A. THE BEGINNINGS

The beginnings of Vaishnavism in India have been the subject of much learned writing and discussion. There are many controversies amongst scholars on the subject because tradition is confused and evidence often conflicting. The materials for the study are also scanty and have to be disengaged and pieced together carefully before an even moderately recognizable picture of the development emerges. What seems to be reasonably certain is that there is from the beginning an accretion of traditions and coming together of the cults to make a composite religion. Vishnu as he is known in the Vedas, allied with the cult of Krishna which in turn represents itself the amalgam of the Krishna-Vasudeva cults. There is in the Vasudeva-Krishna cults

1. The account that follows is largely based on R.C. Bhandarkar, Vaishnavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems; S.K. De, Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal; H. Raychaudhuri, Materials for the Study of the Early History of the Vaishnava Sect; Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, Evolution of Theistic Sects in Ancient India; K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, Development of Religion in South India; and G.S. Ghurye, Indian Sadhus. The authors of these works are not agreed on many points but the purpose of the present section is only to give a general account of the developments.
a fusion of two distinct elements, the worship of the deity and the innocent worship of a cowherd boy, a hero who was popular and whose exploits were celebrated in the region around Mathura. There are references to Krishna, not always clear or explicit, in early literature, and there are times when the two traditions about him, that of him as a gopala, cowherd body, and as a great prince, do not meet at any point at all. But the references go on becoming more and more profuse. And in the background of these developments stands that great classic, the Mahabharata within which is set the Bhagavad-Gita, that jewel of literature which is venerated by all Hindus, Vaishnava or not. The cult of Vasudeva-Krishna, combined with the cult of Narayana or Vishnu, assumes soon a sectarian form and is called the Panchatra or the Bhagavata cult. Four centuries before Christ, references to Bhagavatism as a distinct sect begin and in Megasthenes there is clear mention of this being a religion of a specific people. Inscriptions of the second and the first centuries before Christ refer to Krishna together with Samkarshana who, later, becomes identified with his brother, Balarama. Gradually grew up the doctrine of the four Vyuhas (manifestations): Krishna, Samkarshana, Pradyumna, son of Krishna, and Aniruddha, his grandson. Krishna
now becomes Purushotama. The first century B.C. inscription from Besnagar, recording the erection of a Garuda-dhvaja (i.e. a pillar topped by Garuda, the mount of Vishnu) of Vasudeva by Heliodorus of Taxila who calls himself quite clearly a "Bhagavata" is well-known. There are many other references though none is explicit as will give us a clear idea of either the exact nature or the full extent of the spread of the sect.

With the turn of the era, the developments become more easily discernible. There are more literary references and there are visual remains like sculptures which are clearly Vaishnava in content. At Mandor in Rajasthan and at Mathura, Bhagavata themes treated of in sculpture. As we advance towards the Gupta period the developments crystallise. Apart from the Vyuhas or manifestations, the doctrine of the Avataras or incarnations develops and their worship becomes a noticeable feature of the Vaishnavism of this age. Not all the Avataras are described in inscriptions and some of them appear to have been more popular than the others, but the idea comes to stay and, afterwards, the Das Avataras or the Ten incarnations of Vishnu become a central theme of Vaishnavism.

With the coming of the Guptas, the cult of Vishnu receives, in a sense, determined royal support. The Gupta rulers refer to themselves repeatedly as "Parama-Bhagavatas" leaving no doubts about their personal inclination.
is also the period of more developments in the visual arts as far as Vaishnava themes are concerned. And it appears, that the Vasudeva-Krishna cult which had begun rather uncertainly, has come to occupy a place of eminence in the religious situation in India. When the Puranas are written or when more literature of a secular nature is being produced, the attention of the writer goes easily and naturally towards the faith. With the fall of the Guptas, the situation altered, though not materially. It altered at least in the sense that from the seventh century onwards the centre of attention, as far as developments within Vaishnavism are concerned, shifts to the South. It is here that far reaching changes take place and from Bhagavatism of a somewhat mixed kind, the faith emerges as Vaishnavism, as it is known to us, in the course of about four hundred years. In the South the Bhagavatas were a fairly important sect, important enough at least for the great Shankaracharya to consider it necessary to deliver a frontal attack on them. But the Bhagavata doctrine, which was now also becoming the doctrine of Bhakti, "an intense theism marked by a fervent devotion to a personal God". The agency of the spread of this great doctrine throughout the South were the great saints who are called Alvars, "those who are immersed (in devotion to or love of God)". The Alvars, twelve in number according to a tradition, sang songs of
devotion and spread the message of Bhakti throughout the South. There were, at this time, Shaiva propagators, the Nayanars, who also went about the land, but the position of the Vaishnavas in the South must have been enormously strengthened by the teachings and the rise of the great Ramanuja. Born in the early years of the 11th century, Ramanuja made strenuous endeavours to negate and put down the feeling of hostility to spiritual monism which had come with Shankaracharya. And it was after his well-known pilgrimages and the founding of a sect within Vaishnavism which he called now the Shri Sampradaya that Ramanuja succeeded in giving a new vigour to the movement in the South. But the effect of Ramanuja's teachings and tours was not confined to that region, and he made disciples and converts who produced a profound impact on the developments in the North.

From the 12th century, we see the rise of the four major Sampradayas or schools of thought into which the Vaishnava movement now divided itself. And these are connected with the names of Ramanuja, Madhava, Vishnuswami, and Nimbarka. Theoretically, the doctrine of the schools did not single out any particular incarnation of the Supreme Deity for special worship, but since the faith was personal in ardour and concrete in expression, in actual practice one or the other incarnation was preferred by
the votaries of these schools. Thus the Ramanuja sect, for instance, fixed its devotion mostly on Shri and Vishnu or the Rama incarnation; but in the other three schools of Madhava, Vallabha and Nimbarka, it was Krishna who was popularly installed as the centre of the Vaishnava faith.

Of special interest to the present study are the developments within the Krishna cult. It was not always that Krishna was worshipped together with Radha by his devotees. Radha is clearly a much later development, and several scholars ascribe it to Tantrik influences which had always placed great emphasis on Shakti, or the female principle of power and generation. In that great work which for the Vaishnavas has become a classic, the Bhagavata Purana, there is no mention of Radha even though the love of Krishna for the gopis is mentioned and one particular gopi, without a name, is singled out. With Nimbarkacharya of the South and with later Vaishnava saints the emergence of Radha not only as an integral part of the Krishna cult comes about, but at a later stage

1. "The Vaishnava Sakti-tattva, the acceptance of Kama-gayatri, and the idea of Radha as the Sakti or Energy of Krsna point probably to Tantric influence, both remote and direct". De, Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal, 28.
Radha, in some sects, even assumes a place of superiority over Krishna himself. What was conceived in the beginning as a philosophical allegory, for after all Radha stood for the human soul which constantly yearned for the divine soul which was Krishna, later came to be believed in as a reality by most people. An abstraction assumed over the years a concrete shape.

With Vallabhaeharya who was born in the end of the 15th century and who chose to operate most of the time in the North, especially in Rajasthan, the cult of Krishna and Radha received a tremendous impetus. The great popularity of the shrine of Shri Nathaji in Rajasthan, the legend of which connects it with Vallabhaeharya himself, is some indication of the impact made by his teachings upon the people of these parts. While the saints and the philosophers were paying attention to the theological aspects of the faith, there were literary developments in parts of north India which affected the situation materially. The Gita Govinda of Jayadeva of the 12th century is cited often as a great classic of Vaishnava poetry even though it may not have been intended as a religious work. The poems of Vidyapati and Chandi Das

1. It is Jayadeva's emotional temperament which may have been responsible for this preferring an erotic theme, "but of all erotic themes of medieval times the eternally fascinating love-story of Krsna and Radha was probably the most absorbing". Again, "Jayadeva, like Vidyapati, was chiefly and essentially a poet. We doubt, he emphasises in his poems the praise and worship of Krsna, but it is not unusual in older poetry to present poetic and even secular themes under the grab of religion." De, Veishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal, 10.
who had started writing in the vernaculars, the rise of which is another great development of this period, were also greatly responsible for spreading the doctrine. They did more than this: the Vaishnava doctrines added to their religious content in their hands and became infused with great poetic beauty. The cult of Krishna had other great adherents in the mystic saint-poets like Sur Das and Mira Bai, both of whom flourished in the 16th century and both of whom became famous alike for their devotion and for their poetry during their lives. The areas around Mathura and Brindaban which, in the popular mind, had become associated with Krishna and his boyhood days, now became great centres of Vaishnava or Krishna worship. Rajasthan visibly showed the impact of Vaishnavism. But the developments in Bengal, an area which so far been entirely associated with the worship of Shakti or with Tantrik worship, were sensational because there operated that great saint and mystic, Chaitanya, whose name has become, in the North, identified with bhakti.

Parallel to developments in the Krishna cult were the growth and spread of the Rama cult of which the chief inspiration came from the teachings of the great Ramananda who is credited with the foundation of the sect of Bairagis. The turn that Ramananda had given to Vaishnavism was new, because there was an emphasis
on Krishna worship at about this time. Ramananda was followed by worthy disciples including the great Kabir. In the 16th century another great devotee of Rama, Tulsi Das, produced his immortal poet, the Ramacharit Manasa. Inside the Rama cult, Sita was highly venerated, much as Lakshmi was with Vishnu, or Radha with Krishna. And in the sentiment of Bhakti or personal devotion the work of Tulsi Das yields place to none in the whole range of Vaishnava literature.

But, this is clear that whatever other developments might have taken place, it was the cult of Radha and Krishna somehow which became, in the common mind, associated with Vaishnavism. One can, in fact, even speak of this association also in the mind of the learned. For, as we have seen earlier, when it is Vaishnavism which is associated with Rajput for Pahari painting, it is the Vaishnavism which manifests itself in the cult, and the love of Radha and Krishna which is invoked to explain it. For the learned, of course, the story of Krishna is not really a story, but only a Lila, something gone through for the sake of appearance, almost at a dramatic

1. In his discussion of the rise of medieval Vaishnavism, Dr. Coomaraswamy, for example, refers repeatedly to the love of Radha and Krishna, almost to the point of excluding the Rama element of the Faith.
In Dr. Coomaraswamy's eloquent work the significance of the Krishna Lila is thus described: "In Vaishnava mysticism, the Indian analogy of Zen, the miracle of human love reveals itself in poetry and art not merely as symbol, but as felt religious experience; the true relation of the soul to God can now only be expressed in impassioned epithalmia celebrating the nuptials of Radha and Krishna, milkmaid and divine Bride-groom. Moreover the process of thought is reversible; in the truly religious life, all distinction of sacred and profane is lost, one and the same song is sung by lover and by monk. Thus the technical phraseology of Yoga, the language of bhakti, is used even in speaking of human passion; the bride is lost in the trance (dhvāna) of considering the beloved, love itself is an office (prāja). In separation, she makes a prayer of the names of her Lord, in union, 'Each is Both'." And when Dr. Coomaraswamy describes the sports of Krishna he clearly refers to them, as the saints did, not as an historical event, but an eternal reality.

B. EARLY TRACES OF VAISHNAVISM

As in the rest of India so in the Punjab Hills, there are indications or traces of the existence of Vaishnava belief at an early date. Our only information comes from stray images or inscriptions, and in these the faith of the donors is only casually mentioned. But facts can be gleaned. These inscriptions are, however, very few and laconic so that to look for 'records' of Vaishnavism remains always an effort. Early Vaishnava temples are also extremely rare and those that are extant many not have been dedicated to Vaishnava worship to begin with. In its early phase in the hills, Vaishnavism should perhaps more appropriately be referred to as Bhagavatism. The names of Vishnu and Krishna of course occur in many of these inscriptions, but it appears as if it is only an echo of the situation in the plains of North India in the corresponding periods of time. It is significant that Vishnu is mentioned under several names in this period in the inscriptions and there does not appear to be any one particular manifestation or Avatar of Vishnu adored by the people of the hills.

1. See, Vogel, Antiquities, for a detailed account of these inscriptions.
At Kanhiara, 12 miles north of Kangra where there are now some well-known slate quarries, are two massive blocks of granite inscribed with characters which are as old as the 1st century B.C. The inscription mentions the name of the place as "Krishnayasyarama". The date of this inscription, as also the significance of it, is controversial. Mr. Bayley assigned the inscription to the 1st century A.D., while General Cunningham thought that it belonged to the 1st century B.C. Some scholars believe that the inscription makes reference to a Buddhist place-name, as is indicated by the use of the word "arama" but Cunningham points very pertinently to the fact that the name of the place Kanhiara may well have been derived from Kahn or Kanhayia, which is one of the names by which Krishna is known.

Inside the Kangra fort also there is a much-damaged inscription, outside the Jahangiri Darwaza. This is believed to be the oldest inscription at Kangra. The form of the letters indicate for it a 6th century date. The inscription begins with an invocation to Vishnu.

2. Ibid., V, 176. Also see, Kangra D.G., Pt. A, 1904, 258.
3. A.S.R., V, 155, 164. The inscription is possibly of the 6th century A.D.
One of the most important but little known early temples, which is the unfinished rock-cut temple at Masrur, now approached from the town of Haripur in Guler. In popular parlance this massive structure is referred to as a Thakuridwara, a name which in the hills clearly is reserved for shrines of Vishnu or one of his incarnations. The temple at Masrur has been described at length by Mr. Hargreaves. The images, both early and late, which are housed there are many, and among them is an image of Vishnu even though there are others, like those of Indra, Ganesh, Skanda and Durga. Hargreaves has ascribed to the temple to the 18th century A.D. on grounds of style. He believes that there are no special reasons for concluding that the temple at Masrur was a Vaishnava shrine and he is inclined to the view that there is "a strong presumption that the temple was dedicated to Mahadeva". Whatever the conclusions about Masrur, there is reasonable indication that if Vishnu was not the principal deity here, there at least was one image of his in the temple.

From the remote regions of Chamba, where many inscriptions have been preserved, there are several


2. This preservation may have owed itself to the remoteness of the valley rather than to the tenderness of the invaders.
indications of the existence of Vaishnavism. Here we come upon the names of Vishnu and Krishna in many inscriptions. The Rajas of Chamba belonged to the Suryavanshi line of Rajputs and thus trace their genealogical table from Vishnu or Narayana. But this is true of many other areas where there are not many traces of Vaishnavism and is not a circumstance which is perhaps enough to explain the presence of this faith in this State. In Chamba, Vaishnavism appears to have arrived during the Gupta age. It is reasonably clear that contacts of the hill during the long period of history were not only maintained with Kashmir within whose circle of influence the Punjab Hills remained for long centuries, but also with the plains, and Dr. Goetz suggests that the Bhagavatism of the rulers of Chamba may have been an importation from the plains. The 7th century temples of the reign of Kauvaranan also have indications of Bhagavata worship. Even the Lakshanadevi temple, a temple dedicated to the Goddess, represents Vishnu in his three headed form, for he has here the heads of a boar and a lion in addition to his own. At Brahmsur on one of the gables of the temple is a relief representing Vishnu as Vaikunthanatha. But the most important temple,

1. Goetz, Early Wooden Temples, 84.
2. Ibid., 68.
"the glory of Chamba", is the temple of Lakshmi Narayana which goes back to the period of Raja Shilavarman of the 10th century. According to a legend, this Raja is said to have been without any children. When he got ten sons through the blessings of Shiva, he desired to raise a temple to Vishnu and sent nine of his sons to bring back a rock from the marble quarries in the Vindhyas. From the rock which was brought by the sons, several images were fashioned, including one of a small Goddess, possibly Lakshmi, wife of Vishnu. For, after, Shhilvarman, in Chamba in the reign of his son Yugakarvarman, the worship of Vishnu seems at least partially to have continued. His Rani Tribhuvan Rekha assigned land to the God Narsing who represents the man-lion incarnation of Vishnu. At about the same period as, Yugakarvarman in Chamba is indication of the shrine of "Chakradhara", another name for Vishnu, being raised in Punch.

In the 12th century from Chamba we have many inscriptions which mention Vishnu or Krishna. The stone

1. Vigne, Travels, I, 158-159.
5. Hutchison & Vogel, II, 74.
statue of Narayana from a ruined fountain enclosure at Devi-kothi is three faced, the side faces being those of a boar, and a lion; in this an allusion is made again to the Varaha and the Narasingh incarnations of Vishnu. Vishnu in this image is seated on Garuda and holds his spouse Lakshmi on his left knee. This inscription which has considerably literary merit is dated in the reign of a Rajanaka chieftain by the name of Nagapala who was a vassal of King Lalitvarman of Chamba. The "devotion to Krishna" is mentioned in the Devi-kothi inscription in which the mother of the Rajanaka Nagapala is praised for her devotion to "the enemy of Mura" ("Murastarini") which is only another name for Krishna.

From Salhi in Chamba, there is an image of Vishnu, belonging to the 12th century with a fountain inscription, another figure of Vishnu is carved on a stone slab at Svaaim in which he is seated on Garuda; Vishnu here wears a mukuta or kirita, and long locks. From the 14th century onwards, there is a whole series of inscriptions which have been edited by Dr. Vogel and Dr. Chhabra.

In these there are repeated references to the rulers

3. B. Ch. Chhabra, Antiquities of Chamba State, Pt. II, is a continuation of Dr. Vogel's work on the same subject and treats of medieval inscriptions from Chamba.
endowing land "for pleasing Lord Krishna". There are inscriptions in which the prowess of the rulers is compared to that of Rama Parashurama and Balarama, and Krishna occur again and again in the inscriptions, and this long series brings us right into the 17th century that with almost unbroken continuity. Gifts of land are made to temples some of which are Vaishnava.

Perhaps not very much can be read into this evidence because there is other evidence also, some from Chamba itself, which indicates that the rulers of Chamba professed other faiths, too. The situation is nearly the same in other States. From Sirmur, from the 13th century, there is evidence of a temple of Lakshmi Narayana which is said to have been built by Raja Malaya Prakash in commemoration of his victory over the Raja of Garhwal. This temple was built on the bank of the Bhagirathi or the Ganga. When we get references to Vaishnavism which came to Kulu in the reign of Raja Jagat Singh in the 17th century a suggestion has been made that Raja Jagat Singh was possibly only "reviving" Vaishnavism and not introducing it in that part for the first time.

1. See, Chhabra, Antiquities, 22, 25, 28.
2. Ibid, 28.
3. Ibid, 41, 43, 47, 51, 61, 71, 77, 81, 83 et seq.
5. Harcourt, 197.
The temple of Trigjog Narayana is mentioned as one of the early Vaishnava temples even though its date is uncertain.

The name Narayan occurs in the temples of many Deotás and the significance of this will be seen later. But the circumstance is to be noticed. From Bashahr comes a tradition that the place was settled originally by Pradyumna, son of Krishna, and Aniruddha, his son, who came to live here. It is not unlikely that this may be a reference to the Vanas which were worshipped in the early phase of Bhagavatism.

C. THE ORGANISATION OF VAISHNAVA ACTIVITY

What was happening in religion in the plains of India in the north and east was bound to have repercussions in the hills. Dr. Goetz has applied to the Punjab hills the time-gap theory which has clear validity in the context of other cultures. He believes that whatever happened in the plains, also happened in the hills, only a little later. The developments in religion found

1. Marcourt, 204.
2. Most of these temples are in the Simla Hills, in Mandi and Nulu. There is a well known saying in these parts: "Athara Nag, athara Narain", meaning "eighteen Nagas and eighteen Narains".
4. Goetz, "The coming of Muslim cultural influence in the Punjab Himalayas", India Antiqua, 157. Dr. Goetz has treated at some length of this process of cultural assimilation in the Punjab Hill States. He believes that "the whole of contemporary Rajput civilization" was taken over by the Punjab Hills between the end of the 16th and the middle of the 17th century.
their echo necessarily in the Punjab hills and this vast and popular movement, which in the 16th century had become so wide-spread began to arrive in the hills.

The Channels, through which these influences could have travelled to the hills were many. One of these was the institution of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage from the hills to areas outside and to centres of pilgrimage sacred to Hindus like Haridwar, Kurukshetra or Gaya, or, in the North, even Mattan in Kashmir, were very common throughout these periods of history. Pilgrims also came to the hills from long distances from the plains, to temples like Vajreshwari Devi at Kangra and the Jawalamukhi shrine. And this must have, without doubt, provided a most active channel of contact with the outside world. The pilgrims who went out from the hills must also have travelled to the parts where Vaishnavism had struck deep root in the 16th century.

Pilgrimages apart, during the Mughal period the hill Rajas were in active contact with the Imperial court.

1. An idea of the extent of pilgrimage can be formed from the entries made by persons from the Hills in the Bahis, kept by the priests of these pilgrimage centres. See, B.N. Goswamy, "The Records Kept by Priests at Centres of Pilgrimage as a Source of Social and Economic History", Indian Economic and Social History Review, III, No. 2.

2. It is significant that a large number of Hill States were founded by royal cadets who came on pilgrimages to the Hills in the 10th century and after. The registers with the Bhojakis of these temples contain long lists of people who came from outside.
Tradition has it that the Emperor Jahangir had many hostages at his court from the hills. The Hill Rajas went to different parts of the country, sometimes on Mughal errands. Their visits to Delhi or Agra or Lahore must have been frequent. It is also likely that they did not travel alone. In this manner another channel must clearly have developed. The Pahari Rajas who served in Rajasthan, in the North-West, in Garhwal or in Bengal are likely to have exposed themselves to many influences. It is also not unlikely that during the visits to or sojourn in other parts of India, the Rajas brought back with them people of talent or skill, or, for that matter of known devotion. A family of Gujrat Tarkhan in Chamba and another family of Gujrat Pandits at Basohli are, thus, well-known. In going out to areas of Rajasthan, and even to Bengal and Bihar as Jagat Singh of Murpur did, the Rajas of the hills were only in a sense renewing contacts which were perhaps six or seven hundred years old. For, it must be remembered, that many ruling families of the hills were founded by princes who had come from distant

1. Hutchison & Vogel, I, 74.
2. See, B.N. Goswamy, Social Background of Kangra Valley Painting, 60-67.
3. There are entries from the 17th century in the Bahis of the priests, listing names of members of the Gujrat Tarkhan families, See, for example, Bahi of Pandit Sansar Chand at Pehowa.
4. Kahn Singh, 68.
parts of India from the 10th century onwards and settled in different areas of the hills.

When seen in this light, the hills do not appear to be in the kind of isolation which has been claimed or imagined for them. It is true that the notion of their being cut off from the rest of the world, generally speaking, has been built up by evidence that speaks of princes or other people escaping into the hills. One hears, thus, of the armies of a king pursuing a fleeing noble and then returning unsuccessful because he "the disappeared into the hill". But this need not lead one to conclude that the hills were unapproachable or that they revolved in an orbit all their own, and that ideas travelled towards them only with difficulty.

One of the agencies that one has to think of in connection with the spread of Vaishnavism in the Punjab Hills was not a passive agency like a Raja travelling on an imperial errand or a pilgrim devoutly visiting a tirtha. It is the active agency of missionaries who arrived in these parts determined to carry their faiths into the hills. The occasional paintings that we get

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1. There are many references to Rajas, especially in the Muslim period, escaping into the hills. Thus, e.g., Sikander Sur, who retreated into the Shiwaliks at the approach of Atcher's armies, Hutchison & Vogel, I, 73.
from Mughal India, or mystic singers or Bairagis lead
us into an activity the full significance of which is
not always grasped. It is clear that a calculated
attempt was made to carry the doctrine of Vaishnavism
into all parts of India, and especially into a part which
was as challenging as the Punjab hills because of the
animistic faiths which were known even then to prevail
here. The cult of Vaishnavism that is associated with
Ramananda, that of Ramanandi Bairagis, was clearly
a proselytising cult and much as Vaishnava missionaries
grew into the North eastern parts of India, in Assam,
that a resolute attempt appears to have been made
to operate on behalf of the Vaishnava faith in the hills
of the Punjab.

At this point we are led into one of the most
fascinating chapters of the history of the hills in the
Punjab. In the district of Gurdaspur which lies at the

1. Ghurye, Indian Sadhus, 188, 201; Rose, Glossary,

2. The Vaishnava religious centres called the 1
Sahas appear to have been founded in Assam, mostly in
the 16th century. The great Sankara deva, "the
founder head of the neo-Vaishnavite movement in
Assam, lived from 1449-1569. See, B.K. Barua &
H.J. Sreenivasa Murthy, Temples and Legends of
Assam, 92.
foot of the Punjab hills, and a part of which extends into the hills themselves, were established a number of religious centres obviously with a view to turning them into bases for further operation into the hill areas. The most important as far as the present study is concerned, is the Vaishāva Math at Pindori, eight miles east of Gurdaspur town. The founder of the shrine is said to have been Bhagwanji about whom a large number of traditions are preserved. He was born in Kahanūwan, to parents in their old age as a result of the blessing of a Nath Jogi. When he grew up, he travelled in other parts of India. In Rajasthan, possibly at Gaḷṭa, he met and became the disciple of saint Krishnadas Payahari, "one who survives on water or milk". Many legends surround the name of this famous ascetic, among them his defeating certain Shaiva rivals and replacing this power by the establishment of his own gaddi in the Gaḷṭa area. But the significance of Krishnadas Payahari for the Punjab Hills was both direct and indirect. Direct, because a strong tradition is preserved at Kulu that the

2. The following account is based on B.N. Goswamy & J.S. Grewal, The Mughal and Sikh Rulers and Vaishnavas of Pindori. The authors have reconstructed the history of the Pindori establishment from many sources. The Pindori gaddi has published its own history entitled "Pindori-Dham-ka-Itihas", by Pritam Niyal.
first Raja who became converted to Vaishnavism, Raja Jagat Singh, was converted by Shri Krishnadas Payahari himself. The oral tradition in Kulu receives striking support from a fact which is little known and the significance of which is in any case not realized. This is the fact of a cave close to a little water-fall in a thick forest near Nagar, the old capital of the Kulu Rajas before they shifted to Sultanpur. Local population refers to it as "Phawariji Ki Gupha". In the cave is preserved a tiger-skin (bagh charm), and a tulsi rosary. Nobody at Nagar now knows the significance of the name, and certainly the full meaning of the two relics which are preserved and venerated by people who visit the picturesque spot, is not grasped. But it is likely that here "Phawariji" is nothing else than a corruption of "Payahariji". The tigerskin and the tulsi-mala are indications of a Vaishnava ascetic having made this cave, at a little distance from habitation, his home for meditation. And, above all, there is the clear fact that even here at Nagar, at a place called Thawa, there is a


2. It was unfortunately difficult to photograph the two relics, when the present writer visited the spot, due to indifferent light at the place.
Vaishnava temple dedicated to Krishna. Whether or not the tradition is accurate, it is strong. And Kulu being in the heart of the animistic zone of religion, as we might call it, it is likely to have been chosen by a Bairagi missionary whose attempt was to convert people to the Vaishnava faith. If we are to believe the tradition, Krishnadas Payahari, succeeded in converting at least one individual, the Raja Jagat Singh.

The direct significance of Payahari apart, the indirect importance of his role lies in the fact that he was the one who converted Bhagwanji to Vaishnavism and then encouraged him to found a centre of Vaishnava worship in the very area to which he belonged, i.e., the district of Gurdaspur. Bhagwanji undoubtedly must have, after his conversion, returned full of zeal for Vaishnava faith, and his belonging to the region and to the very Pargana in which he was born would have given him a clear advantage. He could thus operate from a position of vantage, clear the area of Natha or Shiva influence, and then proceed to enlarging the area of his influence. The dates of Bhagwanji are not certain, but he is likely to have lived in the latter part of the 16th century and the early part of the 17th. According to tradition he was, a contemporary of the Emperor Jahangir who is said first to have endowed Mandori with a large land grant.
The Patta by which the grant was given is now lost or mislaid, but only a few years ago it was believed to have been preserved at Damtal, a daughter shrine of Pindori. Bhagwanji is said to have toured extensively even after he established himself at Pindori and he went to many areas in the hills, especially in the direction of Jammu. He made many converts, but the convert who turned out to be the most important for the future development of Vaishnavism in these parts was Narayanji who became his foremost disciple. So close was his connection with Bhagwanji that he and Bhagwanji are mentioned by the devotees of Pindori in the same breath, and the Pindori Darbar is referred to quite often as the Dwara of Shri 2 Bhagwan-Narayan. Narayanji, much like Bhagwanji himself, is very much a historical figure. There are several paintings of him and Bhagwanji, though we cannot be certain that they are accurate likenesses. But Narayanji quite clearly came to be widely known during his lifetime. Among the Vaishnavas of these parts he acquired fame for his bhakti. Preserved at Bathu, which is at a short distance from Guler in the Punjab Hills, and which is the seat of another Vaishnava establishment, is a book within which

2. Ghurye, Indian Sadhus, 188. "A Dwara is known after its founder, and is called Gaddi after the name of the place of its chief centre."
are bound a large number of manuscripts of great literary merit, written by Narayanji (see Fig. 2) himself. Many of these are compositions in which Narayanji explains the doctrine of Bhagwanji, compares it with other doctrines, sings the praises of Vaishnava faith and generally points out the true path to his disciples. The manuscript is described mostly in the hand of one of his disciples, Shyam Gujrati, but the various sections of it are dated and there is no doubt at all that the manuscript has been preserved in its original form from the days of Narayanji himself.

The most interesting event in the career of Narayanji, and in a way, was a meeting between him and the Emperor Jahangir. The tradition at Pindori makes much of this meeting and it points to the manner in which the Emperor Jahangir who had heard a great deal of the powers of Narayanji as a great ascetic wished to test these powers. He is said to have called Narayanji to Lahore and ordered that he be given seven cups of poison, one of which was enough to kill an elephant. Narayanji

1. Among the manuscripts in this volume are texts like Sri Ekonkar Sat-gur Bija Prasada Granth, Guhya Prakashi, Sri tattva Gita etc. The complete list of manuscripts may be found in the bibliography at the end. The volume is now in the possession of Sri Purushottam Dass, the Mahant of Bathu.

remembered his Guru who miraculously appeared by his side and encouraged him to go through the ordeal. At this Narayanji drank all the seven cups of poison without any harm to him. The legend says that it was this which led Jahangir to fall at the feet of the two Vaishnava ascetics, to construct a "mosque-shaped" temple at Pindori which is still standing and which now houses the Samadhi of Bhagwanji himself (see fig.1), and to endow the shrine with a grant of land. Somewhere in this account, we have a hard core of truth. There is, in fact, a reference to this meeting of the Emperor Jahangir with an ascetic in his own Memoirs. "At this time", Jahangir was writing in his 16th year and referring to his sojourn in the Nurpur area on his return from the conquest of Kangra, "it was reported to me that there was a Sanyasi Moti in the neighbourhood who had entirely renounced (sic) control over himself. I ordered them to bring him that I might ascertain the real state of affairs. They called Hindu devotee Sarbbasi. By usage the word has become Sanyasi (laying down everything). There are many degrees among them and there are several orders among the Sarbbasi. Among them there is the Moti

order. They put themselves into the figure of a cross and surrender themselves. For instance, they never speak. If for ten days and nights they stand in one place they do not move their feet forward or backward; in fact, make no movement at all, and remain like fossils. When he came into my presence I examined him and found a wonderful state of persistence in his nature. It occurred to me that in a state of drunkenness and the absence of mind and the delirium, some change might be wrought in him. Accordingly, I ordered them to give him some cups of spirit of double strength. This was done in a royal fashion (liberally?), but not the least damage took place, and he remained in the same impassive state. At last his senses left him, and they carried him like a corpse. God Almighty granted him mercy so that he did not lose his life. Certainly there was a great persistence in his nature.

There is little doubt that Jahangir is here referring to the very same incident of Narayanji being put to a test by him. The only uncertainty that arises is about the name of the ascetic "Moti". But then there appears to have been an error here on the part of the scribe or translator. It is extremely likely that Jahangir originally used the word "Moni" here, because he does refer to the Sanyasi not speaking and
remaining immobile, and at Pindori, entirely independent of what Jahangir thought or wrote, is preserved the tradition that Narayanji remained a "Mauni" or observed the vow of silence for very long years. The test to which Jahangir put Narayanji is clearly mentioned, and even the manner in which Narayanji stood the test also finds admiring mention. And if one ignores minor discrepancies between the account of the Emperor and the tradition at Pindori, which in any case is likely to be tilted slightly in favour of the ascetics, there remains virtually no doubt at all that this, in the Memoirs of Jahangir, is a record of his meeting with Narayanji. The meeting did not merely take place in the fancy of the Pindori Vaishnavas, it took place in fact. And it is this fact to which the Pahari painters refer so often in their paintings of Bhagwanji and Narayanji, as will be seen.

The developments at Pindori during the lives of Bhagwanji and Narayanji included contacts with Shaiva ascetics who were resident at the very spot where the Pindori math stands today. Also, during this period, there was the foundation of the daughter establishment at Damtal, earlier referred to in many records as Gumtal.

1. A manuscript at Pindori, Pujari Krishna Das's, "Sri Bhagwan Narayana ka Jiwan Charitra", mentions this fact very prominently.
four miles from Pathankot at the foot of the hills. Damtal is picturesquely situated. There is a large establishment here, including a Thakurdwara, a school, rooms for the pilgrims, a tank, and the Samadhs or tombs of the former Mahants as at Pindori. From the point of view of the role it was to perform, Damtal could not have been better located, because it was at a place from where an arrow could have been shot into the hills, so to speak. It is not without significance that Damtal was at a spot which formerly lay in the territory of the Pathania Rajas of Nurpur. Nor is it a matter merely of coincidence that the Rajas of Nurpur became the devotees of the Damtal shrine and continue to be so even to this day.

Another establishment which issued from the Pindori-Damtal complex was Bathu which lay in the territory of the Guler chiefs. This establishment dates from the second quarter of the 18th century and the first Mahant of Bathu, Vishnudas, clearly came from Pindori. According to

1. The present chief of Nurpur, Raja Devinder Singh, was an active participant in the dispute about succession to the Damtal Gaddi, only recently. This represents accurately the close connection between the Nurpur Rajas and the Damtal shrine.

2. See, Karuna Goswamy, "The Bathu Shrine and the Rajas of Guler: a brief study of a Vaishnava establishment", Journal of Indian History, XLIII, ii, August 1965. The episode which led to the establishment of the Bathu shrine is discussed there.
to tradition, he is said to have been induced by the then ruler of Guler to settle down within his kingdom. There is at Bathu also a Thakurdwara. The manner in which the establishment came to be founded is the subject of a story which is told both at Pindori and at Bathu. But from its very inception Bathu came to be closely associated with the Rajas of Guler. In the book which contained the manuscript of Narayanji's compositions there are, at the end, several paintings which have been inserted, possibly at a rather late date, and these show some of the rulers of Guler adoring Bhagwanji and Narayanji, or Vishnu. Among these are Rajas Dalip Singh and Goverdhan Chand of Guler. Between the Guler state and the Bathu establishment a tone of intimacy developed over the years. The late Raja Baldev Singh of Guler from whose collection so many exquisite paintings have come used to visit Bathu regularly. He set its records in order and even made notes for the benefit of the present Mahant of Bathu, giving the dates of deaths of various mahants of that place from his own papers or from the records in the possession of the Bathu gaddi. But these are only three out of the far more numerous gaddis established in

In this table the dates of accession and death of the Mahants of Pindori and Bathu have been given. Raja Baldev Singh must have consulted his own family records to prepare this list.
the hills. A regular process of proliferation of Vaishnava establishments in the hill region or in the areas of the foothills can be seen. And lists are available at both Pindori and Damtal of the gaddis which are attached to them. The Mahants of Pindori appear to have been extremely active in winning for themselves and for Vaishnavism, the allegiance of many Rajas of the hills, possibly in the hope that if the Rajas became converted to the "new" faith, the people would soon follow. Apart from the Rajas of Nurpur who were attached to the Damtal establishment, and of Guler who are linked with Bathu, many hill chiefs stood in direct relationship with Pindori. Among the many documents which are preserved at Pindori establishment we find evidence of this. An 18th century document speaks of the large gift of a whole village having earlier been made to the Pindori establishment by a Raja of Jaswan, Raja Ramsingh. This appears to have been no ordinary endowment, for the memory of it persists even to this day. And in a succession case relating to Pindori which was fought in

1. Thhis, there are gaddis attached to Damtal at Hatli, Fatehpur, Nurpur and Hatpang.

2. Goswamy & Grewal, Document VIII. The Document is with a seal of the Kazi, and is dated A.D. 1741.
the early years of this century, the Raja of Jaswan,
gave evidence pointing to the links between his family
and Pindori referring to the gift of the Jaswal Raja
1
to the ancestors of the Pindori Mahants. The Rajas of
Mankot in the Western group of States appear to have
been attached firmly to Pindori. For this we do not
merely have the evidence of tradition; we have clear and
specific statements by the late Raja Raghunath Singh of
Mankot who in the early years of this century was living,
away from his earlier kingdom, in the Hoshiarpur
2
district. The Mankot Rajas appear to have kept up
over a period of nearly two hundred years or more a
close contact with Pindori and the Mankotia rulers are
frequently cited at Pindori as being among their more
prominent devotees. The Jammu Rajas are also said to
have paid homage to the Pindori Chiefs in the earlier
days and endowed lands upon the establishment. At Pindori
the allegiance of the Rajas of Chamba is also mentioned.
It is pointed out, for example, that not very many years
ago the Raja of Chamba came down himself to invite the

1. Statement of the Raja of Jaswan in the Pindori
succession case.

2. Evidence given by Raja Raghunath Singh in the
Pindori succession case. In the collection of
the Mahant of Pindori.

3. See, Pritam Ziyai, 63,
present Mahant of Pindori, Shri Ramdas, to visit Pindori to bless the sacred thread ceremony of his son. With Bandralta, also called Ramnagar, possibly because of its Vaishnava association, there was an early and close connection. The Pindori Darbar had an endowment of land which it held from the Bandralta chief till very recent times. The picture seems to be reasonably clear, then, that the three establishments of Pindori, Pamtal and Bathu, together with their offshoots, were so situated and so organised that they were in a position to affect developments in the Punjab hills.

The Pindori establishment, however important, was not the only establishment set up in the hills by the Bairagis. Nor were Bhagwanji or Krishandas Payahari, as they were, the only missionaries who operated in the hills. There is a very likelihood that there were many others who were making their own attempts. The name of at least one more Bairagi missionary, also belonging to the early part of the 17th century is preserved. This was Bawa Banwari Das, who is always referred to as a Bairagi, and who had taken up his abode in the eastern hills in Sirmur. It is not without interest to recall

1. Shri Charan Das Shastri, interviewed.
2. Sri Charan Das Shastri, interviewed. The land was on the Indo-Pak border and has now been surrendered by the gaddi because of its location.
3. Ranzor Singh, 21727.
that Lacchman Das Bairagi, who later became a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh and was called Banda Bahadur, was a recluse who lived in the Jammu hills. Tradition has it that Gulab Singh who became the founder later of the present ruling family of Jammu, was also under the influence of Bawa Guru Das, a Bairagi, who had taken up his residence near Saroin Sar.

D. THE EARLY TEMPLES

Commenting on the wide prevalence of Shaivism and the worship of the Devi in the Punjab hills, Dr. Vogel also observed that a great deal of Krishna or Vishnu worship prevailed among the Rajas. "At least I found this with regard to the Kangra and Nurpur Rajas, who may be considered to be the most important ones. It seems that while the popular religion was the grosser Shaivism, the Rajas took to the higher form of Vishnuism. This seems to be the most obvious explanation, though it is quite possible that there were other causes and the Rajas perhaps introduced Vishnuism from the plains."

The active role played by the Rajas now becomes apparent. They did not only embrace Vaishnavism themselves:  

1. Lacchman Das is believed to have been a native of Rajauri.
3. Quoted in, Rose, Glossary, I, 261.
they founded temples now which they dedicated to one or the other avatara of Vishnu. At Nurpur, the popular tradition is that Raja Jagat Singh introduced Vaishnavism in the State for the first time. This is not perhaps entirely accurate because the temple inside the Nurpur Fort, which is now completely ruined and only the plinth of which has survived, was built by Raja Basu, father of Jagat Singh. The Vaishnava associations of that temple cannot be denied. Apart from its architectural closeness with some of the temples at Mathura, built by Rajasthani chiefs - consider, for example the temple of Govind Dev at Mathura, on the podium of the temple have survived carvings which leave very little doubt about the nature of the shrine. Among other themes which are decorative or which treat of animal or vegetable motifs there are the figures of Krishna lifting the Mt. Goverdhan, and of cows and of cowherds (see Fig.3). These decorations cannot perhaps have been put on a temple which was not originally intended for honouring Vishnu. The temple even in its ruined condition is a great and impressive monument and it speaks of deep faith on the part of its builder who perhaps drew the

1. Hirananda Shastri, "Ruined Temple in the Nurpur Fort", A.S.I., A.R., 1904-05, II, 119-120. Dr. Shastri believed that the temple was demolished when Suraj Mal's rebellion was suppressed by Jahangir in 1618.
inspiration from temples that he had seen in the plains. One naturally wonders if the inspiration of his faith also did not come from the same part of the country. It was the son of Basu, however, who is associated in the popular mind with the introduction of Vaishnavism in Nurpur. Not far from the ruined temples in the fort is a Thakurdwara which is locally called the temple of Brijraj Swami. Not resembling a Thakurdwara at all, and possibly originally intended to be used for an entirely different purpose, the building is double storeyed; on the upper floor is the idol, in black marble, of Krishna playing upon the flute. Hence the name, Brijraj Swami. The idol is one of the most exquisitely carved in all the hills, even though it is obviously not as ancient as one tradition would have us believe. But it is the story about the idol which lends it great interest. It is said that Raja Jagat Singh brought this idol of Krishna from Chittor during one of his visits. The idol, in fact, is said to be the very same which was the personal deity of Mirabai and before which she sang and danced in ecstasy. It is said that the Raja was residing temporarily in


2. According to an account the idol goes back to the time of the invasion of Mahmud of Ghazni. But there seems to be no reason to believe this part of the tradition.

3. Sri Banka Rai, Bard, interviewed; Dr. Om Prakash and the pujari of Brij Raj Swami temple, interviewed.
Udaipur and when he was about to leave, his host, the Rana, wished to make him a present. Upon being asked as to what he would like, Raja Jagat Singh who had earlier been struck by the great beauty of the image, asked for the Krishna figure. It was only with difficulty that the Rana parted with the image. But Jagat Singh brought the image back with him to Nurpur and installed it in this temple. It is not possible to ascertain the veracity of this legend, but it is not without interest to mention here that the temple inside the Chittor fort where Mira Bai is said to have worshiped in her own days, contains no idol.

The personal faith of Raja Jagat Singh is referred to by his poet, the bard Gambhir Rai whose Rhapsodies are sung even to this day, by one of his descendant at Nurpur, the aged Janka Rai. Referring to Jagat Singh, Gambhir Rai mentions him as having strong faith in Vishnu.

The foundation of the Bathu establishment inside the Guler territory fits naturally into the sequence

2. Janka Rai is a descendant of the composer of the Rhapsodies, Gambhir Rai. He remembers many compositions by heart and recites them with great gusto inspite of his old age.
of religious events there, because there is an association of earlier Guler rulers with Vaishnavism. The chronicler of the Guler State, the poet Uttam, in his *Daliparajani*, refers to the reign of Raja Man Singh, one of the ancestors of Dalip Singh in whose reign the poet composed his verses, having brought from Bangashal the idol of "Rai Daleep". This he calls by the name of a Thakur and this quite clearly makes it out to being a Vaishnava idol. This image was later set up and installed at Nandpur where to this day stands the family house of the Rajas of Guler. In another reign, that of Bikram Singh of Guler, another Vaishnava temple, the shrine of Kalyan Rai, was raised by the mother of the Raja, Kasyan Dai. The image installed in the temple was of Ashtabhuji Narayana, i.e., Narayana with eight arms. A song popular at Guler singing the glory of the queen mother who brought and installed this idol was sung till recent times. At about this time, in the reign of Bikram Singh, another Vaishnava temple, almost adjacent to the present palace of the Raja of Guler, at a little height above the Haripur town.

1. *Daliparajani*, 49-50. The manuscript of the *Daliparajani* was composed in S.1760 (A.D. 1703) by the poet Uttam for Raja Dalip Singh. The copy that was in the possession of Raja Dalip Singh of Guler was a XIX century copy by Kavi Brij Raj.

was raised. This was known as Gopal Rai or Gopal Sagar. There is a slab which bears an inscription here and this leaves no doubt either about the 17th century date or about the fact that it was a Vaishnava installation. It is not without interest, in the context of Guler, to mention that the first image said to have been brought was from Bangahal which is a rather remote part of the eastern group of hills and which is an unlikely place to have had a Vaishnava image of such popularity that Raja Man Singh had to invade it to get the image for Guler. In view of this one wonders if what the poet meant was Bengal and not Bangahal. That would place a wholly different complexion upon the matter. Going out to an area as far east as Bengal may appear to be not a very easy thing for a Pahari ruler to do, but it is clearly recorded that Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur, during the lifetime of his father, Basu, served for several years the interests of the Emperor Jahangir in the same far away Bengal. The date of the development leading to the installation of the Rai Dalip idol in Guler is worth remarking. The period of Man Singh according to Dr. Hutchison and Vogel

1. The date of the temple is recorded in the slab as S, 1719 (A.D. 1662). The temple is dedicated to Krishna and was probably constructed by a Rani.

was from A.D. 1635 to 1661, a period which nearly coincides with that of Jagat Singh with whose reign we have associated some developments in the Vaishnava faith in Nurpur. Another thing which may be remembered is that Man Singh of Guler was a widely travelled man. He served in Jaipur and Jodhpur. He also went to the North-West and there are many campaigns which are attributed to him. The title "Sher Afghan" was given to him by the Emperor Shah Jahan so that he appears to have been rather close to the Mughals and is not unlikely to have made many journeys to other areas than the hills.

The second quarter of the 17th century also saw the installation of the Vaishnava Thakur which is considered by many accounts to be the oldest in the State of Kangra proper. This is the temple of Sita Ram at Bijapur. It is said to have been founded by Raja Bijé Ram Chand in the middle of the 17th century. If the place at which the premier Vaishnava temple of Kangra is situated seems to be a little unusual, became remote, it is to be remembered that the Kangra chiefs

2. Thakur Shamsher Chand and the Pujari of Sita Ram temple interviewed at Bijapur.
were in a state virtually of exile from Kangra after the Mughals took over. This, because they were in a state of rebellion and kept frequently changing their capital from place to place and it is not unlikely that at the time to which this occurrence of the foundation of the temple is related the Rajas resided at Bijapur. Bijapur in any case has strong Katoch affiliation, because there is clear evidence that the great Sansar Chand was born there in 1765. There is a long story connected with the Sita Ram temple at Bijapur and this tells as to how the invading army, probably of the Mughals, was sent back miraculously by a tremendous swarm of bees which issued forth furiously out of a large idol of Hanuman which stood outside the temple and which was broken by one of the invading soldiers. The Sita Ram temple has still considerable lands attached to it and people of the area refer to it as the oldest Thakurdwara in the Kangra State.

Probably the most elaborate story connected with the construction of a temple of the Vaishnava faith in the hills comes from Kulu. This belongs to the reign of Raja Jagat Singh whose date here has been given as A.D. 1637 to 1672. The slighly mixed tradition which

1. This story is also narrated at Sujanpur. Sri Bhu Dev Shastri, interviewed.
has been preserved in Kulu points to the fact that Raja Jagat Singh was first converted to Vaishnavism in this phase of the history of this sect in the hills. The Raja is said to have been cursed by a Brahmin, a part of whose wealth, a small treasure of pearls, the Raja had coveted. Upon the Raja insisting that the pearls should be handed over to him, the Brahmin preferred to commit suicide. He put himself and his family to death by setting his house on fire. His curse had effect and when the Raja sat down for his means, it is said, the rice before him turned into wriggling worms. This was interpreted as a disastrous omen and the Raja set about thinking ways of avoiding the displeasure of the gods. He was advised to take to the worship of Vishnu and for this purpose to import the idol of Raghunath from Ayodhya. The Raja, on the suggestion of this learned person, who, incidentally, had been brought from Suket to tender advice, sent a Brahmin by the name of Damodar to Ayodhya. Damodar is said to have succeeded in bringing the image of Raghunath with some difficulty. The image was then installed by the Raja as "Raghunath" and he himself

vowed his whole life to the service of the deity. He assigned his entire state to Raghunath who thus became technically the ruler of Kulu. The Raja wished to ensure that Raghunath or Rama received universal veneration within his dominion and for this he instituted the Dussehra festival, which everywhere honours the victory of Rama over Ravana, of good over evil. On the occasion of this festival all the gods, the local Devis and Deotas, were required to repair to Sultanpur to pay their homage to Raghunath. The practice continues to this day. This was not the only Vaishnava temple raised by Jagat Singh. The Ram Chander temple at Bashisht near Manali, is also ascribed to him.

Somewhere within this whole story is brought in the role of Shri Krishnadas Payaharl, as has been indicated before. The tradition about him is described by Hutchison and Vogel as "amusing". This Sadhu who lived in a small forest near Nagar and Thawa - this is to be marked because this is the precise place where the cave of Payahariji at present is - was, according to tradition, visited by Raja Jagat Singh. There was

a contest of miracles between the Raja and the Sadhu, and after some time the Sadhu was so pleased with the Raja that he gave him a mala to put round his neck and asked him to shift his capital from Nagar to Sultanpur because that he said would be more conducive to prosperity for his State. This is obviously a garbled version of the tradition that is current in Vaishnava literature about Payahari. Even in Jaipur, it is said to have engaged a contest which is similar to the one which he is made to enter into with Raja Jagat Singh. In that contest his rival turned himself into a tiger and then back into human form and so on. There is little doubt that it is Krishnadas Payahari who is the subject of the legend. Extremely interesting corroborative evidence about the presence of Payahariji comes from that great classic of Vaishnava literature, the Bhaktamal of Nabhaiji. In that, in the Tika by Priyadas, there is an explicit reference to Payahariji having converted the Raja of Kulu. There is, in fact, even a reference to the son of the Raja who was converted by Shri Krishnadas Payahari and a whole incident is

1. Bhagwan Prasad Rupkala, Shri Bhakta Mala of Nabhaiji, 304-305.

2. The Bhakta Mala of Nabhaiji was composed in the 17th century, and there are numerous commentaries or Tikas of it of later date. The Tika of Priyadas, Bhakti Rasa Bodhini, is the most well known and authoritative. It was composed in A.D. 1712.

3. Rupkala, Bhakta Mala, 302-305.
mentioned in which the son who had eaten by mistake a part of the divine prashad was about to be severely punished by the Raja when he was saved through the intervention of Shri Krishnadas.

From Mandi, close to Kulu both in distance and in culture, comes evidence of the conversion of Raja Suraj Sen, whose date is given as from about A.D. 1637 to about A.D. 1664. Naggingly, it appears, we are referring, or in fact are being referred to by our evidence, to this period which spreads over the second and third quarters of the 17th century. Raja Suraj Sen of Mandi is said to have had eighteen sons all of whom died, possibly due to a curse. Greatly perturbed by the fact and by the absence of an heir to the throne, Raja Suraj Sen took the advice of someone who was close to him and began to adore Vishnu. He caused a silver image to be made and gave to it the name of Madhava Rai, a name easily recognisable because Krishna is so often referred to as Madhava in Vaishnava literature. The image bore the inscription: "Surya Sen", Lord of the earth and destroyer of his rivals, had this blameless


image of the Discus-bearer and Master of all the Gods, the illustrious Madho Rai made by Bhima, the gold-smith in the Vikrami year 1705, on Thursday the 15th Phagun". This gives us the year A.D. 1648. Raja Suraj Sen like his neighbour in Kulu, was not simply content with installing this idol, which is now inside the building which houses some offices in Mandi town; he also assigned his whole kingdom to the deity and began designating himself as the "Charibardar", a stickbearer, of the God himself. Raja Suraj Sen, again a little like Jagat Singh of Kulu, instituted a practice by which on the Shivaratri day, all the gods of the Mandi area were to be taken out in a procession but before they did that they went to pay homage to the idol of Madho Rai.

The Vaishnava affiliations of the Chamba rulers have been noticed in some detail before. In the 17th century and afterwards the situation remained unaltered. Except, perhaps in one detail. Raja Prithvi Singh of Chamba, also belonging to the middle of the 17th century (A.D. 1641 to A.D. 1664) is said to have brought back from Delhi an image of Raghuvira, Rama, for being installed inside the Chamba palace and for making it the family idol of the Chamba royal family. The story about

1. Goetz, "History of Chamba State", Journal of Indian History, XXXI, ii, 138-139, Vogel, Catalogue, 28. The figures of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana and of Lakshmi and Vishnu are carved in the wooden porch of the state Kothi at Brahmaur, which is said to date back to Prithvi Singh's reign.
the Image narrates that it was being used in the palace of the Emperor Shahjahan as an ordinary weight. Raja Prithvi Singh obtained it from there, possibly at his own request and brought it with much honour back to Chamba.

In Sirmur, in about the year A.D. 1621, took place that meeting between Bawa Banwari Das Bairagi and Maharaja Karam Parkash which has been referred to earlier. At this time the State of Sirmur was without a capital, the earlier Capital town having been submerged by the floods. When the Raja met Bawa Banwari Das who used to reside at a lonely spot with a pet tiger, he sought the advice of the Bairagi Bawa. It was the very spot on which he was living which was suggested by Bawa Banwari Das to the Raja for new building his new capital. That city is now called Nahan. Bawa Banwari Das is said to have come to the Sirmur region from Jaipur in about A.D. 1616 and is said to have lived in Sirmur for a period of about 60 years. The temple of Jagannath, and the idol which was installed there, is said to have appeared to the Raja in a dream (a dream specifically of this nature being called a locally a "suninda-s") in which he was instructed

1. Sirmur S.G., 1904, 12; Ramzor Singh, 196-199.
to dig the idol out and instal it. This, of course, was done by the Raja and the temple of Jagannath is still a popular shrine. This reference to a dream is highly interesting because this is not the only idol about which the story is told. The same story is connected with many other temples both in the hills and in other parts of India. The intention quite clearly this is to prove the antiquity of the image and the Faith; it is to say that the image was "always" there; it was now only being "re-installed".

There are numerous other temples and many Rajas to whom reference in the context of Vaishnavism in the hills can be made. But the point that is being treated here is the manner in which Vaishnavism arrived in the hills and the the period to which we can roughly assign the first major thakurdwaras or Vaishnava temples in the hills. From Basu of Nurpur

1. The Sri Nathaji image in Rajasthan is said to have appeared to Vallabhacharya in a dream. Coomaraswamy, Rajput Painting, I, 41. The temples built by the Goswamin brothers, Rupa and Sanatan, in Mathura have also stories regarding their having dreamt of the location of the idols. See, Pratap Singh, Bhakta Mala, 48. Also see, Hardayal Singh, I, 112, for a similar legend about a Suket temple.
to Man Singh of Guler, Bije Ram Chand of Kangra, Jagat Singh of Kulu, Suraj Sen of Mandi, or Karam Prakash of Sirmur, we are led by our evidence to the same conclusion that the true beginnings of Vaishnavism as a general movement in the hills are to be placed between A.D. 1625 to 1660. This is a matter of some importance in the context of the study of Pahari paintings and their relationship with Vaishnavism.