The arrival of Vaishnavism in the hills was one matter; its spread an entirely different one. For it was arriving in an area which, as we have seen, was strong in its faith in the cults of Shiva, the Devi and numerous local gods and godlings. Vaishnavism, therefore, from the beginning of its appearance in the hills, had, in a sense, to proceed with tact and circumspection. One almost gets the feeling that in the beginning, the Vaishnava Baragis, who came to the hills in the end of the 16th century or the beginning of the 17th were grouping their way about in the region trying to find ways in which their cult could hold the attention of the people of the hills. The spread of Vaishnavism was clearly a difficult matter, one of the most fascinating chapters of the history of religion in the hills related to the progress of Vaishnavism, because in the arrival of the new faith in the hills existed clear possibilities of conflict.

What happened in the hills is probably not far removed from what had happened elsewhere and at several periods of time in India, for, after all, the emergence of the orthodox Hindu faith had itself not been a simple matter; numerous elements, diverse and
Several elements of animistic or demonic kind which prevailed earlier were absorbed. C.F. Oldham has, in a very perceptive note, described this process of the absorption of the non-Brahmanic cults into orthodox Hinduism in the hill areas. As a result of a prolonged contact, both sides had to yield ground to an extent, and what came into being was an amalgam of opposites.

With regard to Vaishnavism proper, even in the plains, it had aroused strong sentiments. Before it made an appearance as a popular movement, the Shaivas were strongly entrenched, and the Vaishnavas had to wage a grim battle to gain ground. Numerous instances are on record pointing to the strong animosity between the two sects. "When the Faqirs meet with Baragis, ... fight desperately," wrote the traveller Careri. This appears to be a fair indication of the situation which prevailed at least for some time when we come upon references of militant Bairagis.

1. This process was spread over several centuries, but it is possible to see it actually in operation in given areas like the Punjab Hills and Assam. An interesting parallel to the developments in the Punjab Hills is to be seen in Assam. See, Barua and Murthy, Temples & Legends of Assam.

2. Oldham, "Non Brahmanic Hinduism in the Himalayas", Panjab Notes and Queries, II, No. 24, Sept 1885, Note 1046, 199-200. An example that Mr. Oldham gives is of the Bhagsu Naga temple which from a Naga temple became transformed into a Shaiva temple and took the name of Bhagsu Nath.

in Rajasthan, and later in Kulu, it does not come as a surprise. As late as 1825, when Bishop Heber came to U.P., a meeting between him and one Swami Narain, obviously a Bairagi Vaishnava, was arranged. Swami Narain, the Bishop writes, "came in a somewhat different style from all which I expected, having with him near two hundred horsemen, mostly well armed with matchlocks and swords, and several of them with coats of mail and spears". The Bishop concludes his account of this meeting with a wry comment at the idea of two religious leaders meeting at the head of little armies, and filling the city, which was the scene of their interview, "with the rattling of quivers, the clash of shields and the tramp of the war horse".

This meeting with a Christian Bishop must have been an unusual experience for the Vaishnavas, their encounters with the Shaivas had begun much earlier. According to Sir Jadunath Sarkar, as early as A.D. 1266, a group of Naga Sanyasis led by Bhawananda, Sursarananda and Kalamnanda, are reported to have won a decisive victory at Hardwar over Bairagi ascetics. The account


3. See, Ghurye, Indian Sadhus, 166.
of a similar battle at Thanesar, in A.D. 1567, is 1

to be found in a Mughal chronicle. This battle seems
to have excited the Emperor Akbar's interest also and
it is reported, in fact, that some soldiers of the
Emperor went under his orders to support the Sanyasis
in this battle, who ultimately won. There is yet
another record of a battle between Shaiva ascetics and
Bairagis fought at Haridwar in A.D. 1760 to decide
a dispute about precedence at that place. According
to an account recorded by Wilson, the number of dead
in that fateful action was 18,000. So great was the
animus against the Bairagis, that one Bairavagiri
Gosain is said to have taken a vow not to take his daily
meals without killing at least one Vaishnava. Among
the Vaishnavas also was one Ram Das who had taken a
similar vow about not taking his meals without killing
at least one Sanyasi.

Fortunately, the records of the conflict between
the Shaivas and the Vaishnavas are not as gory in
these parts. And Mr. Rose, states that the differences
between the two sects in the Punjab, were "much less
marked" than elsewhere in the United Provinces and

1. Nizam-ud-din Ahmad, Tabaqat-i Akbari, in Elliot & Dowson, History of India as told by its own Historians, V, 318.
3. Ibid., 201.
Rajasthan, "where the mutual jealousy of the two sects is often very acute". The strong feelings of animosity between the Shaivas and the Vaishnavas in the South is also well-known. When we come to the hills, however, there is, on the face of it, not this kind of armed conflict or sanguine hostility. This could have been for one of the following two reasons; either, that the records which are generally very scanty from the hills do not refer to this chapter of religion; or, that the organisation of the Vaishnavas and the Shaivas was not so strong here as to engender organised conflict. But there are clear indications that somewhere deep beneath the surface Vaishnavism had to struggle hard and long to make a headway in these parts. The conversion of the Rajas or the importation of small groups of Pandits from Banaras or Gaya was not sufficient guarantee that the people would easily take to the new faith. And one has to glean facts and to read between the lines, so to speak, to try and ascertain the situation as it was in the hills. Legends, which are prevalent about several temples are, in this matter, of very great help. Many of these stories, however quaint and fanciful, often conceal a hard core of facts. There is, for example, the legend about

the hot springs of Manikaran in Kulu. The story is that the Goddess Parvati, while bathing with Mahadeva in the river, had laid her earrings (Mani-Karnika) on the bank. When she came out, she found that these had been stolen and carried off to Patala, the regions below the earth, by the serpent, Sesha. This made Mahadeva very angry and before his anger could take a disastrous turn for the whole world, the Gods intervened and pressed the Naga to restore his plunder. He refused, claiming the earrings as his own property, but as he snorted with indignation, the subject of the dispute, the earrings, were released with tremendous force from his nostrils, in which they had been hidden. The jewels then flew back to the Goddess. It is locally narrated that through the opening made by the hot passage of the jewel to the surface of the earth, boiling water came out, and has continued to flow in Manikaran ever since. It is interesting that the dispute here is between Parvati who is associated with Shiva, and Sesha who is always associated with Vishnu. No other deity is mentioned, so that it cannot have been any Naga; there clearly is a reference here to the Vaishnava snake-God. And one is

1. Moorcroft, Travels in the Himalayan Provinces etc., I, 178; Gore, Lights & Shades of Indian Hill Life, 69.
able to detect in this legend an oblique reference to a dispute or a conflict between the Shaiva and Vaishnava elements.

The Lakshmi Narayana temple at Chamba, one of the early Vaishnava temples in the hills, must also have excited varying responses in the popular mind. Vigne, the traveller, cites a tradition heard by him at Chamba about how the new God who had arrived in Chamba made himself "most obnoxious", by "obtruding himself into the Chamba Zenanas". The husbands of the town then sought the aid of a saint who helped them by enlisting the aid of Garuda which, according to the story, let out a cry to warn the ladies when the idol next came out of his shrine. At this the God, it is said, pierced Garuda with an arrow. This strange legend may possibly bear a reference to the initial prejudice against the newly arrived Vaishnava idol in Chamba and there may well be in the story some reference also to the supposed moral laxity often associated with the new cult. In the small state of Kumharsain in the Simla hills, the story is told of how the founder

of the city, Kirat Singh, came from Gaya in about A.D. 1000. When he came, he was carrying in his arms an idol of Lakshmi Narayana and also, curiously, a cat. When he came to this place a strange happening occurred. The cat was killed by a mouse. Upon this, Raja Kirat Singh is said to have complained to Kot Ishwar Mahadeva, who ordered him to settle down at that spot. Strange and almost incoherent as the story is, the element that is of interest to us, that the Raja came with a Vaishnava idol with him, but took his orders from Shiva, who apparently at that time was supreme in this part of the hills.

In the Kulu region, there are numerous temples of the Nagas, and several local Deotas whose names end with the word Narain. Between the Nagas and the Narain Deotas, there is almost a perpetual feud. And the cause of the quarrel is said to be the "rudeness of Narain to Kalinaga". The Narain Deotas may have only a small element of Vaishnavism in their worship at the present moment, but their Vaishnava affiliation at some early date cannot be denied. And the cause of dispute between the Nagas and the Narain Deotas leads us immediately to the episode in the Bhagavata Purana in

in which Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Narayana or Vishnu, quelled the Kaliya Naga who was poisoning the waters of the Jamuna.

Of deep interest to our study is a group of pictures from the hills which can be described as caricatures. The subject of some of the pictures are Vaishnava devotees or saints. In one of the partially coloured drawings of this theme, (see fig. 4) the central figure is a huge man, naked but for a dhoti, sitting cross-legged, his right armpit jammed over an arm-rest. He has a thick, bushy beard, and is seen carrying a rosary in his hands; with half closed eyes he is looking upwards. In his lap he has a Vaishnava nun, her head shaven and wearing a short skirt and a brief choli. The saint's left arm is around her shoulders and she is toying with his beard in a playful manner. Among the group of religious devotees at the back, there is one that looks into the mirror held in his hands; another holds a cup to the lips of the chief personage. The man with the mirror in his hand in the back has a sparrow over his head and one of his hands is held frivolously over the

1. Chandigarh Museum, J.37. "These caricatures are intended to be pictorial comments on men of religion whom the painter appears to have regarded as charlatans deserving of derision rather than reverence."
bald head of the man wearing a cap at the right is another devotee with long locks and a traditional cap, with an arm-rest raised in his hand. He is seen looking towards another devotee, who wears a hideous smile and owns a shaven head. In the right hand corner yet another devotee, completely naked and showing signs of obvious strain, holds in his arms a female devotee wearing a skirt but no choli. Her legs are stretched and although she is not seen as fully naked, the artist manages to convey the idea reasonably well. A toe of hers is rammed into the chin of the devotee with the cap. At this point the picture is unfortunately torn and the face of the female devotee is not visible. But there is very little doubt that what is shown is a male and a female devotee in the act of physical congress.

Another drawing (see fig.5) not as caustic, but certainly satirical, shows well-known saints like Prem Das, Gharib Das, Tulasi Das, Ram Singh and Kesar Singh. The misshapen bodies, the vacant expressions and meaningless gestures leave no doubt again that the intention of the artist was clearly derisive. He saw this group of Bairagis as subject for scorn. The Shaivas

1. S.N. Gupta, Catalogue of Indian Paintings in the Central Museum Lahore, No. J.36. This drawing was reproduced by Coomaraswamy in Rajput Painting, II, XXXV B.
also come in for unkind comment. A drawing in the Chandigarh Museum (No. 271) shows a Kanphata Jogi luring a woman away (see fig. 6).

In the Kothi State, at a fair locally called Blaj, there is evidence of Bairagis being made fun of in dramatic performances which are staged during this fair. Pt. Tika Ram Joshi who has written in some detail about the hills has recorded one such performance in which the songs of the Ramayana theme are sung in the Pahari dialect. Also there are songs about the feats of Vishnu at the court of Raja Bali. It is clearly a Vaishnava theme that is being sung. But, at the same time, what is interesting is that during these dramatic performances the beginning is made by a gang of Bairagis enter with their preceptor. These disciples of the saint serve him with exaggerated respects, employing comic sentences and ludicrous gestures, making themselves generally ridiculous. The intention clearly is to make the audience laugh. There are other themes in these dramatic performances also, but quite clearly in this short episode it is the Bairagis who come in for unkind comment. It is certainly true that the stories which conceal a conflict.

between the sects do not merely refer to Vaishnavism. There is, for example, the legend about the shrine of Baba Balak Rupi near Sujanpur. In this, a *pindi* of the Baba was unearthed near a temple of Gugga. The Baba is said to have appeared in a dream and asked his devotees to install his idol in place of that of Gugga; his temple was then constructed out of the remains of the Gugga temple. Undoubtedly here, in the dream, there is an explanation for the substitution of one shrine by the other. A conflict in the situation is naturally implied.

From the point of view of ascertainable facts, it appears that Vaishnavism had to make numerous concessions. One major concession was that the brand of Vaishnavism which came to be acceptable to a section of the population of the hills permitted the eating of flesh. In the popular mind Vaishnavism is quite distinctly associated with vegetarianism in the plains and it is inconceivable that a devout Vaishnava should be permitted by his faith to consume flesh of any kind. In fact this appears to be the chief distinction between a Shaiva and a Vaishnava in the plains. He who

2. Thus an eating establishment which serves only vegetarian food is often called a Vaishnava *dhaba* or restaurant.
3. Rose, *Glossary*, I, 259, says that "the grand distinction" between the Shaivas and the Vaishnavas is that the latter are strict vegetarians.
eats meat is not a Vaishnava. This is clearly not so in the hills. In an interview with the present writer, a Brahmin of Sujanpur, Pt. Narain Dutt, gave an interesting reason for the hill people being more enthusiastically the followers of the Devi than of Vishnu. He said that it was because in the cult of the Devi there was a great deal of liberty. And one could consume, if one liked, meat, fish and wine, things which are normally taboo in the Vaishnava faith. A Rajput, particularly, said, Pt. Narain Dutt, could not do without these things and to him it was more convenient, in a sense, to be a devotee of Durga or the Devi. Whether this is wholly true or not, there are clear instances in which one sees a conscious concession made to the long standing meat eating habits of the people of the hills. Even in the reign of Raja Jagat Singh of Kulu, when he was converted into Vaishnavism by Shri Krishna Das Payahari, a story is told of how Shri Krishna Das gave to the Raja, as also to the priest of the Raghunath temple, the permission to eat a special kind of flesh, the flesh of a pheasant. This practice would have been wholly

1. Interviewed at Sujanpur.

2. The saint is said to have spoken thus to Raja Jagat Singh: "You are of the Kshatri caste, so you should have one bird shot every day and then cooked and then offered to the God after which half is to be given to my disciple and the other part you should eat yourself". See, Hutchison & Vogel, II, 461.
inconceivable anywhere else but here. Some devious justification for this practice being introduced inside a Vaishnava temple is sought to be given. It is said that Shri Krishna Das gave to the Pujari of the temple the power to bring the bird magically back to life, after it had been eaten. He was only to place its bones together, sprinkle a little water over them, and chant a mantra and the bird should spring back to life. With this make-believe story, the meat eating habit of the people of the area was retained. It remains nonetheless a singular fact that a Pujari of a Vaishnava temple himself is permitted by his faith to consume the flesh of any kind. One feels that the Bairagi missionaries must have clearly arrived at the conclusion that one of the strong resistances to the Vaishnava faith would come from the eating and drinking habits of the local population. Convinced as they must have been of this difficulty after local experience, the Vaishnavas made these concessions in order to gain more converts to their faith. It is again worth remarking that on the occasion of the great Dussehra festival in Kulu which is presided over by the idol of Raghunath, there is the sacrifice of a goat.

1. The Pujari of Raghunath temple at Kulu, interviewed.
or a sheep every year. This again comes as a most unusual practice which would perhaps not be met with in other parts of the country in a Vaishnava temple. It may well be that the sacrificed animal's flesh is not actually offered to Raghunathji, but the deity is made to preside over the sacrifice. And this is enough to take his sanction for the sacrifice as granted.

An interesting feature of religious belief in the hills generally is the confusion which arises between one sect and the other in many places. The couplet which is quoted in connection with the Raghunath temple at Kulu: "Makarhar Ayodhyspur manohen Braj ki reet; Jagat Singh Maharaj ki Shri Raghoji se Preet", meaning: "Makarhar (Kulu) is another Ayodhya, and is the counterpart of Braj. Maharaja Jagat Singh is devoted to the illustrious Raghavji (that is Rama)". In this there is clearly a confusion between Rama and Krishna because while Jagat Singh is made out here to be a devotee of Raghunath or Rama, a reference in the first line of the couplet goes to Vraj which is associated only with Krishna. It is interesting that Raja Jagat Singh is said to have deposited a flute or a murli inside

the temple of Rama. This may well be a way of suggesting that he was both a devotee of Rama and Krishna, but the whole tradition seems to be confused and uncertain. In the Sirmur hills and in certain areas of the Simla hill states, a deity widely worshipped is Parasram. This clearly is none else than Parashurama who is taken to be the sixth Avatara of Vishnu and worshipped in that capacity. But here Parashurama has become almost entirely transformed and is nearly unrecognisable as a Vaishnava deity. The legends which are told of the Parashurama temples and there are a very large number of them - mix up the legend of Parashurama as known to the Vaishnavas, including his being the son of Jamadagni and of Renuka, and his killing the king Saharabahu or Karthavirya. At a place called Jambu in Sirmur, in the temple of Parasram, the Pujari recited the following mantra:

"Pahale Barahrup Avtar uttare, Barah ki Mata Chandravati, pita Padamavati; Phir Budh rupi Avtar uttare; Budh ki Mata Udmawati pita Kanwal Rishi", and so on.

1. There may be a reference in this to Krishna temple at Thaw above Naggar. The Thaw temple is clearly of an early date and is sometimes associated with Shri Krishna Das Payahari.


We do not know anything about the ancestry of the Varaha or the Boar incarnation, but the ancestry given here sounds highly fanciful. In any case the ancestry of the Buddha, the 9th incarnation of Vishnu, as given here is queer, to say the least. This strange tradition by which deities who are well-known in other parts of the country, become virtually unrecognizable, except in their names, holds a mirror to the confusion which appears to have come about in the hills and which may have resulted from the merger of more than one sect.

The temples of Parashram are also associated in the hills with the sacrifice which is variously called Beda or Bhunda. The Nirmand temple in Kulu where Parashurama is worshipped as the principal deity is well-known for this sacrifice. And this ritual, which originally involved the sacrifice of a human being, seems to be followed in many temples dedicated to Parashurama or any of his allied deities. This association of a sacrificial ritual with a deity that was originally Vaishnava is again apparently peculiar to these parts. Another aspect of interest about the Parashurama faith in the hills is to be seen in the fact that in one of his temples there are

1. The temple was one of the most gruesome ceremonies. It consisted of stretching a long rope on the top of a hill or precipice to the foot and sliding the victim in a sitting posture down this rope. The ceremony was held once every 12 years.

2. Apart from Nirmand, the Bhunda sacrifice was held at other places in the hills also, two of them in Bashahr. See, Simla Hill States Gazetteer, 1910, 30.

as many as 17 images, among them those of Jamadagni, Renuka, Ganesh, Shiva, Durga, the five Pandavas and another deity called Kedara Bharava. The fairs which are held in the Parshurama temples all have around themselves strong associations with sacrifices.

Another example in which a Vaishnava deity seems to have coalesced with a local Deota is of the temples of Narsingh in the hills. Some attempt is made occasionally to distinguish between Narsingh the Deota, and Narsingh, the incarnation of Vishnu. But this is obviously of a late date and to begin with the two seem to have been identical. With the Narsingh temple in Chamba as our evidence, we can be reasonably certain that the worship of Narsingh as one of the Avataras of Vishnu was introduced in these parts at a relatively early date. But then the deity became closely allied in the popular mind with a local Deota who received the name of Narsingh or, as sometimes it is put, Nar Singh. Many of the Narsingh temples now are simply local Deota temples and Narsingh is now in fact mentioned prominently as a Bir of a wholly local character. He is extremely popular among women,

1. This distinction was emphasised by the Pujari of the Raghunath temple at Kulu. The Narsingh image there consists of a small black stone.
3. Rose, Glossary, I, 376-378; Simla Hill States Gazetteer, 1910-11. There is a long list in Rose, of Narsingh temples in some of the Hill Areas.
because with him is associated the boon of giving sons.
In the Kangra district, it was estimated sometime ago,
that two thirds of the women believed in Narsingh. In
the Brij Raj Swami temple at Nurpur a peculiar dramatic
occurrence is staged every year. A little niche behind
two pillars is covered with painted paper and behind that
a priest, dressed up as Narsingh aksh, when the devotees
are gathered, at an appropriate moment, the Pujari who is
dressed as Narshing pierces the paper screen and emerges
with a roar. The pieces of paper which is thus pierced
by the "emergence" of the "deity" are then taken by
women to their own homes, because this is supposed to be
auspicious and is conductive to the birth of a son in
the family. This practice clearly disposes of any
doubt that might be there about the identification of
Narsingh and Nar Singh. The man-lion incarnation is
impersonated here by the pujari in the temple and it
is the papers torn by him which are supposed to bring sons
to women. And since Nar Singh is throughout the hills
associated with granting the boon of sons, it is entirely
reasonable to conclude that Narsingh Bir is none else than
a transformed Narsingh, the Avatara of Vishnu. From an
Avatara of orthodox Vaishnava pantheon, Narsingh has

1. The full account of this ceremony was given by
Dr. Om Prakash at Nurpur.
become, in the hills, a mere spirit.

The confusion of which we have spoken in the context of Parashurama and Narsingh extends also to the many Deotas called "Narain" in the hills. Their names are clearly derived from that of Vishnu himself but the alliance of that deity with local Deotas seems to have transformed his character in this case also; so that we get numerous Deotas retaining only a vestigial remain of their Vaishnava origin but in fact having become local godlings resorted to by the people when a cow is yielding less milk than desired, or when the crop has been damaged by excessive rains.

This mix-up or confusion seems to have been quite common in many parts of the hills. And we have interesting instances in which the Hindu and the Buddhist Gods have also in the popular mind, become jumbled up. Dr. Vogel has written about an inscribed brass statue from Fatehpur in Kangra which is really an image of the Buddha in Dharmachakra pravartana of perhaps the 6th century A.D. But this image was considerably worn "owing to the daily

1. The Narayana deotas are very numerous and their temples are mostly in Kulu, Mandi and the Simla Hills.

application of the tilak during the long period it was worshipped by the Hindus." The worship at the Rawalsar lake in Mandi of Padmasambhava as one of the Hindu God is well known; and so also is the confusion relating to the Triloknath temple in Chamba-Lahul which offers a curious illustration of "this catholic spirit". The temple at Trilokanath is built of stone and is in the orthodox Hindu style. There is an image of the Hindu deity and pilgrims come to it from different parts, bringing artificial mica flowers as offerings here. But the officiating priest at the temple is a Lama and not a Brahmin. Prayer flags, as in Buddhist shrines, fly from the top of the roof and large prayer wheels are installed in the quadrangular wall as in a Buddhist chapel.

It is possible that this situation in the hills may only partially be the result of the confusion; in some parts it seems to have been brought about deliberately possibly with a view to work out a balance between different faiths. An equilibrium, in a sense, is struck between the faiths and the result is this syncretistic coming together of the various sects. The early coins

1. The Rawalsar Lake has also a Sikh shrine which is ascribed to the time of Guru Gobind Singh.
from the Nurpur area, generally referred to as Audambara, are some indications of this kind of an equilibrium having been struck at a very early period of time in the hills. One of the coins, thus, bears the legend "Bhagavatesa Mahadeva Rajarajesa". Thus are Mahadeva and Bhagavata brought together. On another coin, a male figure with his right hand raised is clearly copied from the figure of Hercules crowning himself; the figure is labelled "Vispamitra" which stands for Vishwamitra, the famous sage. Yet another coin has a tall tree in an enclosure on the right, and the fore-part of an elephant. On the reverse is a two-storeyed domed and pillared stupa beside which stands a trident. We find here quite clearly elements of the Buddhist, the Shaiva and the Bhagavata cults. All this may well have been successful in avoiding a serious clash between religion and this "syncretistic theology", as it has been called, may have played its part in making the existence of faiths relatively free of bitterness.

In some of the legends we can almost see the conscious, deliberate process of this equilibrium between

3. Allan, Catalogue, 122-129.
religions being struck. The inscriptions from the reign of Meruvarman of Chamba which occur on the idols sacred to the Devi, Vishnu and Shiva, are well-known. But it is in the 10th century legend of the period of Raja Sahilvarman of Chamba that we find a most interesting example of the striving towards this balance. The full story that is told about the Lakshmi Narayana temple at Chamba is that Raja Sahilvarman, being desirous of raising a temple to Vishnu, sent nine of his sons to the marble quarries in to the Vindhya mountains. They were to bring back with them a block of marble for the figure of the deity to be carved out of it. The sons did succeed and brought back the marble slab. But when the slab was cut, it was found to contain, inside a hollow, a frog. This was at once considered to be very inauspicious and it was decided not to make the image of Vishnu from it. Since the slab could not be used for the original purpose for which it had been imported, it was utilised for making some smaller images and among these were an image of Trimukha, or three-faced Shiva; a small image of Ganpati or Ganesha now in the Chandragupta temple, and also the figure of a Goddess. But the image of Vishnu yet remained to be fashioned. So the nine sons went again to the same

quarries. They were on their way back with another marble slab when they were attacked and killed. Upon this the Raja sent his eldest son, Yugasvarman, who was also attacked, but he was able to save himself and brought this slab back to Chamba. It was from this slab that the image of Lakshmi Narayana which later became so central in the history of Chamba was fashioned. Not only is this legend indicative of the earlier attempts of Sahilavarman to embrace Vaishnavism and his being induced to bend his devotion towards Shiva and the Devi also, it clearly points at the same time to the attempt on the part of the Chamba ruler to pay equal attention to other gods, while still insisting on being personally a Vaishnava devotee. The Chamba inscriptions contained a large number of references to the faiths of other rulers who came after Sahilavarman. An inscription of the reign of Somavarman begins with an invocation to Shiva, but in it he is compared with Rama in his piety. Likewise, an inscription of the reign of Raja Asitatavarman records his donating lands in various villages to two temples: one of Vishnu and the other of Shiva.

Quite like the legend about the Lakshmi Narayana image from Chamba, there is the interesting tradition from

2. Ibid., 263.
Chahbpli, in the western group of states. The most important place of pilgrimage in that State is a temple called Sudh Mahadev. The place is sacred to Shiva because it is believed that it is here that Himachal gave his daughter Parvati in marriage to Shiva. At this place there is an enormous trisula or trident of Shiva which is struck into the ground opposite a tank. The story about the trisula, in fact about the shrine, is interesting. It is said that Raja Ramchand of Chanehni once made an attempt to measure the extent of the depth of the trident into the earth. He ordered digging operations to be carried out so that the trisula could be taken out and measured, but its lower end could not be reached even after digging had been going on for two days and nights. That night, it is said, Raja Ramchand had a dream that on the next morning a small piece of iron from the top of the trisula will fall itself. Out of this, the dream indicated, will emerge an image of Shaligram, the ammonite stone emblem of Vishnu. The Raja was exhorted in the dream by the deity to worship this murti and to use the iron for forging a sword. In the dream the Raja also "heard" that at the

(bottom of the pit will be found a Shivalinga which should also be installed at that place. The next morning events transpired exactly as they had been dreamt of by the Raja. The Raja installed the Shivalinga in a temple and took the Shaligram stone with him to his palace to Chahnehni for its being worshipped by his family. This tradition is widely believed in Chahnehni area and in it we have once again a story which only barely manages to cloak the basic fact that the Raja is here made to divide his attention equally between Shaivism and Vaishnavism.

Also of interest to the study is an uncommon manifestation of the Goddess who is widely worshipped in the Jammu hills and in other parts of India: the Vaishno Devi. The name itself is suggestive of fusion of the Vaishnava and Shakta beliefs, because, elsewhere in India, a Vaishnava Devi, as such, is not heard of. There is an involved legend telling of the origin of this place of pilgrimage which even to this day attracts large crowds in the Navratras of Chetra and Asuj, a time of the year sacred to all Devi temples. In the story which is told the Devi who was born in the Treta yuga is made out as worshipping Rama and renouncing her home which was

1. For a long and detailed account, see Kahn Singh, Tarikh-i Jammu wa Kashmir, 289-300.
somewhere in the southern part of India, to go and meditate upon his name. During one of his journeys, Rama is said to have visited the Devi when she was undergoing her penance. The Devi then pleaded with Rama, asking him to marry her which Rama declined. But he said that he will be married to her in the Kaliyuga when he incarnates himself as the Kalki Avatar. He also asked her to go towards the north in the area of the Trikuta hills and there it is that the Devi took up her abode and came to be worshipped. Even though there is a Vaishnava association in the legend, the essential character of the Devi does not alter except in one important fact that no sacrifice is offered before her. Hence, perhaps, the name of Vaishno Devi, which to the popular mind immediately suggests a Devi who does not accept an animal sacrifice. That it is essentially a Devi shrine is proved by the fact that there are idols of Mahakali as Durga and Mahasaraswati inside the inaccessible cave. Nowhere in the cave or around it is there a Vaishnava image. The only other image in the neighborhood of Vaishno Devi is of Bhairon who is representative of Shiva, in fact a tamasik emanation of his.

The emergence of Hanuman as a deity commanding a siddhi, which he is capable of conferring upon his devotees,  

1. For the reason of the shrine being in the Trikuta Hills, Goddess is sometimes referred to as Trikuta Devi.
is also of interest. There are several images in the
hills of what is called Panchbaktra or "five-faced
Hanuman" and there is even a painting of the theme in
the collection of the Chandigarh Museum. (A Panchbaktra
Hanuman image was raised at Mandi, it is said, by Raja
Sidh Sen, who was a devout Shakta by personal belief. In
several collections of the manuscripts that the present
writer has seen there are *kavachas* or Tantrik *mantras*
landing Hanuman which again completely alters his
character as known to the Vaishnavas. Because, in the
Vaishnava mythology he is the greatest of the *bhaktas*
of Rama; worshipped in his own right, but essentially as
a minor deity subordinate to an incarnation of Vishnu.

This situation in which the character of Vaishnavism
becomes changed, faiths come together, and even some
confusion between beliefs arises is mirrored in some paint-
ings from the Punjab hills. But these will be discussed in
their proper place. What is necessary to emphasise here is
that the path of Vaishnavism in the hills was beset with
difficulties. Not only did it meet with definite resistance

1. There is a prominent sculpture of this description in
the Damtal establishment. Another image is in Mandi.

2. Chandigarh Museum, No. 261. In the collection of the
Raja of Guler was a painting showing Rama and Sita inside
a Tantrik *yantra*.

3. A manuscript called the *Hanumat Kavacha* was to be found
in many collections including those of Thakur Somnath
Singh at Haripur and Pt. Mohan Lal at Samloti.
in some places, it had clearly to make concessions in
a region the faith of which was firm in its local gods
and goddesses, and in Shiva and Shakti.