideration because 'avatar' of Vishnu he is a completely colourless figure, brought in at a late date into the pantheon as a matter of convenience.
or policy. Every detail of the lives of Rama and Krishna, however, imaginary, is available. Their childhood, adolescence and youth; the fact that they lived, at least in theory, at a given point of time in a given society, give the opportunity to the writer of the text to weave in all possible human emotions and responses in these stories. It is because they are human that their lives often become ideals of conduct. One thinks of Rama and Krishna constantly as leading the kind of life that everyone lives, only at a higher plane. And when it comes to the artist, he finds in the stories of Rama and Krishna an inexhaustively rich source of illustration.

The Pahari painter shows consistent and intense interest in narrative. In a sense he is the true descendant of the sculptors of Bharhut and Sanchi who took such obvious delight in the stories that they were portraying. The fact that the Pahari painter instinctively chooses the dramatic and the lyrical as his favourite themes, is demonstrated not only with the aid of the Vaishnava legends or texts that he illustrated; this interest of his extends to many other themes which are non-Vaishnava. In the stories of the Goddess, the episode that he picks up to illustrate is the powerful, dramatic episode in which she kills the demon Mahishasura. From the stories centering around Shiva, the episode that he illustrates at length is that which tells so lovingly and in such human detail of the birth
of Kumara. Regardless of what the theme is, the artist goes into it with the same enthusiasm because the tale affords him the opportunity to extract emotion from it. The story of Hamir, or the romances of Nala and Damayanti or Usha and Aniruddha, are favourites with the Pahari artist because he can linger over the narration and invest it with a great deal of feeling. For the same reasons the Pahari artist also turns towards purely secular stories like Shhni and Mahiwai, Sassi and Punnui, or Madhavanala and Kamakandala. Some indication of the manner in which the mind of the artist worked, can be gathered from the incidents from known stories that he chose to illustrate. When we emphasise the narrative aspect of this art, however, it is by no means meant that the artist was unaware of the subtler implications of the stories, or their being, quite often, elaborate allegories. He was both aware and capable of investing his pictures with many meanings.

Another dominant interest that the Pahari painter had was in Shringara, the erotic flavour. And it is this which is responsible for innumerable paintings of Radha and Krishna in Pahari painting. In his illustrations of situations in love, the artist depended upon works on rhetoric which had been produced in the plains. And it is the poets, beginning with Jayadeva, who had sung of Krishna and Radha as the eternal lover and beloved;
the Pahari artist simply took his cue from them. By the middle of the seventeenth century works like those of Kesahavadas and Bihari had firmly identified in the popular mind Krishna with the Nayaka, and Radha the Navika. Love could thus be spoken of at two different levels and it is this which the illustrator of the Rasamanjarī precisely did. He relied on the archetypes to give more universality to his pictures.

From the point of view of sublimation of ordinary love also, nothing could have come nearer to the heart of the Pahari artist than the loves of Krishna. The popularity of the Krishna cult has been explained eloquently by Dr. Archer in terms of "the needs of the Rajput society". The pictures of the Krishna theme have in his words, "a lyrical splendour, a certain wild elation quite distinct from previous Indian paintings and we can only explain these new stylistic qualities by reference to the cult of Krishna himself. The realisation that Krishna was adorable, that his practice of romantic love was a sublime revelation of Godhead and that in his worship they revealed this, is the motive force behind these pictures, and the result is a new style transcending in its rhythmical assurance and glowing ardour all previous achievements."
It needs to be pointed out that paintings of Vaishnava themes from the hills are essentially illustrations of texts, either religious or rhetoric, and are not religious in the sense that they become aids to faith. There are relatively few pictures which serve the same functions that cult images did. Among the few that do may be the pictures of the feet of Vishnu, or of Lakshmi and Narayana. There is no denying the beauty and power of occasional Vaishnava pictures of hieratic significance, but they are exceptional. On the other hand, the religious necessity, as it might be called, is fulfilled by other paintings. And these are iconic paintings of the Shaiva or Shakta themes. References have been made above to the pictures of the various manifestations of Shiva and the Devi. And it is in these that, in a sense, a truer reflection of the faith of the hills can be seen.

Even though paintings of the Shaiva and Shakta themes have been noticed by most writers on Pahari painting, it is strange that they do not enter, or affect, the discussion on the character of Pahari painting. In spite of their large presence, and in spite of the fact that many of these paintings are full of feeling and depth, one hears Pahari painting constantly being referred to, in Vaishnava terms. An explanation of this possibly lies in the fact that many theories about Rajput painting were first formulated with the situation
of Rajasthani painting in mind, and then applied to Pahari work. It is of singular interest that not a single large set illustrating a Shaiva or a Shakta theme has so far been connected with a Rajasthani court. Rajput painting being identified with Vaishnava themes is then more or less accurately reflective of the situation in the art of Rajasthan. But this identification does not hold good in the case of Pahari paintings. Paintings of the Shaiva and Shakta themes, not only because of their number but also because of their quality, cannot be left out of consideration, when the character and inspiration of paintings from the hills is talked about.

The synchronization that is often seen between the rise of vernacular literature and the growth of Rajput painting, once again, appears to have been responsible for the formulation of many theories regarding Rajput paintings. But these theories, again, are not applicable in their entirety to the Pahari situation. Here, quite definitely, there is no such synchronization between the growth of vernacular literature, much of which was devoted to Vaishnava themes, and the rise of Pahari painting. The Pahari artist was clearly not a member of a society which experienced a Hindu Renaissance either in religion or in literature. As such, he did not inherit any themes nor did he participate in the
development of these themes by the poets. He, on the other hand, chose his own themes with care and deliberateness and, often, from a distance. And it was after he had made his choice, perhaps through the act of making this choice, that he identified himself with these themes. And these themes were by no means exclusively Vaishnava.