A host of stalwarts in the field of Indology have enriched our knowledge about the various aspects of goddess worship in India over a period of last one hundred and fifty years through their researches. As such it may appear to be a futile attempt on my part to step on the much treaded path. There are two reasons for me to have chosen this topic. First that there is always a scope to look at a thing from a new angle and add fresh evidence to already known facts. The second which is more important in the present context is that most of the work on goddess worship has been done in all India context and no specific work on Himachal Pradesh has been undertaken so far to the best of our knowledge. As such an independent study dealing with various aspects of the goddess worship, its tradition, art, architecture and rituals in Himachal Pradesh becomes a desideratum.

The study that has been undertaken with multiple objectives, such as to trace the origin and development of the goddess worship in
Himachal Pradesh, with a view to probe the historical factors responsible for it; contribution of the society to this faith and vice-versa; the changes that occurred in religio-social beliefs of the region; contribution of Himachal to the mainstream Śaktism in India, the art and architecture related to Śaktism and its significance and development has been very rewarding. When going through various original sources such as literary texts, art remains and images of the goddess, archaeological finds, epigraphic and numismatic data on the subject we found that they contain amazingly rich information on the subject. We verified, and analyzed this information, compared it with the secondary sources i.e. the works of modern scholars who have written on the subject and corrected ourselves where we were wrong and presented our views where we found that the earlier scholars had missed some point.

Since the subject is too comprehensive to be dealt with in a single study we had to confine ourselves to a time scale. Therefore, we did not venture into the medieval and modern aspects of the subject and confined our study from the earliest times to about the end of the fifteenth century A.D. Since it is not possible to draw a clear line of division in this subject that has continuity to this day, there may be some minor over-lappings here and there.

The first chapter by way of Introduction is a survey of the origin and development of the Mother-Goddess cult from pre-historic period to the early medieval period. In this we have been able to throw light on the archaeological data from around the world before dealing with the evidence for the Vedic, Later Vedic, Purāṇic and
early medieval periods. The purpose here has been to prepare a comprehensive back drop for a better understanding of the subject in context of Himachal Pradesh.

The next two chapters deal with the origin, antiquity and development of the goddess worship and her temples in Himachal Pradesh. Here we have co-related literary data with oral tradition and art and archaeological evidence to reconstruct as clear a picture as possible. Several new ideas have been put forward. For instance, taking the numismatic evidence of the Kuninda, Yaudheya and Audumbara coins, we have shown that both the goddess images and temples existed in Himachal Pradesh as early as second century B.C.

The fourth chapter, the longest in this study, deals with art and architecture related to goddess in Himachal Pradesh. Its sheer size is enough to show that how popular the cult has been in the land through the ages. Here we have studied the architecture of all the important Devi temples, and historical significance and iconography of important goddess images afresh. Besides collecting all the data at one place we have been able to throw some new light on the subject.

The fifth chapter that deals with the rituals of worship is largely based on our fieldwork visits to various temples in the state. It has enabled us to gather on the spot information regarding the mainstream rituals being followed and the local and folk practices being included or mixed in the mode of worship. The last chapter containing conclusion presents a summary of the results of our research enumerated in the earlier chapters.
For us this work has been our love for labour and a desire to contribute in a very small way to furtherance of this discipline on scientific grounds. We hope it will be well received and crave the indulgence of the scholars for any inadvertent mistakes in the work.

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