

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Emergence of Chamba Painting and its Development**

#### **till 1760 CE**

The primary objective of this chapter is to establish the emergence of Chamba as a leading centre of Pahari miniature painting in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, and its chronological development till 1760 CE. Another important focus of the chapter is to understand the sequential evolution and development of the nature of patronage and the migration of several painter guilds. The patrons who form the core of this chapter include – Raja Balabhadra Varmana (r. 1589—1641), Raja Prithvi Singh (r. 1641—1664), Raja Chattar Singh (r. 1664—1690), Raja Udai Singh (r. 1690—1720), Raja Umed Singh (r. 1720—1735), Raja Dalel Singh (r. 1735—1748), and Raja Umed Singh (r. 1748—1764).

Origin and emergence of Chamba miniature painting, like other schools of miniature painting in the North-Western Himalayas, are mired in controversy. The scholarship on the beginnings of Pahari painting – in the broadest sense – is polarised around a variety of issues, most notably those pertaining to the early phase of Pahari painting. Perspectives of various authors on origins of painting in Pahari region are ambiguous, and there appears to be no consensus among scholars regarding the dating of early paintings, particularly those of Chamba.

Prior to Ohri's<sup>116</sup> elaborate study on origin and development of Pahari paintings, scholarship did not address individual schools, rather the various schools were considered collectively under the canopy term of 'Pahari painting'. Coomaraswamy emphasised the continuity of India's old tradition of painting in his views on the origins of 'Rajput painting' (Rajasthani and Pahari)<sup>117</sup>, while Karl Khandalavala highlighted the role of Mughal style in the Punjab hills.<sup>118</sup> Archer observes: “Until the first half of the seventeenth century, no painting seems to have existed in any of the

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<sup>116</sup> Ohri, V. C. 1991. *On the Origins of Pahari Painting: Some Notes and a Discussion*. Indian Institute of Advanced Study in association with Indus Pub. Co. New Delhi.

<sup>117</sup> Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. 1916. *Rajput Painting: Vol. I*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>118</sup> Khandalavala, Karl J. 1958. *Pahari Miniature Painting*. The New Book Co. Private Limited, 18.

Rajput states of the Punjab Hills... Indeed it is as if the great schools of Punjab Hill painting developed in the seventeenth century out of nowhere".<sup>119</sup> Due to the lack of clear or definitive material on this issue, theories on the beginnings of Pahari painting are hazy and imprecise.

On the subject of the beginning of Chamba painting, Ohri's 1991 monograph titled 'On the Origins of Pahari Painting' is the most recent, and he underlines Basohli, Nurpur, Chamba, and Mandi as the earliest centres of Pahari Painting. Ohri was able to determine the origin of Chamba painting to at least the second quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century with a portrait of Raja Balabhadra Varmana (Fig. 4.13) to be the earliest known miniature painting from Chamba.<sup>120</sup>

However, limitations in Ohri's study include incorrect dating of paintings, restricted analysis of style, limited study of the various waves of painters' migration to Chamba, and movement and interaction of Chamba painters with other regions of the Punjab hills, that demand a revised study of a systematic development, and emergence of painting in Chamba.

#### **4.1 The Origin**

Archaeological evidence suggests that Chamba was a leading centre of art activity in the North-Western Himalayas since the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>121</sup> Raja Ajyavarmana of Chamba (then Brahmapur<sup>122</sup>) (c. 760 CE)<sup>123</sup>, was contemporaneous to Raja Lalitaditya of Kashmir, and the state, in all likelihood, became a vassal of Kashmir.<sup>124</sup> After the rapid disintegration of Kashmir following the death of Lalitaditya in 756 CE in Sinkiang, the disorganised Bharmour state lost its sole support, and was overrun by the Tibetans, leading to the killing of Raja Lakshmirvarmana<sup>125</sup> of Chamba.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Archer, William G. 1973. *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills: A Survey and History of Pahari Miniature Painting: Vol. I.* Sotheby Parke Bernet, xxiii.

<sup>120</sup> Ohri, V. C. 1991. *On the Origins of Pahari Painting: Some Notes and a Discussion.* 18.

<sup>121</sup> Goetz, Hermann. 1955. *Memoirs of the Kern Institute No. 1: The Early Wooden Temples of Chamba*, E.J. Brill, 5.

<sup>122</sup> Brahmapur, the early capital of Chamba state, is presently known by the name Bharmour

<sup>123</sup> The date of the reign of Ajyavarmana is attributed by Hutchison and Vogel (1933, 281)

<sup>124</sup> Goetz, *The Early Wooden Temples of Chamba*, 23.

<sup>125</sup> Grandson of Ajyavarmana (Ajyavarmana – Suvarnavarmana – Lakshmirvarmana)

<sup>126</sup> Goetz, *The Early Wooden Temples of Chamba*, 23

Thereafter, transfer of the seat of power from Bharmour to Chamba took place during the reign of Raja Sahilavarmana<sup>127</sup> (c. 920 CE).<sup>128</sup> Kashmir's assertion of a claim to the suzerainty over the hill-states of its borders from the ancient times was lost during Sahilavarmana's rule, and the state enjoyed complete independence.<sup>129</sup> The independence of Chamba was maintained till around 1060 CE, when Ananta Deva of Kashmir invaded Chamba, resulting in its defeat and the murder of its then Raja Salavahana Varmana.<sup>130</sup> The subjugation of Chamba to Kashmir was restored and continued till the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE.

This subjugation was not limited only to political control, but also had influence on the sculpture tradition of Chamba. According to Goetz<sup>131</sup>, the gable of the Lakshana Devi Temple at Bharmour, the ancient capital of the Chamba state, and the bust of Shakti Devi temple at Chatrarhi reveal a strong influence of Kashmir sculpture at Chamba. A number of prominent sculptures of Chamba, including the bronze four-headed Vishnu from the Hari Rai temple in the town and the Durga image from Swai bear a prominent influence of Kashmir sculpture.<sup>132</sup> These traditions continue to appear in the sculptures and reliefs continue till much later, even after the discontinuation of the political association between Chamba and Kashmir in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, reflecting in temples such as Vajreshwari Temple (13<sup>th</sup> century), Vamsigopala Temple (late 16<sup>th</sup> century), and the Sita Ram Temple (mid-17<sup>th</sup> century).

As per my research of available material evidence, the first and only instance of a break – in the form of foreign influence – in the iconography and visual language of the art tradition of Chamba, primarily sculpture and woodcarving, is felt in mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, in constructions attributed to Raja Prithvi Singh (r. 1641—64).<sup>133</sup> Among the

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<sup>127</sup> The *vamsavali* of Chamba state does not mention any significant events which happened between the reigns of Lakshmi Varmana and Sahilavarmana. The chronological order is Lakshmi Varmana-Mushanavarmana-Hansavarmana-Saravarmana-Senavarmana-Sajjanavarmana-Mriyanjayavarmana-Sahila Varmana

<sup>128</sup> Hutchison, J., and Vogel, J. Ph. 1933. *History of The Panjab Hill States: Vol. I*. Superintendent Government Printing, 283

<sup>129</sup> Hutchison, J., and Vogel, J. Ph. *History of The Panjab Hill States: Vol. I*, 291.

<sup>130</sup> Hutchison, J., and Vogel, J. Ph. *History of The Panjab Hill States: Vol. I*, 291.

<sup>131</sup> Goetz, *The Early Wooden Temples of Chamba*, 25

<sup>132</sup> Agrawala, R. C. "A Note on the Durgā Image from Swai (Chamba), Himachal Pradesh." *East and West* 47, no. 1/4 (1997): 385-390. Accessed on JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29757331>.

<sup>133</sup> The reign of Prithvi Singh (1641—64), as described in the previous chapter, is marked with cultural and diplomatic exchange between the Chamba court and the Imperial Mughal throne. Amiable

various novel patterns and designs, which are introduced in the material culture of Chamba in this period include symbols and motifs that appear to have Perso-Timurid origin.<sup>134</sup> The emergence of Mughal motifs such as the Najamat al-Quds, Persian Peri figures and ten-pointed star rosettes in the woodcarvings of Chamba, in my opinion, occurs parallel to the emergence of Chamba painting in its initial stages, and a stylistic analysis of the woodcarvings suggests the involvement of painters, not woodcarvers, in the production of the former.<sup>135</sup> An analysis of the style, iconography, composition, typology, and colour-palette of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century painting of Chamba – which I consider the early phase of Chamba painting – suggests the presence of painters trained in the ‘Popular Mughal’ tradition. Hence, in my view, the overall art tradition of Chamba can broadly be divided into two groups:

1. Kashmir influence through sculpture and woodcarving – 7<sup>th</sup> c CE to late 16<sup>th</sup> c CE
2. Mughal influence through painting and woodcarving – mid 17<sup>th</sup> c CE to late 18<sup>th</sup> c CE.

#### **4.1.1 Evidence of Early Painting in Chamba**

So far, earliest paintings to have emerged from Chamba belong to the second quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and no specimens have come to light which could suggest traces of painting activity prior to this period – neither in the form of manuscripts, nor as wall-paintings. Ohri<sup>136</sup> has suggested that the art of wall-painting and book illustrations were in vogue in the Pahari region in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and when the artists working in the Popular Mughal styles arrived in these hills in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century or the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the art of miniature painting came into being. However, Ohri does not provide any examples to support this hypothesis, and instead suggests that the compositional norms of ‘ancient painting’ have been retained in the

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relationship between Shahjahan and Prithvi Singh paved way for Mughal cultural sensibilities to be assimilated at Chamba.

<sup>134</sup> The symbolic and formalistic analysis of these motifs is done in Chapter 6.

<sup>135</sup> A detailed study of the involvement of painters in the woodcarving and sculpture traditions of Chamba is done in Chapter 6

<sup>136</sup> Ohri, V. C. 1991. *On the Origins of Pahari Painting: Some Notes and a Discussion*, 5.

wall paintings in various centres of the Punjab hills till the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>137</sup> In my opinion, the syncretic exchange between the painters at Chamba with the local sculptors and woodcarvers appears to be happening in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, most probably after them having spent at least one generation at Chamba. I would assume that if the painters had already been present at Chamba prior to the emergence of Chamba painting in mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, a syncretic exchange between painters and sculptors would have been evident in both sculpture and woodcarving of that era.<sup>138</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> century paintings at Chamba appear entirely alien – in terms of iconography as well as form – to the pre-existing art traditions (sculpture and woodcarving) of the region.

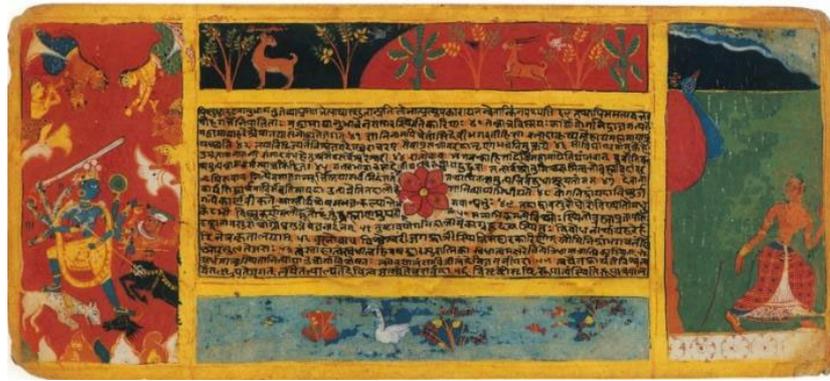


Fig. 4.1 The Goddess Slays Mahishasura, from a Devi Mahatmya manuscript, dated 1552 CE, 11.5 x 26.5 cm, Acc. No. 77.192, Himachal Pradesh State Museum, Shimla



Fig. 4.2 Chaura Stands before Champavati, from the Chaurapanchasika series, Central India, c. 1500-25 CE, 16.8 x 24.8 cm

<sup>137</sup> Ohri, V. C. 1991. *On the Origins of Pahari Painting: Some Notes and a Discussion*, 5.

<sup>138</sup> Elaborated in Chapter 6



Fig. 4.3 Hero Stone, c. 13<sup>th</sup> century, 38.2 cm x 17.5 cm, Chamba, Himachal Pradesh

However, to consider Chamba as the only centre where painting activity had not been practiced prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> century would be inappropriate, as no evidence of painting happening in neighbouring states as well has come to my attention. The second instance which Ohri provides to suggest an early origin of Pahari painting is the illustrated manuscript of *Devi Mahatmya* (housed in the Shimla Museum), belonging to the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 4.1).<sup>139</sup> This manuscript was discovered in Kangra<sup>140</sup> and shows a slightly later development from the paintings of the *Chaurapanchasika* series (Fig. 4.2). Ohri has used this one manuscript to demonstrate that the art of book illustration must have been in practice at other hill-states as well.<sup>141</sup> However, I do not share Ohri's opinion that the manuscript was made in Kangra, or in any of the adjoining hill-states, as firstly, the text in the manuscript is written in Devanagari, a script relatively foreign to the Pahari hills in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, or at least to Chamba, where *Devashesha*, an early form of *Takri* was in usage at this period; and secondly, the illustrations of this manuscript do not share any stylistic or formalistic resemblance to the paintings of the second quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, found in Chamba, Mandi, Basohli and Nurpur.

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<sup>139</sup> Ohri, V. C. 1991. *On the Origins of Pahari Painting: Some Notes and a Discussion*, 5.

<sup>140</sup> Ohri, V. C. 1991. *On the Origins of Pahari Painting: Some Notes and a Discussion*, 5.

<sup>141</sup> i Ohri, V. C. 1991. *On the Origins of Pahari Painting: Some Notes and a Discussion*, 5.

However, it would be incorrect to assume that any pictorial tradition could not have existed in Chamba prior to the arrival of the Popular Mughal painters. Copper-plate charters dated as early as 1330 CE have engraved seals in the form of a rosette, which have certainly been engraved by hand. Furthermore, the availability of a large number of fountain-stone slabs executed in bas-relief (Fig. 4.3) also suggests that the designers must have been somewhat familiar with the art of painting, though not necessarily the art of miniature painting. Additionally, a number of Gyana Chaupar<sup>142</sup> grids have also been found in the possession of families in Chamba. Though the late Gyana Chaupar appear to be made by Chamba painters, there is a possibility that the tradition of Gyana Chaupar at Chamba must have predated the arrival of the miniature painting tradition, and craftsmen who could be designated with the production of these grids must certainly have existed. Following the arrival of the Popular Mughal artists at Chamba, a syncretic exchange must have happened between the two, leading to the creation of a ‘folkish’ sensibility running parallel to the painters of the Popular Mughal style.

#### **4.1.2 Political Atmosphere of the Punjab Hills in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and the Beginning of Pahari Painting in Nurpur and Mandi**

As per available information, Nurpur and Mandi emerged as the earliest centres of painting activity in the North-Western Himalayas. Based on the evidence provided above, I have concluded that painting activity began in the region only after the hill-states came into a political and cultural contact with the Mughals. As described in the previous chapter, Mughal influence did not reach Chamba till the reign of Raja Prithvi Singh, though the states of Nurpur and Mandi had come under Mughal subjugation during the reign of Akbar. However, it is also to be noted that while Nurpur and Mandi came under Mughal subjugation during the reign of Akbar, the earliest known paintings found in these centres are dated to the reigns of Jahangir (1605—27) and Shah Jahan (1627—58).

Nurpur’s Raja Basu Dev (r. 1580—1613) had accepted Mughal suzerainty soon after his accession and moved his capital from Pathankot to Dharmeti<sup>143</sup>, which was later renamed Nurpur by his son Jagat Singh. Throughout his reign, Raja Basu would rebel

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<sup>142</sup> Gyana Chaupar is a dice game popularly known as ‘Snakes and Ladders’.

<sup>143</sup> Hutchison, J., and Vogel, J. Ph. *History of The Panjab Hill States: Vol. I*, 225.

against Akbar but later would submit and be pardoned. He particularly enjoyed favours with Jahangir and supported him against Akbar.<sup>144</sup> His closeness to Jahangir could be realised by the fact that when William Finch visited Lahore in 1611, he saw Raja Basu and called him a ‘minion’ of Jahangir. He also mentions of seeing a fresco in the fort of Lahore showing Basu Dev standing on Jahangir’s left hand, which no longer exists.<sup>145</sup>

Basu Dev’s son **Jagat Singh (r. 1619—46)** was in the good books of Jahangir and had renamed his capital of Dharmeti ‘Nurpur’ in the honour of ‘Nuruddin’ Jahangir during the emperor’s visit to Kangra in 1622.<sup>146</sup> A portrait of Jagat Singh rendered by the Mughal painter Bichitr, presently at the Cleveland Museum of Art (Fig. 4.4), not only indicates the significance of the Nurpur Raja in the Mughal court, but also serves as the earliest available specimen signifying a Pahari chieftain coming into contact with the art of Mughal miniature painting.<sup>147</sup> The portrait, in all likelihood, was made for the Mughal emperor as a record of Raja Jagat Singh and was certainly not commissioned by Raja Jagat Singh at Nurpur. However, the production of the portrait is a watershed moment, as I would presume led to the foundation of a painting atelier in the hill state. Accordingly, Nurpur would become the earliest centre of Pahari painting, and Jagat Singh’s desire to establish a painting atelier, in my view, was partially driven due to his close association with the Mughal court. Secondly, he was also motivated due to his devotion to Vishnu, as among the early portraits that are available of the Raja depict him praying at Vishnu shrines.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Basu had a Mansab of 1500 under Akbar and 3500 under Jahangir. Hutchison and Vogel assert that many of Basu’s rebellions were stirred up by Jahangir against his father.

<sup>145</sup> Hutchison, J., and Vogel, J. Ph. *History of The Panjab Hill States: Vol. I*, 227.

<sup>146</sup> There is another legend popular in the hill-state that the capital was renamed as Nurpur by Jahangir in the honour of his wife Nurjahan. However, in the *vamsavali* scroll of Chamba, the renaming of the capital is attributed to Jagat Singh, who, for this act, is tauntingly called ‘yavana sachiva’ – the secretary of the Mughals

<sup>147</sup> The possibility of a painting atelier being established in Nurpur during the reign of Raja Basu Dev cannot be ruled out, as he shared a similar political allegiance with Jahangir during his lifetime. However, in the lack of resource material to support the hypothesis, the Bichitr portrait of Jagat Singh is the earliest portrait of a Pahari chieftain made by a Mughal painter

<sup>148</sup> It was customary for the Rajas to erect temples in their dominions to express their devotion to gods. In my opinion, paintings in comparison to sculpture and temple commissions proved to be a cheaper and portable medium to have the personification of deities recorded. I consider it to be an important factor in the popularity of painting tradition.

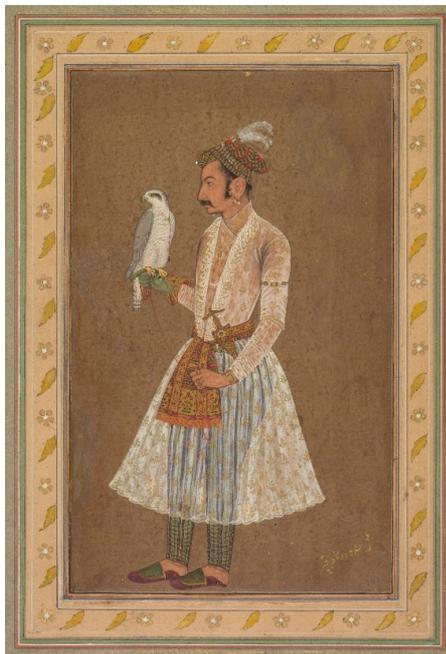


Fig. 4.4 Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur (r. 1618—46), Mughal, attributed to Bichitr, probably 1619, 41 x 32.7 cm, Acc. No. 2013.324, Cleveland Museum of Art

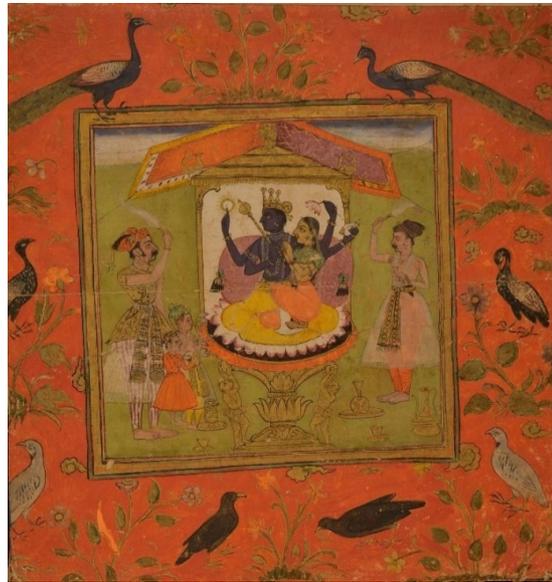


Fig. 4.5 Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur Praying at a Vishnu Shrine, Nurpur, c. 1625, Acc. No. 234, Bharat Kala Bhawan, Banaras

One such portrait of Jagat Singh praying at a Vishnu shrine is in the Bharat Kala Bhawan Museum, Banaras (Fig. 4.5). The portrait depicts Jagat Singh with his younger brother Mian Madho Singh, and his two sons – Rajrup Singh and Bhau Singh. The four members of the Pathania<sup>149</sup> royal house are clad in fashion associated with the court of Jahangir, including – a loose plumed turban, a translucent muslin *jama* descending below the knees, a long and decorated *pataka* sash with a dagger tucked in at the waist, and a tapered *payajama*. Jagat Singh and Madho Singh fan flywhisks at Vishnu and Lakshmi seated on an open lotus against a huge bolster, while the young Rajrup and Bhau Singh hold lotus buds. The lotus bud is held by a decorated pedestal, which is further supported by two male figures draped in leaves. Pictorial devices such as a white strip of clouds at the horizon against a monochromatic backdrop (Fig. 4.6), margins of the painting laden with rich depiction of flora and fauna (Fig. 4.7), and the male figures at the pedestal draped in leaves (Fig. 4.8), are among the pictorial elements which were in vogue in the painting tradition belonging to the reign of

<sup>149</sup> Pathania is the suffix used by the ruling family of Nurpur

Jahangir (r. 1605—27). Visual analysis of the painting suggests the work of an artist trained in the Popular Mughal tradition of the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.



Fig. 4.6 Study of Oleander and Kainth, Mughal, attributed to Miskin and Bhawani, c. 1590, 32 x 19.1 cm, Or. 3714, British Library

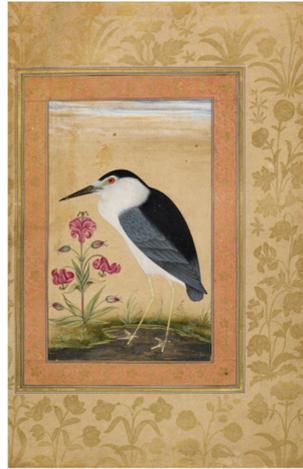


Fig. 4.7 Black-Crowned Night Heron with a Lily, Mughal, c. 1630-33, Add.Or.3129, f.9v, British Library

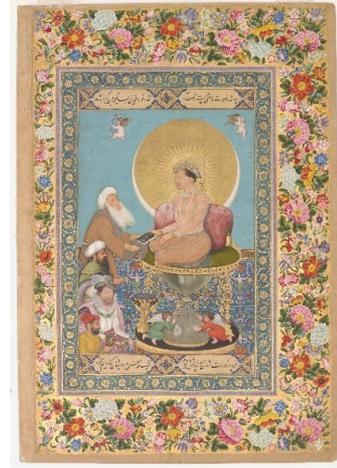


Fig. 4.8 Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings, from the St. Petersburg Album, Mughal, attributed to Bichitr, c. 1615-1618, 25.3 x 18 cm, Acc. No. F1942.15a, Freer Gallery of Art

Whether the painter(s) of this workshop stayed at Nurpur, or visited the principality on an itinerant basis, remains unknown, as no other paintings from Nurpur which is stylistically similar to the previous example have come to light. However, it could be assumed with confidence that the painter(s) of this workshop were instrumental in the establishment of a painting atelier at Nurpur (which eventually influences Chamba), flourished and developed for two centuries, which can be evidenced through following examples.

A portrait of Jagat Singh praying at a Vishnu shrine is housed at the Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh (Fig. 4.9). The painting shows an older Jagat Singh praying at a Vishnu Shrine in the presence of an attendant. The Raja does not appear to be dressed in the royal garb, but rather sports a bright red shawl and a crimson dhoti. While the popular Mughal elements – naturalistic depiction of facial details, diaphanous muslin clothing, detailed depiction of the sky – are absent in the portrait, the technique in which the painting is rendered, including – the choice of

medium as *wasli*<sup>150</sup>, burnish on the back of the paper with agate stone, and application of fine shading called *pardaz*<sup>151</sup> continue to predominate the new style. The development of this visual language laid the foundation of the Nurpur school, and the painter(s) of this workshop remained active in the court of Raja Mandhata (r. 1661—1700) of Nurpur, as suggested by a portrait in the National Museum (Fig. 4.10), which bear strong stylistic similarities to the Chandigarh portrait of Jagat Singh. However, the Nurpur school started opting for a folkish appeal and lost its Popular Mughal vocabulary over the course of time.

While fostering the foundation of painting atelier at Nurpur, Jagat Singh was also able to fulfil his political ambitions by subjugating the neighbouring hill-states. As explained in the previous chapter, Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur murdered Raja Janardan Varmana of Chamba in 1623 CE, followed by Chamba falling in the control of Nurpur



Fig. 4.9 Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur Praying at a Vishnu Shrine, Nurpur, c. 1640, Acc. No. 1339, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig. 4.10 Raja Mandhata of Nurpur (r. 1661—1700), Nurpur, c. 1675, 18.5 x 12 cm, Acc. No. 65.188, National Museum, New Delhi

<sup>150</sup> *Wasli* is a handmade paper used specifically for miniature painting. The term became popular with Mughal painting

<sup>151</sup> *Pardaz* is a Mughal technique of applying shading with either fine strokes of brush, or with stippling

officials for the following eighteen years, till 1641 CE. Raja Balabhadra Varmana of Chamba<sup>152</sup> (second reign 1623—41) was re-installed on the throne, who ruled in subjugation to the Nurpur chief. Due to these political instabilities, the four-year-old son of Janardan Varmana, Prithvi (future Raja Prithvi Singh), was secretly smuggled to Mandi, in the court of Raja Hari Sen (r. 1604/1616—1637) for protection.

In my opinion, the early life of prince Prithvi spent at Mandi has a notable impact on the painting tradition of Chamba. Catherine Glynn has revealed a direct link between Mughal painting during the reign of Jahangir and the paintings made at Mandi during the second quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>153</sup> She has pointed out that Raja Hari Sen of Mandi, was impressed by Imperial painting of the period and chose either to patronise a Mughal artist to come to Mandi or train a local artisan into the Mughal visual language.<sup>154</sup> A portrait of **Raja Hari Sen of Mandi (r. 1604—23—37)** (Fig. 4.11) made in c. 1625—30 has several visual elements comparable to the paintings in vogue during the reign of Jahangir, including diaphanous muslin *jama*, loose turban, emphasis on facial details, application of stippling and shading to create modelling of face, minute detailing in the rendering of hair, and monochromatic backdrop. A Bhagavata Purana set (Fig. 4.12) has come to light, which appear to be in continuation of the Mughal visual language as in the portrait of Raja Hari Sen, but in a localised fashion. The set and the portrait in question are identical in style and uniform in treatment, suggesting the engagement of a single painter with the commissions. Technical details such as architectural layout, depiction of flowers and trees, apparel of the human figures (both male and female), the division of space, extensive usage of malachite pigment, and shading around the temple and the bridge of the nose are among notable characteristics of painting during the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, that are also found in aforementioned Bhagavata Purana.

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<sup>152</sup> Father of Janardan Varmana

<sup>153</sup> Glynn, Catherine. 1983. "Early Painting in Mandi." *Artibus Asiae XLIV, no. 1*, 23

<sup>154</sup> Glynn, Catherine. 1983. "Early Painting in Mandi." *Artibus Asiae XLIV, no. 1*, 52



Fig. 4.11 Raja Hari Sen of Mandi (r. 1604—23—37), Mandi, c. 1650, 31.8 x 17.8 cm, Acc. No.2018.96, Cleveland Museum of Art



Fig. 4.12 Wedding ceremony, folio from the Bhagavata Purana, Mandi, c. 1640-1650, 31.2 x 47.5 cm, Acc. No. F2017.13.2, Freer Gallery of Art

#### **4.1.3 Emergence of Painting and Patronage in Chamba**

Available evidence dates the formulating period of Chamba painting to the second reign of Balabhadra Varmana (1623—1641). In light of my discussion above, I conclude that painting activity at Nurpur and Mandi also began during the second quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Bhalabhadra Varmana issued 41 copper plate charters, the most by a Chamba Raja, suggestive of his piety and religious charity, which also earned him the title of ‘Bali-Karna’, as elaborated in the previous chapter. A group of painters appear to have migrated from the already existed atelier of Nurpur to Chamba, either on being attracted by the financial affluence of the Chamba state, or, I would like to suggest, on the request of Balabhadra Varmana, as most of the paintings belonging to this period are religious in nature.

It is also noteworthy that the only way into the Chamba state passed through Nurpur, hence, for painters to travel to Chamba, it was natural to spend some time at Nurpur. Another possibility that I propose is that Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur must have dispatched a group of painters active at Nurpur to Chamba either to keep the old Raja

entertained, or/and to keep him distracted from the affairs of the state. Though any or all of the possibilities could have played a role in the establishment of a painting atelier at Chamba, the contribution of Nurpur in the development of Chamba painting in its initial stages cannot be undermined.

On the other hand, the young prince Prithvi of Chamba, who grew up at Mandi in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, a period when Mandi painting had matured. The prince, in all likelihood, received exposure to painting, which inspired him to patronise painting at Chamba after he consolidated his power in 1641 CE. In contrast to Balabhadra Varmana, Prithvi Singh was a much travelled man, and hence, was well aware of the courtly culture of the neighbouring states, as well as the Imperial Mughal capital, which he visited nine times in his life. The political supremacy of Chamba during the reign of Prithvi Singh, his exposure to the Mughal court, the financial affluence of the state<sup>155</sup>, and his personal inclination towards the art of miniature painting, inspired him to attract painters to Chamba, who migrated in several waves, while also continuing patronage to the painters who had already arrived at Chamba during the earlier reign of Balabhadra Varmana.

As established previously, a number of portraits of Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur have come to light. By the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, it had become customary for the hill Rajas to have their likenesses recorded in portraits, hence welcoming portraitists trained in the Mughal workshops. In my opinion, several of these painters sought better prospects in the hill states, preferably from Lahore, where a major workshop established by Akbar during the last quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was getting disbanded. A large number of painters active at Lahore were disregarded by Jahangir, keeping a handful of his favourites in the atelier, leaving several painters without employment. Earlier these painters might have sought refuge working for independent patron in Lahore, but later they may have favoured working for the hill-chiefs, such as Raja Jagat Singh and his son Rajrup, who had started to earn a name for themselves by leading the Mughal army in military expeditions. The Rajas, on the other hand, would have also developed

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<sup>155</sup> Although proper information pertaining to the revenue generated at the erstwhile Chamba state is scarce, historians have often remarked about Chamba being an important centre of trade. The vast stretch of the Chamba boundaries must have certainly contributed towards the riches of the chieftdom.

inclinations for patronising painting activity at their capitals as they would repetitively remain in proximity of the emperor, familiarising themselves with the customs of the court. However, to only credit Mughal painters as the forerunners of painting activity in the North-Western Himalayas would be inappropriate and the contribution of artists who were without a Mughal background is just as much in laying the foundation of painting activity at Chamba, which is elaborated in the following section.

#### **4.2. Building the Chronology of Chamba Painting – Charting the Painting Activities During the Reigns of Different Rajas**

Following is my attempt to draw the chronology of Chamba painting beginning in the reign of Balabhadra Varmana, in context of the information provided previously. The chronology of Rajas considered for study include – Raja Balabhadra Varmana (r. 1589—1641), Raja Prithvi Singh (r. 1641—1664), Raja Chattar Singh (r. 1664—1690), Raja Udai Singh (r. 1690—1720), Raja Umed Singh (r. 1720—1735), Raja Dalel Singh (r. 1735—1748), and Raja Umed Singh (r. 1748—1764).

##### **4.2.1 Balabhadra Varmana (1589—1613/1623—1641)**

My study reveals that the emergence of Chamba painting is associated to the second reign of Balabhadra Varmana, evidenced by the only portrait of the Chamba Raja showing him being attended by his son Bishambar as among the earliest paintings (Fig. 4.13). A Takri inscription on the top margin identifies Balabhadra as ‘Shri Balikarna’. Bishambar in this painting is identified by comparing his appearance to another drawing which is an inscribed facial study recorded by the same artist (Fig. 4.14). Both Balabhadra and Bishambar appear adorning Jahangir-styled turbans and wear Mughal court *jamias* tied in the Hindu fashion to the left. Such Mughal elements are also evident in early Nurpur painting, and hence it is likely that the painter(s) of this portrait had spent some time in Nurpur while moving towards Chamba. Another evidence is in the form of a bust portrait of Jagat Singh of Nurpur recorded in a similar style has come to light (Fig 4.15). It is certain that the painter(s) responsible for this portrait settled at Chamba and founded a workshop, as paintings bearing similar

stylistic and compositional elements keep appearing during the reigns of succeeding kings.

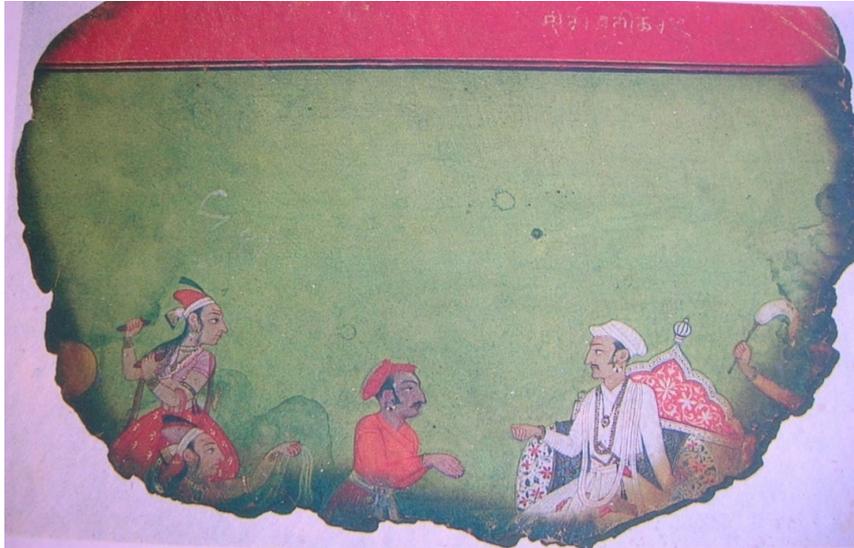


Fig. 4.13 Raja Balabhadra Varmana of Chamba (r. 1589—1613/1623—41) Attended by his son Bishambar, Chamba, c. 1630, Himachal State Museum, Shimla

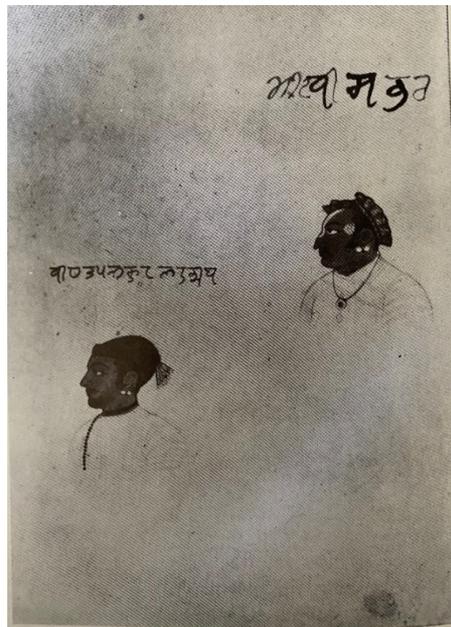


Fig. 4.14 Portrait Studies of Mian Bishambar of Chamba and Mian Vidyut Pal of Kutlehr, Chamba, c. 1630, Himachal State Museum, Shimla



Fig. 4.15 Bust Portrait of Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur, Chamba, c. 1630-1635, Acc. No. 62.1829, National Museum, New Delhi

**Narasimha Avatara** (Fig. 4.16), in my opinion, is chronologically among the earliest paintings made in Chamba during the second reign of Balabhadra Varmana (1623-1641 CE). The painting is certainly made by a painter trained in Mughal sensibilities as suggested by his fine brushwork, light application of colour, lean bodily proportions, and the apparel and lobed crown of Vishnu, which is comparable to Krishna's depiction in the paintings of the Mughal *Harivamsa Purana* (Fig. 4.17). On a marble terrace, the ferocious Narasimha who has emerged out of a column is about to rip open the belly of a terrified Hiranyakashyapu who is helplessly clutched between the half man-half lion's legs. His son Prahlad folds his hands in supplication while he turns his head towards Vishnu who has emerged into the scene. A woman is seen bowing down to Vishnu in devotion. The conspicuously depicted flowering willows are a recurring motif in Chamba painting and their origin could be traced to this image.



Fig. 4.16 Narasimha incarnation of Vishnu, Chamba, c. 1630-40, auctioned by Sotheby's on 8-9 October 1979

By the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, a period this painting is dateable to, Vaishnavism had been established as the state religion of Chamba. It is also well known that the Suryavanshi Rajas of Chamba traced their lineage to Rama. Dasavatara paintings emerged as the favourite subject-matter of the Rajas of Chamba and it remained in vogue throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries – the time-period we associate with the crucial development of painting at Chamba. It is probable that this might not have been a standalone

painting and likely other incarnations of Vishnu could have constituted a set. This painter family, in all possibility, had settled down in Chamba and founded a painting workshop of their own.

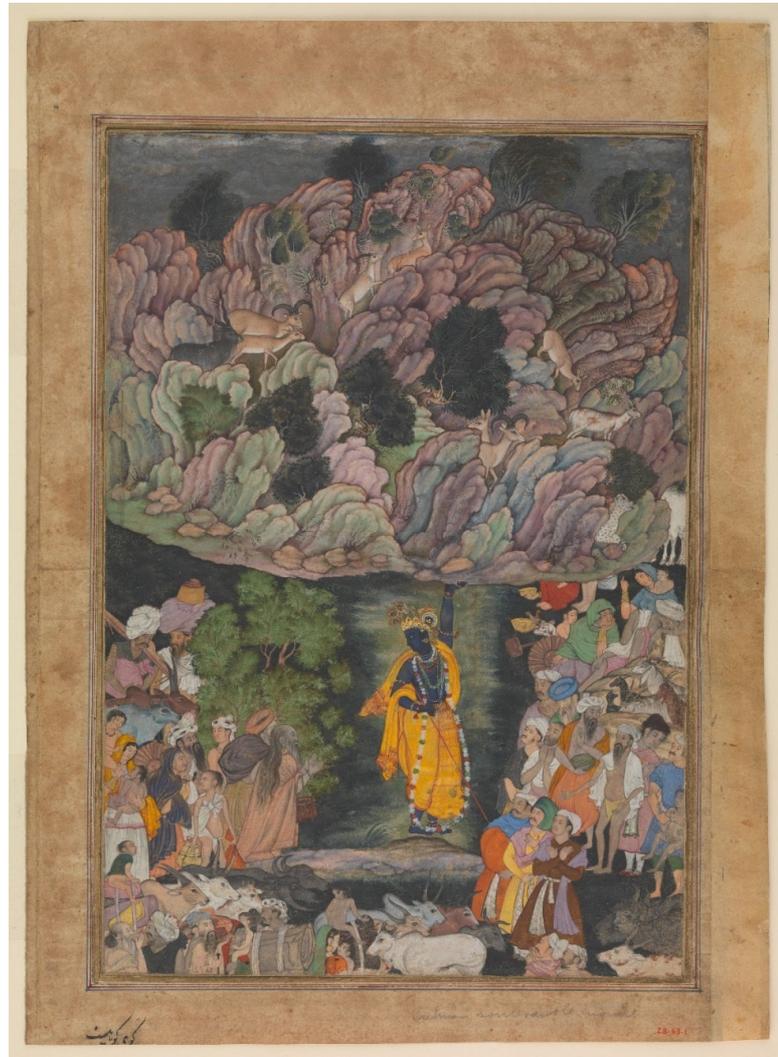


Fig. 4.17 Krishna Holds Up Mount Govardhan to Shelter the Villagers of Braj, from a Harivamsa Purana set, Mughal, c. 1590-95, 28.9 x 20 cm, Accession Number 28.63.1, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Four folios of another dispersed **Dasavatara manuscript** housed at the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (Fig. 4.18-21) can confidently be placed to this formulating phase of the Chamba school. Attributed to c. 1630-40 CE, the paintings are in an uncomplicated layout. The top portion of the compositions is dominated by a text box bearing a Sanskrit description of the incarnation of Vishnu. Against a monochromatic backdrop

of green or red, the incarnations corresponding to the inscription are depicted in iconography generally associated to them. The first image of this dispersed set is Kurma Avatara (Fig. 4.18). Vishnu is depicted seated on the top of mount Mandara supported on the back of his incarnation as tortoise, Kurma. The serpent Vasuki is used as the churning rope to churn the ocean out of which the seven headed horse Uchhaishravas and the white elephant Airavata are produced. A similar approach is undertaken for the other incarnations, such as Varaha depicted as carrying the earth on his tusks (Fig. 4.19), Vamana receiving sacrifice from Bali (Fig. 4.20) and Balarama carrying his plough to change the course of Yamuna (Fig. 4.21). The painter has employed a fine crimson line for the delineation of figures and his application of colours is light and warm. Raised eyebrows, slender limbs, chopped fingers and toes, long and narrow feet, and the torso shorter than the lower half become stylistic hallmarks of this workshop for the depiction of human figures. A trident-like shape is observed at the four corners of the border, which later becomes visible in a c. 1760-65 Dasavatara set. Additionally, water is depicted in a basket-weave pattern, an element seen on the fountain-stone slabs of Chamba that I have discussed earlier.

I would like to deduce that this 'Bharat Kala Bhawan' Dasavatara set lays the foundation for the Dasavatara iconography that is uninterrupted followed at Chamba for two centuries. The painters who painted this set had settled in Chamba and were patronised by the succeeding kings. To support my argument, I bring to light a comparable work from the Cleveland Museum of Art, that is dateable to c. 1690 (Fig. 4.22).

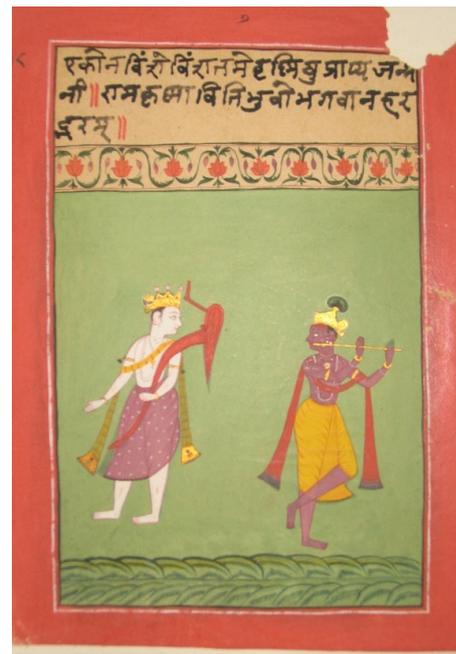
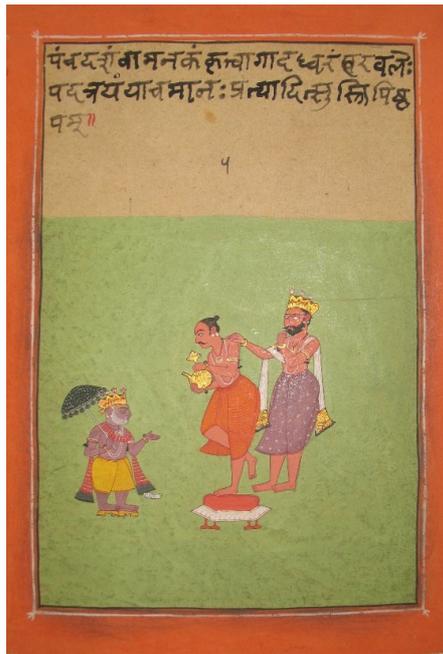
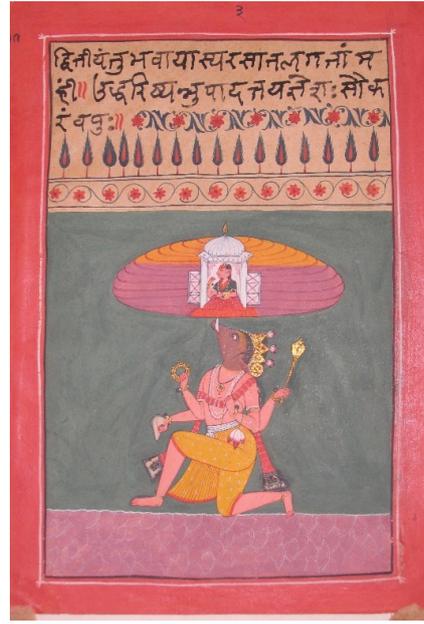
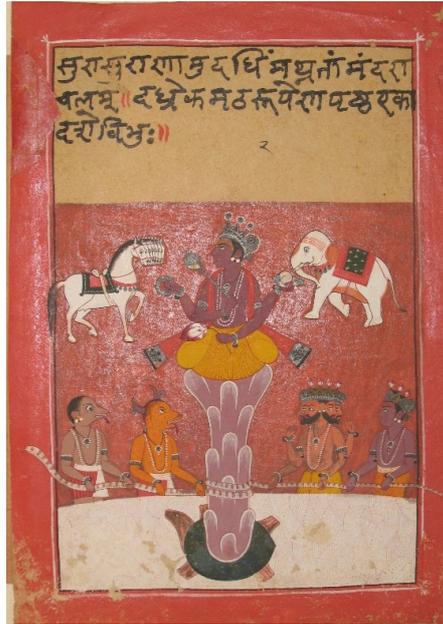


Fig. 4.18-21 Four Paintings of a Dasavatara set (clockwise from top-left): Kurma Avatara, Varaha Avatara, Vamana Avatara, Balarama Avatara, Chamba, c. 1635-40, Bharat Kala Bhawan, Banaras

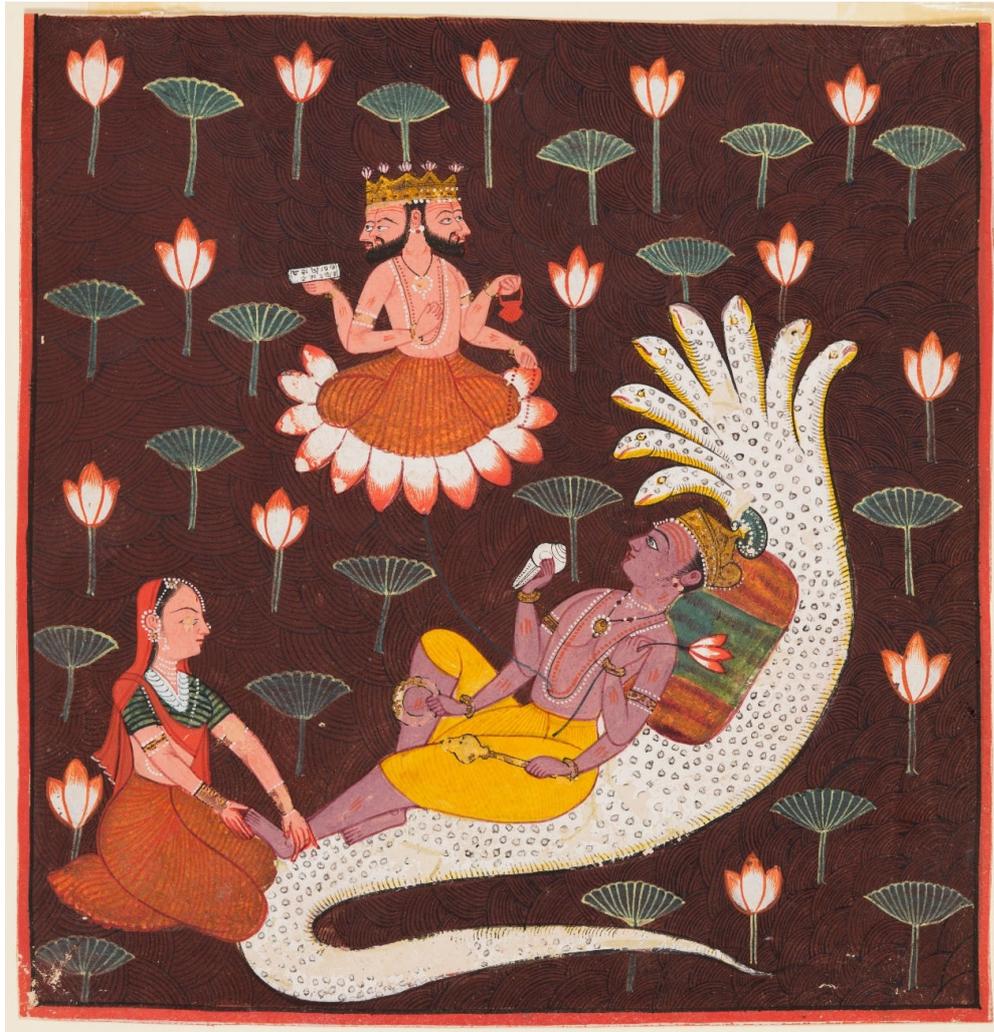


Fig. 4.22 Vishnu on Ananta, the Endless Serpent, Chamba, c. 1690, 17.8 x 17.1 cm, Accession No. 2018.155, Cleveland Museum of Art

The reign of Balabhadra Varmana, thus, can be viewed as the formulating period of Chamba school. Painters arrived at Chamba from diverse background, bringing along their visual sensibilities, leading to the parallel development of their individual artistic traits. Although not many paintings from this period have come to my attention, yet

the available material indicates that Chamba was already emerging as a school of painting in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **4.2.2 Prithvi Singh (r. 1641—1664)**

Prithvi Singh's <sup>156</sup> return from Mandi to Chamba and his restoration as the Raja in 1641 marks the beginning of a new age of artistic and cultural sensibilities. Prithvi Singh was favoured by Shah Jahan and enjoyed special favours at the imperial court. Epigraphical records reveal that among the earliest commissions by Prithvi Singh is a residential *Kothi* at Bharmour which is notable for woodcarvings on its doorways (Fig. 4.23).<sup>157</sup> The wood panel shows Prithvi Singh receiving honours from a noble figure that is identifiable with Shah Jahan's son Dara Shikoh. In the upper register, the young Raja is shown holding the Mahi-Maratib<sup>158</sup>. In front him stands a royal figure sporting a Shah Jahani turban and a Jama tied in the Mughal fashion, holding a falcon in his right hand, who appears to be Dara Shikoh in all likelihood. Falcons of Chamba were popular at the Mughal court, and a painting depicting Prithvi Singh offering a falcon to Shah Jahan has come to light (Fig. 4.24). It could be said with confidence that the doorway commemorates the meeting of Prithvi Singh with Dara Shikoh in which the Mughal prince awarded the Chamba Raja Mahi-Maratib and received the falcon as a tribute in return.

This Bharmour *Kothi* doorway (c. 1641-1643) also happens to be the earliest specimen of woodcarving at Chamba, which shows the depiction of the Timurid eight-pointed star. The style in which the woodcarvings are rendered are similar to the tradition of painting in vogue during the reign of Shah Jahan. There is enough evidence to suggest this phase as the beginning of patronage to artists at Chamba who had, in all

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<sup>156</sup> Grandson of Balabhadra Varmana (Balabhadra Varmana—Janardana Varmana—Prithvi Singh)

<sup>157</sup> Sharma, Vijay. "The Woodcarvings of Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh." Sahapedia, March 9, 2017, <https://www.sahapedia.org/the-woodcarvings-of-chamba-district-himachal-pradesh>.

<sup>158</sup> Mahi-Maratib (order of the fish) was an honorific standard given by the Mughals to persons of distinction. The tradition is believed to have started by Emperor Shahjahan in the year 1632.

probability, migrated from the Mughal workshop during the reign of Prithvi Singh.<sup>159,160</sup>



Fig. 4.23 Wooden Doorway Depicting Prithvi Singh receiving Mahi-Maratib from Prince Dara Shikoh, Bharmour, c. 1641-43, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba



Fig. 4.24 Shah Jahan receives falcon from Raja Prithvi Singh of Chamba, Chamba, c. 1650, 19 x 18 cm, Object Number 2009.202.217, Harvard Art Museums

A likelihood of Prithvi Singh bringing along an artist from Mandi to Chamba cannot be ruled out, given the fact that **Shyam Sen (r. 1664—79)**, the younger son of Hari Sen and the future Raja of Mandi, lived chiefly at Chamba and stayed there till the death of his brother, the erstwhile king, in 1664.<sup>161</sup> I would like to bring into discussion an unidentified portrait seemingly rendered in the Mandi Bhagavata Purana style, from the Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery. It portrays a Rajput figure praying at a Devi shrine, which, in my view, is a posthumous image of Janardan Varmana, most likely commissioned by Prithvi Singh at Chamba (Fig. 4.25).

<sup>159</sup> Ohri, V. C. 1991. *On the Origins of Pahari Painting: Some Notes and a Discussion*. 20.

<sup>160</sup> A family of Chamba painters identified themselves as *Tarkhan-Chitere* (painters-carpenters) in the *Bahis* (genealogical accounts) at Haridwar in the last quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Goswamy, B. N., and Eberhard Fischer. 1992. *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*. 129).

<sup>161</sup> Ample evidence related to the relationship of Prithvi Singh with Shyam Sen is not available. However, Prithvi Singh must have forged a close friendship with the Mandi prince during his stay at Mandi, and after the former's consolidation of the Chamba throne must have invited him to stay at Chamba. It is to be mentioned that 1664 is also the year of the demise of Prithvi Singh.

The middle-aged Raja is depicted standing in devotion at a gold shrine inlaid with precious stones dedicated to the Devi. The Devi sits against a huge bolster on a high-backed throne, adored by Narada. She is attended by Ganesha and Bhairava, along with an elderly woman whose identity remains unknown. In my conjecture, this woman in question is possibly Dai Batlo, Prithvi Singh's wet-nurse who secretly brought him to Mandi, as discussed in the earlier chapter. Prithvi Singh held Batlo in high regard after his return to Chamba and her influence is revealed by the fact that the construction of Khajji Nag temple is credited to her. There is a copper-plate testifying a land grant made in her name which further suggests her participation in state affairs.

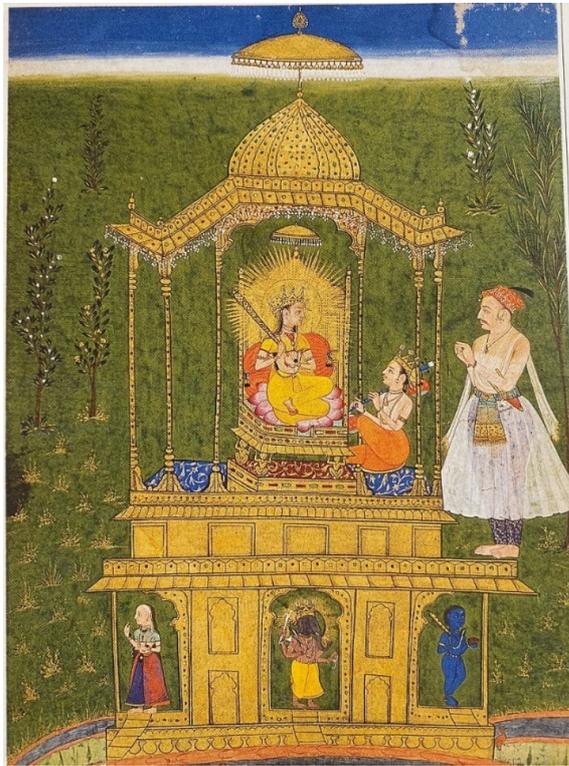


Fig. 4.25 Posthumous Portrait of Raja Janardan Varmana of Chamba Praying at a Devi Shrine, Chamba, c. 1645, Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery, Vadodara

Visual elements employed in this painting, as discussed earlier (and in the following paragraph) certainly establish this painting into the Chamba school, which strengthens my conjecture that the standing figure in the above painting would be none other than a Chamba dignitary, most likely Janardan Varmana.



Fig. 4.26 Krishna Lifting Mount Govardhana, Chamba, c. 1650, NCM 117, NC Mehta Collection, Lalbhai Dalpatbhai Museum, Ahmedabad

The portrait, in all likelihood, was rendered by the same artist who produced the **Krishna Lifting the Mount Govardhana** painting, presently in the NC Mehta Gallery, Ahmedabad (Fig. 4.26), which is certainly a painting of the Chamba school as agreed upon by scholarship. Both share the white band separating the horizon from the sky, green monochromatic backdrop, design of the crowns, and manner of the rendering of feet. The above characteristics are also shared by another **Devi painting**<sup>162</sup> brought to light by Jagdish Mittal that was discovered in the collection of

<sup>162</sup> The Takri inscription on the painting reads 'Jalpa', another name for the Goddess Jwalamukhi whose shrine in Kangra is a major site of pilgrimage.

the descendants of a painter family at Chamba, which also bears stylistic similarities to the Krishna Lifting the Mount Govardhana (Fig. 4.27). I would like to bring to light another painting rendered in this style titled 'Vishnu and Lakshmi Riding Garuda', which presently forms part of a private collection.



Fig. 4.27 Devi Enthroned, Chamba, c. 1650, Jagdish and Kamala Mittal Museum, Hyderabad

Yet another Devi painting that is widely attributed to Chamba school is of the Devi enthroned on a lion, presently at the Philadelphia Museum (Fig. 4.28). The attribution to Chamba school has been supported by the representation of the Devi in a metal plate which is in a temple in Mehla, Chamba (Fig. 4.29). Additionally, the metal plate is very similar in mannerism to the Devi painting in the Mittal collection (Fig. 4.27) and the portrait of Janardan Varmana (Fig. 4.25), thereby securely establishing a stylistic canon during the reign of Prithvi Singh (1641-64).

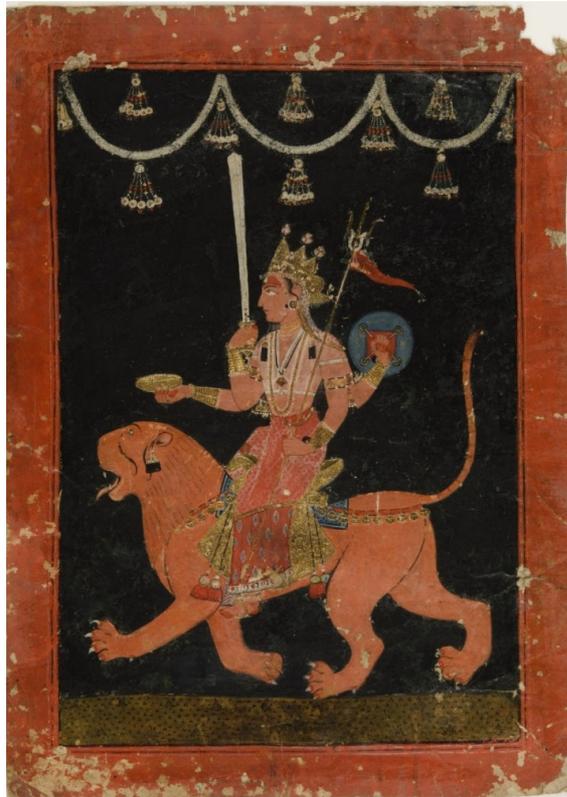


Fig. 4.28 The Great Goddess Durga Riding Her Lion, Chamba, c. 1690, 28.9 x 20.6 cm, Accession No. 1994-148-486, Philadelphia Museum of Art



Fig. 4.29 Adoration of Chamunda, silver plate installed in the Hidimba Temple by Raja Prithvi Singh, Chamba, c. 1650, Hidimba Temple, Mehla, Chamba

In the years 1949 and 1957, Jagdish Mittal acquired a bunch of drawings from Hiralal and Billo Mistry, descendants of two families of painters living in Chamba. These drawings bear strong parallels to the Mughal painting style of the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A drawing of a **Maulavi and his pupils** dateable to c. 1615-1620 (Fig. 4.30) is one such specimen. A study of the workmanship of the painter and compositional devices applied into the drawing suggests that it must have been prepared during the early reign of Jahangir, greatly predating the beginning of miniature painting tradition at Chamba (my personal opinion). This analysis paves way for the likelihood that the drawing was made in a Mughal workshop, probably in Lahore, and was brought to the hill-state by the predecessors of these painters during their migration.

A drawing based on the **Death of Dasaratha** dateable to c. 1630-1640 (Fig. 4.31) was acquired by Jagdish Mittal from Chamba and has been noted for its connection with the Mughal pictorial tradition by Catherine Glynn Benkaim (personal communication). I observed that several architectural elements in this drawing are adopted and later developed by artists active at Chamba during the last quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

I have discovered a **portrait of Akbar**, dateable to c. 1660, in the collection of Chandigarh Museum (Fig. 4.32). The portrait, while appearing to be inspired from a Mughal original (Fig. 4.33), in my opinion, is most likely the work of a local master. It shows Akbar at an old age supporting a falcon on his right arm. The mass availability of such posthumous portraits of the late emperor from various painting centres in North and North-Western India suggests that these must have been popular during the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and their copies must have circulated heavily through the region. These formula portraits show Akbar in a three-quarterly manner, dressed as per the court fashion of Jahangir's era, either holding a flower or a hawk, and being crowned by angels descending from the sky. I firmly believe that the Chamba artist must have seen a close reproduction of the original, as the painting is strictly based on such a formula. Stylistically, I observed that the portrait is comparable to the portrait of Balabhadra Varmana, indicating the work of an artist from the same workshop (Fig. 4.13).

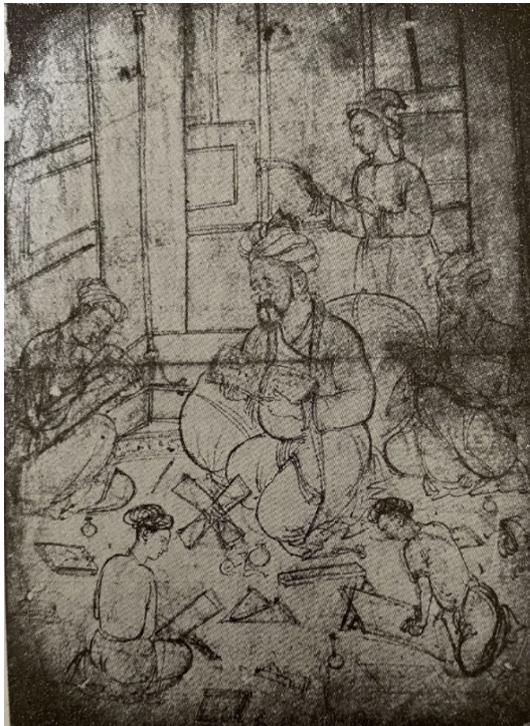


Fig. 4.30 Maulavi and his Pupils, Drawing in Popular Mughal style, c. 1615-1620, Jagdish and Kamala Mittal Museum, Hyderabad

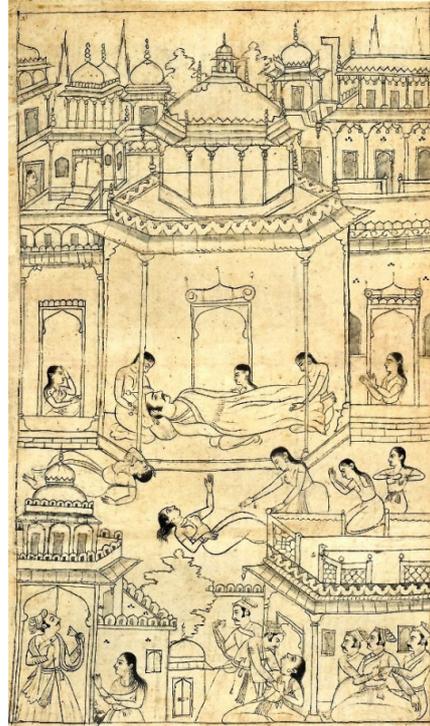


Fig. 4.31 Death of Dasaratha, Chamba, c. 1630-1640, Jagdish and Kamala Mittal Museum, Hyderabad



Fig. 4.32 Posthumous portrait of Akbar holding a falcon, Chamba, c. 1655-60, Accession Number 1195, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig. 4.33 Posthumous portrait of Akbar holding a falcon, Mughal, c. 17<sup>th</sup> century, 28.2 x 21.5 cm, Accession Number 15.41, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Another case of a Popular Mughal painting being reproduced by a local artist at Chamba is in the form of the **Saptirishi** painting at the Chandigarh Museum (Fig. 4.34), dateable to c. 1660. The painting depicts the seven sages seated around a small pile of smouldering ash, performing austerities. This painting is strikingly similar to a Chamba painting dateable to around 1680 CE (Fig. 4.35), where it apparently appears as the reinterpretation of the former by a local artist. While the provenance of the Popular Mughal painting is uncertain, it could be theorised that either the Chamba painter had seen the previous painting and decided to reproduce it, or he was a descendant of the same painter family responsible for the Popular Mughal painting.

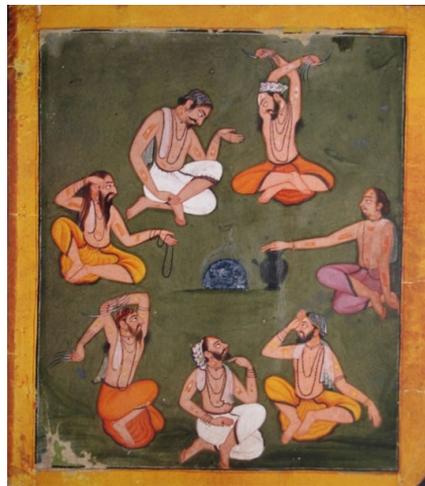


Fig. 4.34 Saptarishi, the Seven Sages, Chamba, c. 1660, Accession Number 1352, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

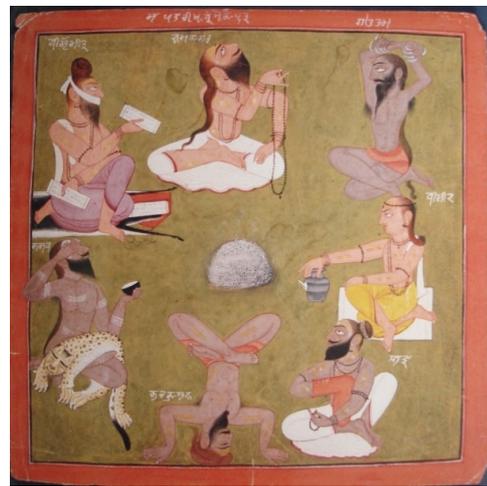


Fig. 4.35 Saptarishi, the Seven Sages, Chamba, c. 1680, Accession Number 1343, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

A **Jharokha portrait of Prithvi Singh** (Fig. 4.36) at the Chandigarh Museum in my opinion deserves attention. The middle-aged Raja, now sporting a grey beard, sits by a window holding a flower-bud in his hand. The sensitively rendered portrait must have been recorded during the last phase of his reign and is datable to c. 1660-1664. Although old, Prithvi Singh does not appear frail, and his gaze is as intense as in the earlier likenesses. The stylistic mannerisms of this artist include bold eyes, gentle eyelashes, soft rendering of facial lines, and delicate fingers. He also applies a thin wash of colour below the eyes to highlight facial contours.

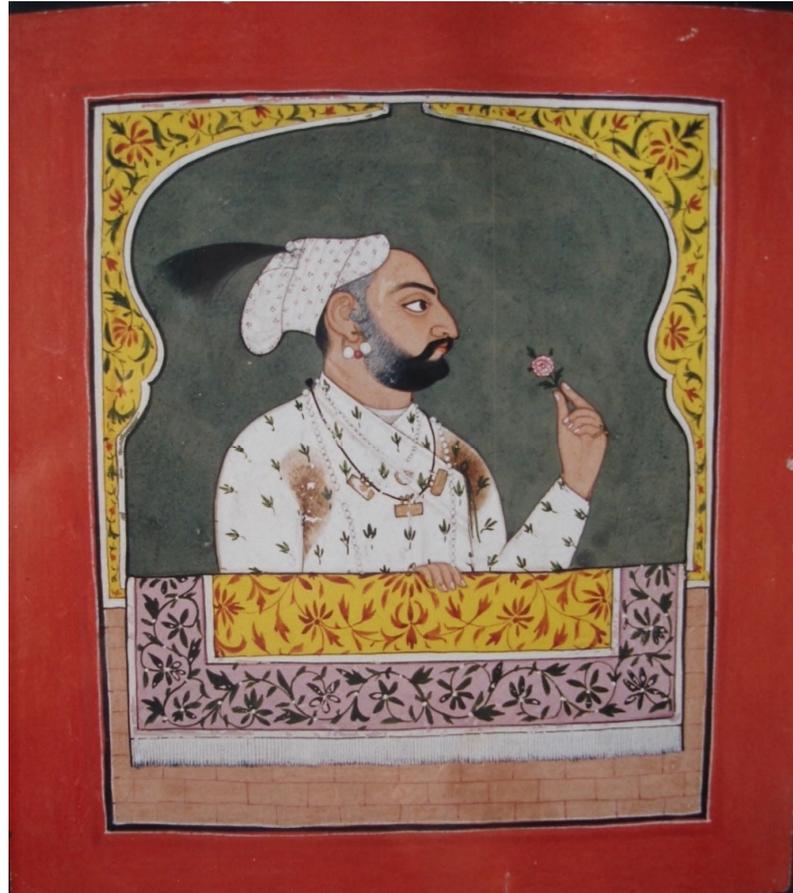


Fig. 4.36 Jharokha portrait of Raja Prithvi Singh of Chamba (r. 1641—64), Chamba, c. 1660-64, Accession Number 1219, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

A study of paintings dateable to the early half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that have surfaced in Chamba reveal to be continuing the style discussed above, which leads to the deduction that the 17<sup>th</sup> century style was instituted as a workshop by the artist clan that continued working in this manner.

Based on the paintings dateable to the reign of Prithvi Singh, I infer that this period marked the firm establishment of Chamba as a leading school of painting. Prithvi Singh's reign witnessed the migration of painters from different backgrounds – while a branch of Mandi painters certainly seems to have arrived at Chamba following his reconciliation of power in 1641 CE, his cordial relationship with Shah Jahan was also instrumental in the migration of Popular Mughal painters to Chamba. I also observed the continuation of visual sensibilities in vogue during the reign of Balabhadra Varmana, indicating that Prithvi Singh extended support to painters who had already settled in Chamba prior to his ascension.

### 4.2.3 Chattar Singh (r. 1664—1690)

Raja Prithvi Singh died in the year 1664 CE at the age of 45 and was succeeded by his son Chattar Singh (r. 1664—1690). A large number of paintings belonging to his reign would only suggest that Chamba witnessed a dramatic surge in the production of paintings. This surge indicates that Chattar Singh was an extravagant patron, supporting production of manuscripts in grand scale during his reign. My study reveals that several portraits were recorded in this period, with a number of court portraits showcasing Chattar Singh in the company of his seven brothers, the likenesses of almost all of them have been identified (Fig. 4.37).

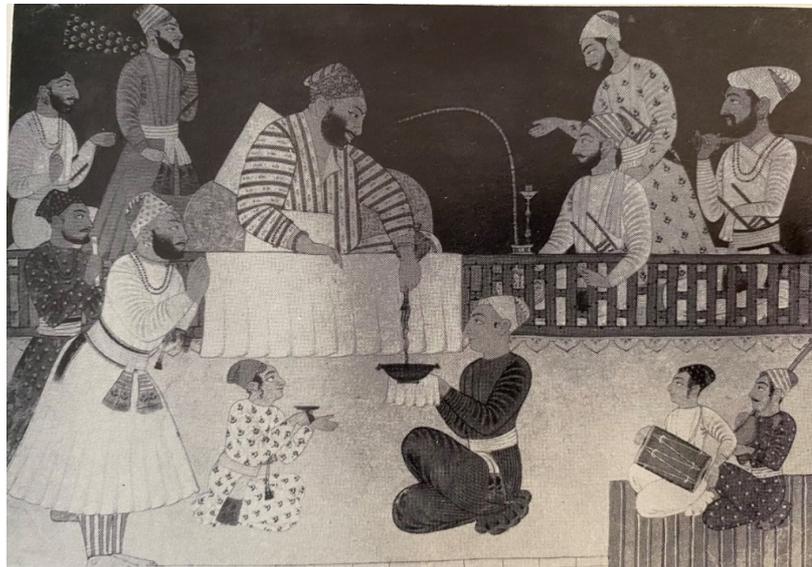


Fig. 4.37 Raja Chattar Singh in the company of his Seven Brothers, Chamba, c. 1680, National Museum, New Delhi

Chattar Singh's aggressive expansion of the kingdom, defiance of the Mughal emperor and financial affluence of Chamba during his reign further laid the ground for artist migration into Chamba from the neighbouring states of Nurpur and Basohli, hence synthesising many more pictorial elements into the already developing painting tradition. I have observed that around eight stylistic sensibilities can be marked out in Chamba during the reign of Chattar Singh, in the last quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This could only be attributed to the migration of new painter guilds to Chamba during this

Raja's reign.<sup>163</sup> It has come to my observation that Chattar Singh emerges as a regional power, which is revealed by a number of portraits of neighbouring kings who evidently had spent time in Chamba. These portraits can be attributed to the various Chamba hands.

For example, an inscribed likeness of Raja Bikram Singh of Guler (r. 1660—75) rendered by a painter at Chattar Singh's court has come to light (Fig. 4.38). The Takri inscription on the top border identifies the subject as 'Guleria Raja Bikram Singh' (Raja Bikram Singh of Guler). The painter who has recorded Bikram Singh's likeness seems to have a mannerism of drawing scowled eyebrows as seen in the faces of both the Raja and his attendant. The later Guler portraits, albeit highly naturalistic in nature, also depict Bikram Singh with the same eyebrow pattern. It could only mean, as I interpret, that the Chamba portrait of Bikram Singh became the prototype for his posthumous portraits once a painting atelier was established at Guler (Fig. 4.39).



Fig. 4.38 Raja Bikram Singh of Guler (r. 1661–75) Smoking a Hookah, Chamba, c. 1670, 21.7 x 28.8 cm, Accession No. 2018.89, Cleveland Museum of Art

<sup>163</sup> Stylistic analysis is elaborated in Chapter 7



Fig. 4.39 Posthumous portrait of Raja Bikram Singh of Guler (r. 1661–75), Guler, 18<sup>th</sup> century, 39.1 x 29 cm, Accession No. 15.38, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

In building and adding to the chronology, I would like to add the following three paintings. A portrait of Raja Bikram Singh of Guler (c. 1670) can be attributed to Chamba, as it is painted in the style of the ‘Bharat Kala Bhavan’ Dasavatara (Fig 4.40). A portrait of Bikram Singh’s son Raja Raj Singh (r. 1675—95) is also rendered by a painter active in the court of Chattar Singh (Fig. 4.41). Another inscribed portrait study of Chattar Singh’s brothers (c. 1680) labelling them as Mian Jai Singh and Mian Shakat Singh intriguingly shows a young Raj Singh in the study hinting that he was present at Chamba at the time of the drawing (Fig. 4.42).

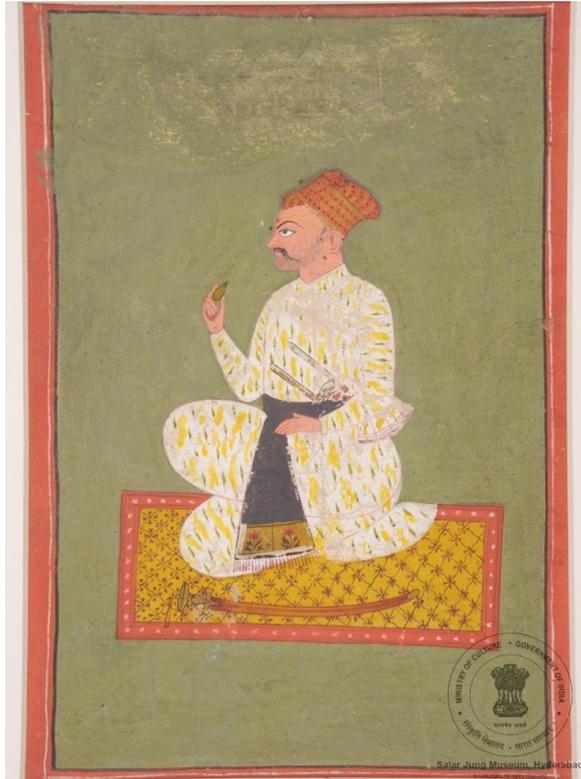


Fig. 4.40 Raja Bikram Singh of Guler (r. 1661–75), Chamba, c. 1670, 39.1 x 29 cm, Accession No. ACQ-78-9, Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad

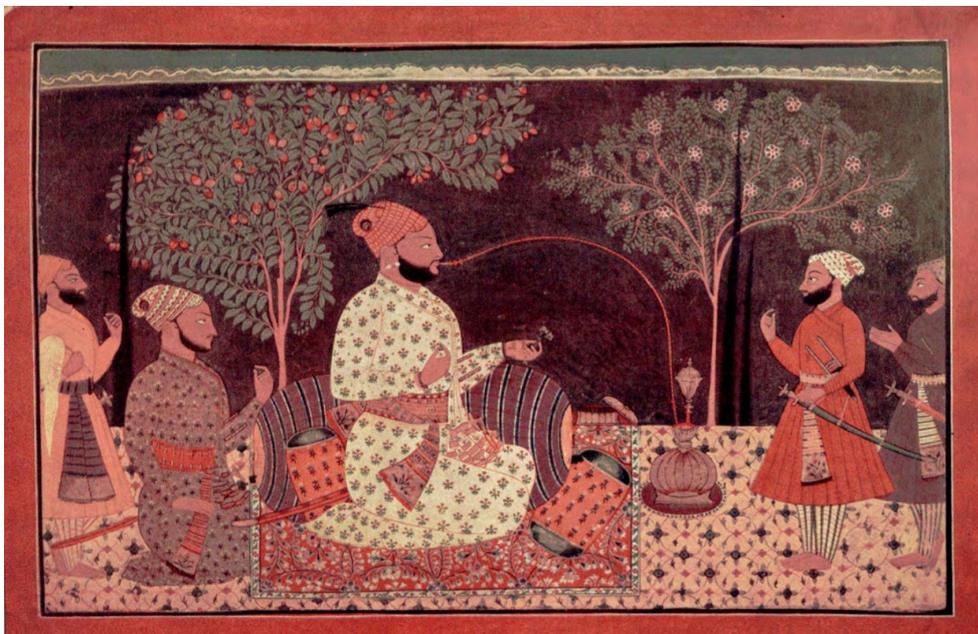


Fig. 4.41 Raja Raj Singh of Guler (r. 1675–95) Smoking a Hookah, Chamba, c. 1685, 31.75 x 21.5 cm, National Museum, New Delhi



Fig. 4.42 Portrait Studies of Wazir Mian Jai Singh of Chamba, his brother Mian Shakat Singh and Raja Raj Singh of Guler, Chamba, c. 1680, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba

What emerges as popular subject-matter during the reign of Chattar Singh is portraiture, Ragamala, Dasavatara, and Bhagavata Purana. However, most of these paintings are in varying hands, which leads to an opinion that Chattar Singh was not the only patron, but his seven brothers also commissioned personal sets for themselves.

Building up the painting activity of the reign of Chattar Singh, I would like to attribute a **Parijata-Harana** set (Fig. 4.43) and a **Svapna Darpana** manuscript (Fig. 4.44) to this period. However, the painting set belonging to this period that deserves utmost attention is the enigmatic '**Bathu**' set, which gets its name from the Bathu shrine, which is now submerged in a water reservoir,

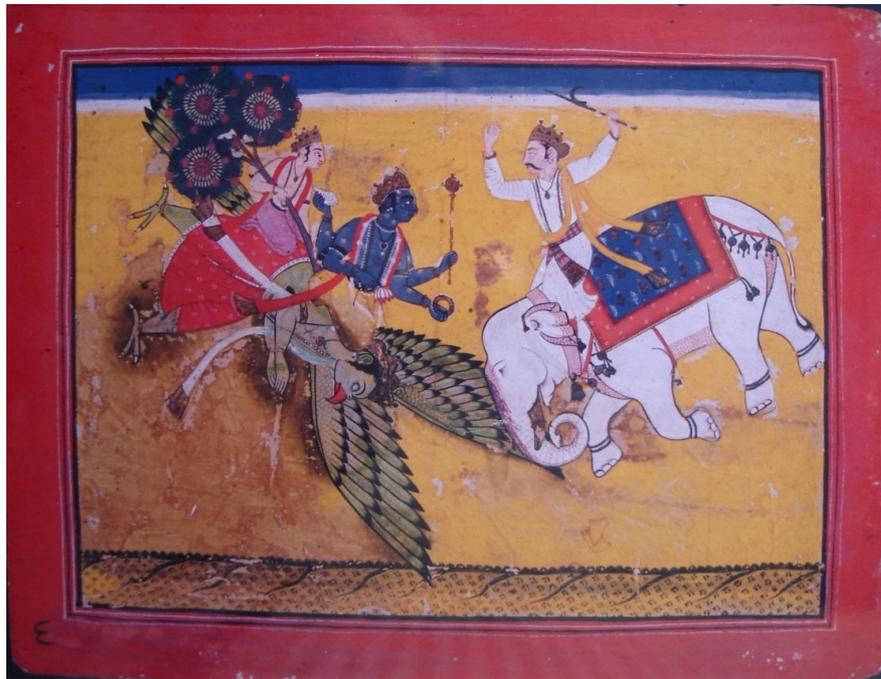


Fig. 4.43 Krishna Battles Indra, from a Parijata Harana set, Chamba, c. 1690, Accession No. 1290, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

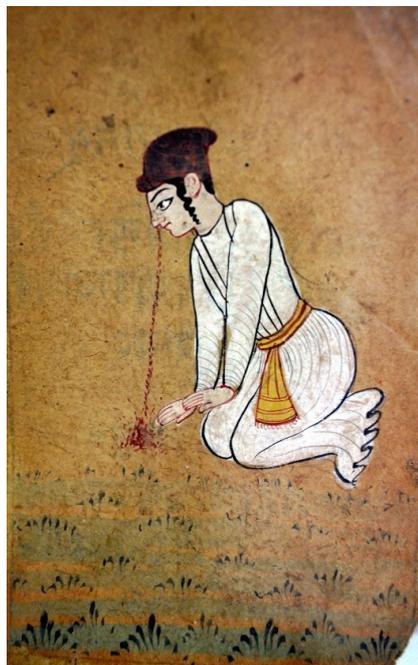


Fig. 4.44 Page from a Svapna Darpana manuscript, Chamba, c. 1690, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba

Bathu shrine was originally located within the territories of Guler and emerged as an offshoot of the Vaishnava math at Pindori, Gurdaspur. The establishment of the Bathu *gaddi* took place during the tenure of Mahant Ramdasji of Pindori, who was the sixth successor from Bhagwanji and lived during the reign of Jahangir. According to tradition, Mian Bishan Singh of Guler invited Ramdasji to settle in Bathu permanently, but Ramdasji returned to Pindori and appointed his disciple Vishnudas as the head of the Bathu *gaddi*.<sup>164</sup> Despite this, reverence for Bhagwandasji and Ramdasji persisted at the shrine, evidence of which is the **Bathu set**, which was discovered here that may have been donated by a patron to the *gaddi*.

The Bathu set, which has now been dispersed, was once examined by Usha Bhatia, who described it as a compilation of texts bound into a single volume but written at different times and by different hands.<sup>165</sup> Among these texts are poems by Vaishnava *bhaktas* such as Kabir, Ramdas, and Namadeva, and a significant portion of the compositions comprises the teachings of Narainji.

The illustrations of the Bathu set depict themes related to Dasavatara and the lives of Bhagwandasji and Narainji. It is believed that these paintings were commissioned in Guler during the late 17th century and were offered at the shrine by Bishan Singh. However, my analysis of the style and typology suggests that the paintings were more likely commissioned by the Chamba court/patron as early as c. 1665, during the reign of Raja Chattar Singh.

The stylistic examination of the Bathu manuscript paintings indicates that they were likely created by a novice artist working in the same workshop responsible for the 'Bharat Kala Bhawan' Dasavatara set of Balabhadra Varmana (r. 1589—1613/1621—1641). The workshop's distinctive style includes certain features observed in the depiction of facial characteristics, such as a slanted forehead, a short and stout nose, thin lips, a round but small chin that extends to the neck. In the female figures, the back of the head is rendered in a conical manner with a slight curve at the centre. The

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<sup>164</sup> Bhatia, Usha. 1995. "Rediscovery of the Dispersed Bathu Manuscript." In *Indian Painting: Essays in Honour of Karl J. Khandalavala*, edited by B. N. Goswamy. Lalit Kala Akademi, 53.

<sup>165</sup> Bhatia, U. 1995. "Rediscovery of the Dispersed Bathu Manuscript." In *Indian Painting: Essays in Honour of Karl J. Khandalavala*, 54.

eyebrows are plumed and angularly arched, while the eyes are boldly represented with minimal detailing. Both upper and lower lashes are depicted in black, and the outline is delineated in dark crimson. The faces lack a sense of depth as there is little emphasis on modelling and shading.

From a physiognomic perspective, the figures in these paintings have short torsos and elongated lower halves. The torsos are depicted in a front-facing manner, while the faces are rendered in a profile view. Male physiognomies are characterized by round shoulders, a slender waist, slender limbs, and small palms with long fingers. On the other hand, the female figures appear slender, with a delicate neck, narrow shoulders, slim waist, and hands depicted with long and graceful fingers.<sup>166</sup>

Regarding the stylistic evolution of this workshop, the Bathu manuscript occupies an intermediate position between the 'Bharat Kala Bhawan' Dasavatara set (c. 1635-40) and the Cleveland Vishnu painting dating to approximately 1690 CE.

Typologically, the Bathu manuscript reaffirms the iconographic and compositional elements found in the 'Bharat Kala Bhawan Dasavatara' set, while also establishing the foundation for the depiction of Bhagwandasji and Naraindasji in a distinct Chamba style. One painting from the Bathu set, currently housed in the Philadelphia Museum, portrays Bhagwanji and Narainji as a composite figure seated on a double lotus (Fig. 4.45). This visual motif is recurrent in various paintings from the Bathu manuscript and continues to appear in the Chamba paintings for the course of a century (Fig. 4.46). In my opinion, portrayal of the Vaishnavite saints as conjoined in these paintings likely symbolizes their union as a singular entity.<sup>167</sup>

Furthermore, the Bathu manuscript contains a portrait of a Raja offering flowers to Bhagwanji and Narainji (Fig. 4.47). An inscription in Devanagari script on the top border indicates the name 'Raja Dalip Singh ji' (Raja Dalip Singh of Guler<sup>168</sup>). However, this identification appears to be a later addition and is likely incorrect for

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<sup>166</sup> The stylistic aspect of this workshop is detailed in 7.1.3

<sup>167</sup> Typology and iconography of Chamba Dasavatara paintings and the two Vaishnavite saints is detailed in Chapter 5. Comparative study of the two Vaishnavite saints with the hero-stones at Chamba is done in 6.1

<sup>168</sup> Reigned 1695–1741

several reasons. Firstly, Dalip Singh was born in 1688 CE, while the creation of this manuscript predates 1665. Secondly, the depicted Raja is adorned in clothing that was fashionable during the reign of Shah Jahan (r. 1627—58). These inconsistencies strongly suggest that the inscription was added at a later time and is inaccurate.



Fig. 4.45 Composite Portrait of Saints Bhagwanji and Narainji, Chamba, c. 1665-70, 28.6 × 21.3 cm, Accession No. 1994-148-511, Philadelphia Museum of Art



Fig. 4.46 Composite Portrait of Saints Bhagwanji and Narainji, Chamba, c. 1690, 16.3 x 25.3 cm Accession No. 1228, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig. 4.47 Raja Offering Flowers to Bhagwanji and Narainji, identified to be Raja Prithvi Singh of Chamba (r. 1641—1664), Provenance unknown

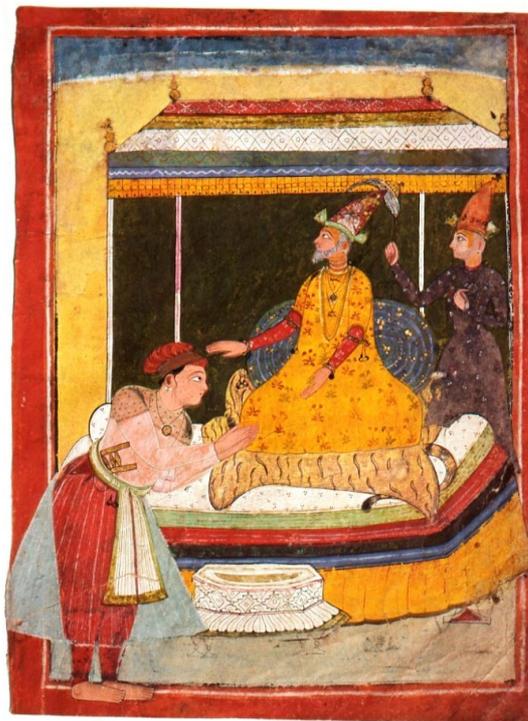


Fig. 4.48 Prince Paying Obeisance to Narainji, identified to be young Raja Chattar Singh of Chamba (r. 1664—1690), Museum Rietberg, Zurich

On the other hand, a comparative analysis of this portrait with that of Raja Prithvi Singh of Chamba (r. 1641—64) (Fig. 4.24) reveals a striking resemblance and suggests that both likenesses depict the same individual, with the Bathu portrait showing him slightly older. The attire in the Bathu portrait also resembles that of Prithvi Singh in the Shah Jahan portrait, which would be a natural pictorial attribute for Prithvi Singh.

Yet another portrait in the Bathu set features a young princeling bowing to Narainji, currently housed in Museum Rietberg, Zurich (Fig. 4.48). In this painting, Narainji is depicted as older, sporting a grey beard, and Bhagwanji is absent, most certainly indicating his demise and marking the passage of time between the two portraits. The tall and muscular prince with broad shoulders in this painting bears a resemblance to the later likeness of Raja Chattar Singh of Chamba (r. 1664—1690) portrayed in Fig. 4.49.

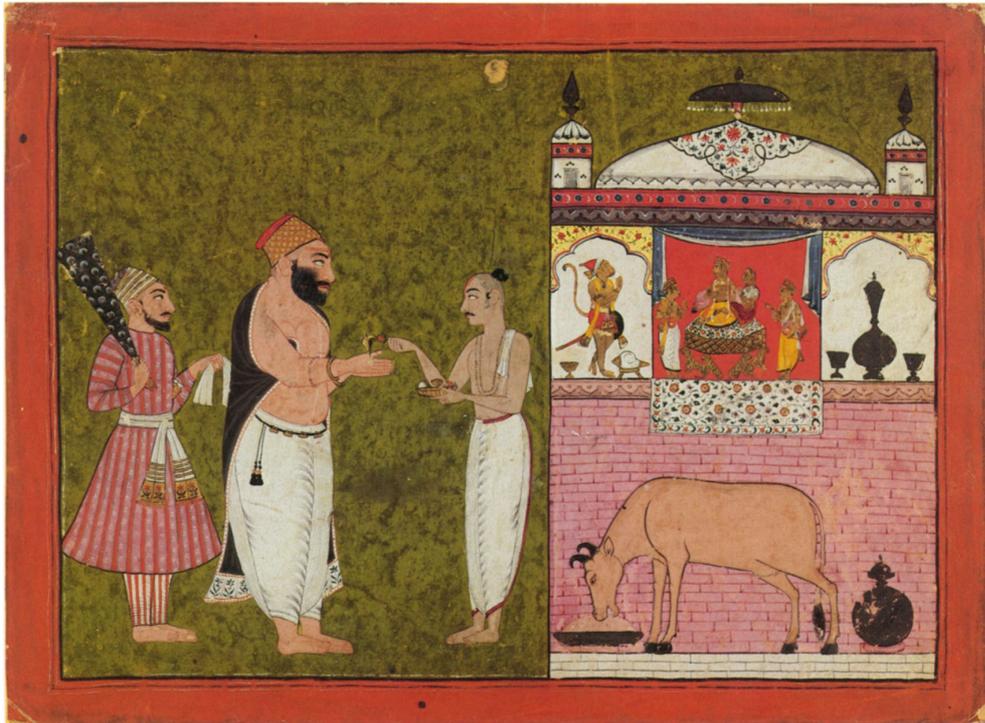


Fig. 4.49 Raja Chattar Singh Praying at a Rama Shrine, Chamba, c. 1680, 21.2 x 28.2 cm, Accession No. RVI 1250 Museum Rietberg, Zurich

Upon establishing the Chamba connection of the set, it becomes crucial to determine its dating. The two portraits play a pivotal role in this regard. The depiction of Raja Chattar Singh alone in the second portrait suggests that he had already succeeded his father and ascended the Chamba throne. Furthermore, the grey beard of Narainji indicates that some time has elapsed since the portrait of Prithvi Singh (d. 1664). Based on these observations, I have dated the set to the early years of Raja Chattar Singh's reign, who became the ruler in 1664, making the set likely datable to around 1665.

Regarding the transfer of the Bathu set from Chamba to Guler, two plausible propositions have been considered by me. The first possibility is that the set was presented as an offering to the Bathu shrine by a Raja of Chamba who visited the shrine to pay his respects. In this scenario, the set would have been a gesture of reverence and devotion from the ruler of Chamba.

The second proposition suggests that the Bathu set might have been taken from Chamba to Guler by either Raja Bikram Singh of Guler (r. 1660—75) or his son, the future Raja Raj Singh (r. 1675—95). This assumption is based on the fact that both Raja Bikram Singh and his son spent a significant amount of time at the Chamba court, which is evidenced by the numerous portraits of them that were created in Chamba.

In either case, the transfer of the Bathu set from Chamba to Guler could have been a result of a meaningful connection between the two regions, whether through acts of homage and offering or through interactions and exchanges between rulers and courts.

Studying the contents of the set, I have come to conclude that the paintings follow no sequence and have been stitched together without a particular order in mind. However, it would be appropriate to consider the Ganesha and Kartikeya image to be the beginning of the Bathu manuscript (Fig. 4.50).



Fig. 4.50 Ganesha and Kartikeya, from the Bathu set, Chamba, c. 1665, 27.5 x 19.5 cm, auctioned by Christie's on 10 October 2014, lot 14

A giant Ganesha is portrayed with a deep mauve head and saffron body, seated on a double lotus flower, enjoying a bowl of Modaka. His brother Kartikeya stands beside him, folding his hands in devotion. Ganesha's iconography includes a mace, a bowl of Modaka, and a tusk in his hands, while Kartikeya is depicted as a Rajput noble adorned in a Mughal *jama* and a gold crown. Ganesha is intentionally made larger than Kartikeya, symbolizing his hierarchical dominance over his brother. The background is rendered in monochromatic cyan, possibly to replicate the Mughal malachite backdrop, and a white curved band separates the earth from the sky, a characteristic element of early Chamba paintings.

Another painting in the set depicts the Descent of Ganga (Fig. 4.51), with an ashen Shiva seated on Mount Kailasha, releasing a stream of water from his hair. Parvati stands beside him, holding a parasol, and Bhagiratha, similar in appearance to Kartikeya from the previous painting, is also present. Shiva's bull, Nandi, looks at him in awe while Shiva himself gazes meditatively into the distance. The water of Ganga flows in a basket-weave pattern, resembling the Bharat Kala Bhawan Kurma Avatara image (Fig. 4.18).



Fig. 4.51 Descent of Ganga, from the Bathu set, Chamba, c. 1665,  
26.35 x 18.73 cm, Accession No. M.86.345.6, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Following this, there is a painting of Devi adored by Brahma (Fig. 4.52). The Devi is seated on a throne, wearing a gold crown and a halo, while Brahma sits nearby with folded hands in veneration. The manner in which the Devi holds the bell is comparable

to another Devi painting as discussed earlier, from the Philadelphia Museum (Fig. 4.28).



Fig. 4.52 Devi adored by Brahma, from the Bathu set, Chamba, c. 1665, Provenance unknown

The next section showcases four incarnations of Vishnu, beginning with the Matsya Avatara (fish incarnation) (Fig. 4.53), where Vishnu emerges from the jaws of a giant fish, surrounded by four Vedas that he rescued from the belly of Shankhasura. Varaha lifting Bhudevi on his tusks is depicted heroically in the next painting (Fig. 4.54), with a deer-headed Hiranyaksha about to fall. In the Narasimha painting (Fig. 4.55), the norm of depicting Narasimha in the centre of the composition with Prahlada and Hiranyakashipu's wife flanking him is followed. The last painting of the Dasavatara section shows Parasurama battling Sahastrabahu (Fig. 4.56), depicting Parasurama wielding his axe to strike Sahastrabahu, with many of his arms lying lifeless at his feet.



Fig. 4.53 Matsya Avatara, from the Bathu set, Chamba, c. 1665, 27.3 x 19.5 cm, auctioned by Bonhams on 8 April 2014, lot 280

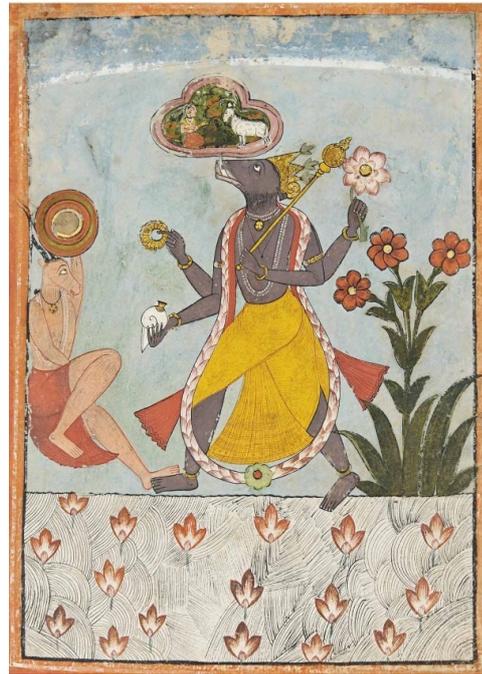


Fig. 4.54 Varaha Avatara, from the Bathu set, Chamba, c. 1665, 27.5 x 19.5 cm, auctioned by Christie's on 10 October 2014, lot 14



Fig. 4.55 Narasimha Avatara, from the Bathu set, Chamba, c. 1665, Provenance unknown



Fig. 4.56 Parasurama Avatara, from the Bathu set, Chamba, c. 1665, Provenance unknown

Immediately following from the Dasavatara section, the Bathu set proceeds to depict the legend of Narainji, a revered sage celebrated in the hill-states for his miraculous survival of Jahangir's ordeal by liquor<sup>169</sup>. In one painting, Narainji and his teacher Bhagwanji are shown sitting on a tiger hide (Fig. 4.57). Bhagwanji is depicted as larger than Narainji, indicating his seniority. Both sages wear conical caps, and their attendants wear similar headgear in return. Bhagwanji's older age is emphasized by his grey beard.



Fig. 4.57 Bhagwanji and Narainji seated on Tiger Hide, from the Bathu set, Chamba, c. 1665, National Museum, New Delhi

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<sup>169</sup> Elaborated in detail in 5.8

Another painting from the set portrays the ordeal by liquor that took place at Nurpur (Fig. 4.58). According to legend, Emperor Jahangir, during his visit to the hills, was informed about the extraordinary self-control abilities of the Vaishnavite saints. Intrigued and wanting to test their claims, Jahangir subjected Narainji to an ordeal by liquor, which the saint miraculously survived. This incident became a celebrated legend<sup>170</sup> among the local chieftains as it symbolized their spiritual superiority over their imperial overlord.



Fig. 4.58 Ordeal of Narainji, from the Bathu set, Chamba, c. 1665, Provenance unknown.

In this painting illustrating the ordeal, Bhagwanji and Narainji are seated on two pedestals, supported by heavy bolsters. Jahangir administers the liquor from a balcony, while a Muslim attendant of Jahangir, recognizable by his full beard, Turkish coat, and three-quarterly face, brings a bowl near Narainji's mouth. Later copies of this episode with compositionally similar depictions are found in Chamba.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>170</sup> It is believed that Janardan Varmana, the ruler of Chamba, sent his brother Bishambar to meet Jahangir at Kangra. It is possible that Bishambar was present at the ordeal and later recounted the story at the Chamba court. Even if this particular possibility is unlikely, the legend would undoubtedly have reached the court of Chamba, given its significance.

<sup>171</sup> Comparative analysis of later reproductions of this episode is discussed in 5.8

The paintings in the Bathu set capture a significant historical and cultural event, immortalizing the legend of Bhagwanji and Narainji and their remarkable ability to endure the ordeal by liquor, which became a symbol of spiritual authority over imperial power in the local hill-states. These paintings offer valuable insights into Chamba painting style and iconography, with similarities and distinctions observed across different depictions. The Bathu set provides a rich visual narrative and serves as a significant cultural and historical artifact. Moreover, it represents a visual narrative that delves into various aspects of Hindu mythology and Vaishnavite saints. It presents a diverse range of subjects, including the Dasavatara (ten avatars of Vishnu), the legend of Bhagwanji and Narainji, various Devi and Shiva themed paintings. This diversity adds to its cultural significance and showcases social and religious atmosphere of Chamba.

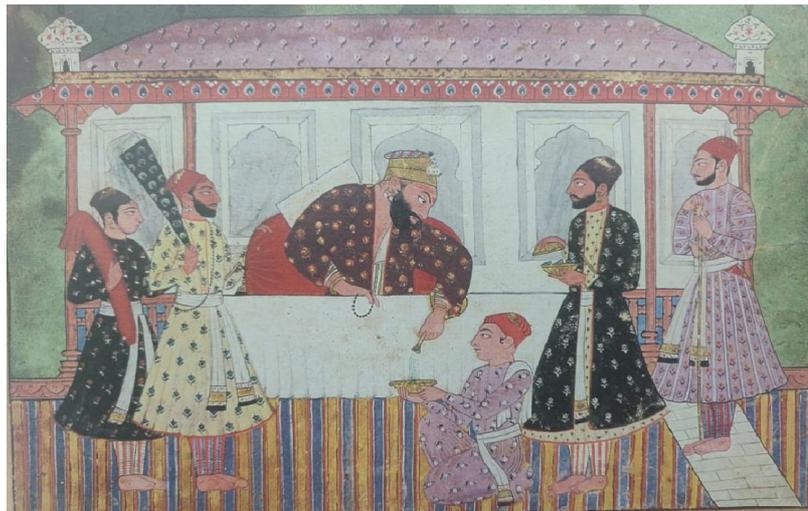


Fig. 4.59 Raja Chattar Singh of Chamba (r. 1664—90) Pouring Wine from a Decanter, Chamba, c. 1680, 17.6 x 24.8 cm, National Museum, New Delhi

From the subject-matter popular in Chamba during the reign of Chattar Singh, I infer that he, other than being an able statesman and a military commander, was also a learned man, an ardent devotee of Vishnu, and a connoisseur of music. In my understanding, the Raja also possessed a flair to be recorded in unconventional situations, in contrast to the typical hookah or jharokha portraits. Number of portraits of Chattar Singh depicts him in a private setting with his brothers, pouring wine from a decanter (Fig. 4.59), etc.

A portrait of Raja Chattar Singh, identified by me in the repository of the Cleveland Museum of Art, is a watershed moment in the history of Chamba painting, as it symbolises the shift of power from Chattar Singh to his son Udai Singh. Previously identified as a Mankot painting of a prince smoking hookah (Fig. 4.60), the painting depicts a noble clad in a white *jama* and a plumed cap in the company of another man and an adolescent of princely backgrounds. Both the personalities adorn similar looking clothing – white *jama* with a red *patka* shash around the waist – suggestive of a similar rank or background. The placement of their swords next to one another implies that the noble and the older man in white might be related, or at least are in amicable terms.

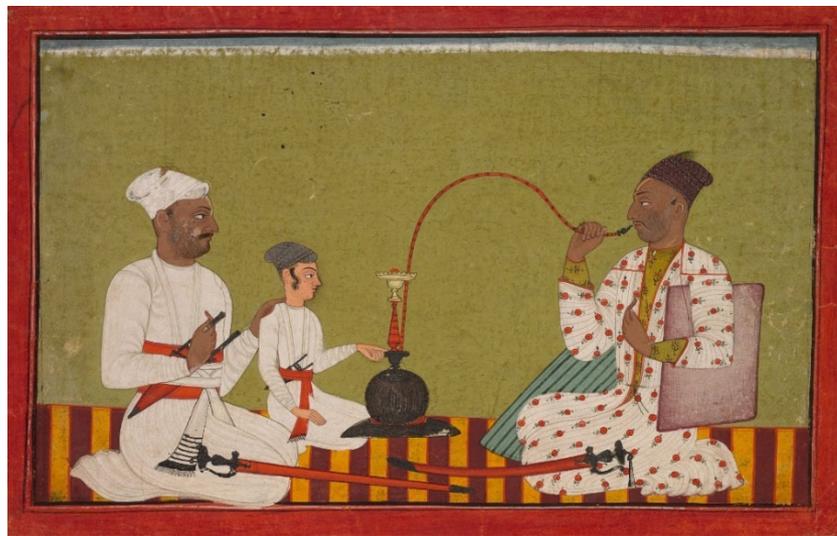


Fig. 4.60 Raja Chattar Singh of Chamba with Wazir Jai Singh and [future Raja] Udai Singh, Chamba, c. 1690, 20.3 x 31 cm, Accession No. 1960.47, Cleveland Museum of Art

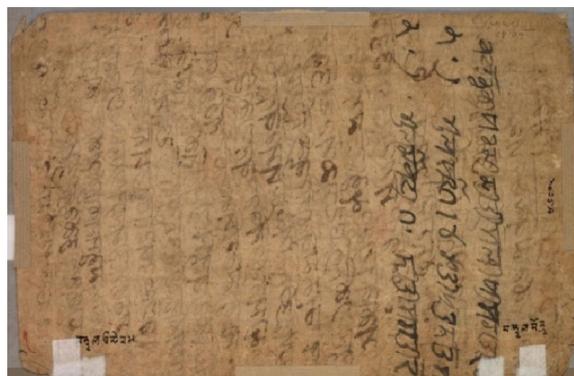


Fig. 4.61 Verso of Fig. 4.60. Inscription in bottom-left reads *chambial udai ram* (Udai Ram of Chamba) and bottom-right reads *chambial satru* (Shatru/Chattar of Chamba)

Two Takri inscriptions in the verso are discovered by me (Fig. 4.61), with one reading ‘*chambial satru*’ (Shatru<sup>172</sup> of Chamba) while the other reads ‘*chambial udai ram*’ (Udai Ram of Chamba). The appearance of the noble smoking hookah of Fig. 4.60 is comparable to an inscribed portrait of Raja Chattar Singh in the Cleveland Museum of Art (Fig. 4.62) where he is identified through Persian and Takri inscriptions written on the top. Hence it leaves no doubt that the noble in Fig. 4.60 is none other than Raja Chattar Singh of Chamba. In a similar fashion, I have concluded that the inscription *chambial udai ram* would refer to Chattar Singh’s son and successor Udai Singh, who was a juvenile at the time of succession. In my view, the noble gently placing his hand on the shoulder is none other than Mian Jai Singh, Chattar Singh’s younger brother and regent to Raja Udai Singh. The similarity in their costumes would suggest that the two have shared the administrative and political reigns of Chamba after Chattar Singh’s demise.



Fig. 4.62 Raja Chattar Singh of Chamba Smoking a Hookah, Chamba, c. 1690, 19.7 x 16.4 cm, Accession Number 2018.109, Cleveland Museum of Art

<sup>172</sup> Chattar Singh is mentioned as Shatru Singh in the *vamsavali* of Chamba state

#### 4.2.4 Udai Singh (1690—1720)

In my view, Raja Udai Singh (r. 1690—1720) remains the most significant personality for studying the tradition of **portraiture** not only in Chamba, but in the entire region of the North-Western Himalayas, as he is the only 17<sup>th</sup>-century Pahari Raja whose likeness has been documented from an early age. Udai Singh became the youngest patron of Pahari painting when he ascended the Chamba throne in 1690 CE as a minor, and the young Raja demonstrated an unusual affinity for this court art, as implied by his continuous patronage to painting during his lifetime.<sup>173</sup> The enthronement of Udai Singh in 1690 CE presents a unique circumstance, as he was a minor, not exceeding eight years of age. This fact renders him improbable for having cultivated a substantial affinity for patronising painters. Nevertheless, a substantial body of paintings have come to my attention that are attributable to the early reign of Udai Singh. In light of this, I have inferred a compelling possibility that this young Raja could not have been the only patron, instead, it is conceivable that such endeavours were orchestrated by his father Chattar Singh's seven brother, individuals to whom I have already established an inclination for patronising artists during Chattar Singh's reign. This conjecture substantiates the notion that the interest of the Chamba nobility in patronising artists retained its vitality in Udai Singh's reign, reaffirming the notion that Raja was not the only patron at Chamba.

A selection of portraits of Udai Singh from his adolescence to his youth to his assassination in 1720 demonstrate not only the evolution of the Raja's appearance, but also the various stages in the development of Chamba painting during the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially the suggestion that different hands were active in Chamba simultaneously. The change in Udai Singh's physical appearance from childhood to the end of his life illustrates his transition from a popular and idolised Raja to a self-indulgent and hedonistic monarch. I believe that as the portraits' dynamism is inextricably related to his private life, it is critical to study both the portraits and his personality concurrently. Albeit none of the portraits are dated, I have

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<sup>173</sup> Sharma, Sarang. "A Life in Portraits: Raja Udai Singh of Chamba (r. 1690-1720)." *Jnana Pravaha Research Journal No. XXV* (2021-2022), 51.

attempted to place them in a chronological framework with consideration to Udai Singh's changing appearance and his various stations in life.

Udai Singh's first portrait honouring his coronation is in the collection of the Allahabad Museum (Fig. 4.63). Although the image lacks an inscription identifying the person, there exist several stylistic and technical factors which led me to attribute the portrait to the young Raja. The facial types, representation of the shrubby ground, monochromatic green background, and clothing of the subject and attendant – all adhere to the painting style popular in Chamba during the reign of Raja Chattar Singh. The peacock flywhisk is symbolic of the minor's regal status, while the attendant can be recognised as Jai Singh based on his physical characteristics and those of other known paintings of the Wazir. I have arrived at the conclusion that the portrait in question (Fig. 4.63) could be Udai Singh's first likeness after ascending to the throne. The diminutive ruler stands erect, his belt tucked with a dagger and his right hand resting on a sword. Additionally, the Raja wears amulets to ward off the evil eye, as is customary among children in Chamba (personal communication with Bhuvaneshwar Sharma). The painting also indicates that patronage to the painter(s) working in this style at the court of Chattar Singh was continued in the patronage of Udai Singh.



Fig. 4.63 Young Raja Udai Singh (r. 1690—1720), Chamba, c. 1690, 19.05 x 13.35 cm, Accession No. AM-MIN-876, Allahabad Museum



Fig. 4.64 Raja Udai Singh Smoking a Hookah, Chamba, c. 1695-1700,  
Provenance unknown

The early reign of Udai Singh was notable for its economic prosperity and political stability, which produced a prosperous and expansive state. As mentioned in the previous chapter, at the beginning of his reign, people idolised the young king, who was renowned for his strong religious beliefs. However, this period was brief, as Jai Singh, his wazir and regent, died in 1696, leaving 18-year-old Udai Singh in charge of the state. The Raja began to disregard his duties to the state in favour of hedonistic pleasures, which alienated him from the populace. Wazir Jai Singh, who may have served as a paternal figure and guiding hand in the life of the young king, worked towards maintaining the Raja's allegiance to the state. His demise, however, is supposed to have led to the loss of regulatory control over Udai Singh, leaving him a weak ruler.

This is reinforced by a 1695–1700 artwork (Fig. 4.64) which shows Udai Singh as a tall and hefty youth. His long sidelocks indicate that he has not yet reached adulthood.<sup>174</sup> The Hookah pipe in the young Raja's hand indicates that he had developed a taste for smoking. The Raja's pouch-belly may indicate his drinking habits and lack of physical activity. This event marked the beginning of the Raja's descent

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<sup>174</sup> Sharma, Sarang. "A Life in Portraits: Raja Udai Singh of Chamba (r. 1690-1720)." *Jnana Pravaha Research Journal No. XXV* (2021-2022), 56.

into self-indulgence. This drawing is comparable to another portrait produced about the same time period (Fig. 4.65). Raja holds the hookah pipe in one hand and a silken handkerchief in the other, similar to the previous drawing. He also appears to be clad in the same *jama* as in Fig. 4.64. Additionally, Udai Singh is accompanied by two youthful attendants. While one faithfully holds a peacock-flywhisk behind the Raja, the other is tasked with filling the Raja's hookah, as shown by the tongs at his side. On the Raja's forehead, the Shakta religious symbols show his devotion to the Goddess.

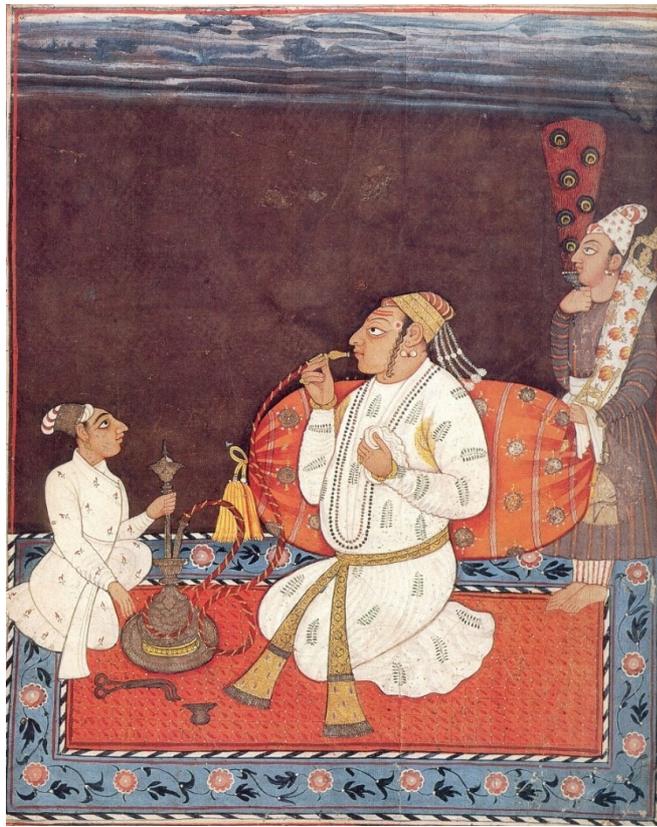


Fig. 4.65 Raja Udai Singh Smoking a Hookah, Chamba, c. 1700, 19.5 × 15.7 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Accession No. 2004-149-34

I discovered a fourth portrait of Udai Singh as an older Raja is housed in the National Museum in New Delhi (Fig. 4.66). To emphasise his kingly status, the clean-shaven chieftain is shown as being taller than his servants. A Takri inscription at the upper border identifies him as Udai Singh.



Fig. 4.66 Raja Udai Singh Smoking a Hookah, Chamba, c. 1710, National Museum, New Delhi



Fig. 4.67 Raja Udai Singh Pouring Wine from a Decanter, Chamba, c. 1720, 25.71 x 16.9 cm, Accession No. 2005.1.21, Chazen Museum

A fifth portrait of the Raja was discovered by me in the Chazen Museum, United States (Fig. 4.67), which appears to be painted in the final decade of Udai Singh's life, depicting him in his late thirties pouring wine from a decanter into a bowl held devotionally by a noble. This subject was extremely popular during Chattar Singh's

reign — Udai Singh's father — and, as mentioned previously, various paintings of Chattar Singh wearing an undone robe and pouring wine from a decanter into a bowl held by an attendant have been identified by me. As implied by his dress, the attendant in Fig. 4.67 appears to be a man of aristocratic standing and some prominence. In my opinion, the person in question could be Mian Lakshman Singh, the younger brother and Wazir of Udai Singh. Udai Singh appears to be in his mid-thirties in this painting, and in contrast to his prior depictions, the Raja now has bags under his eyes, a darker complexion, a scruffy beard, and appears to be in declining health.

Udai Singh's public and private life were turbulent during this time period. As mentioned in the Chamba *vamsavali*, he had maintained a harem of women, marrying as many as twenty-two Ranis during his lifetime, the last of whom was a 'low-born' woman, culminating into his assassination by his court.

The Government Museum and Art Gallery in Chandigarh houses the final known portrait (Fig. 4.68), where the Raja is depicted holding a falcon on his right arm while wearing a fur-trimmed green robe. In a Persian inscription on the top, the Raja is designated as "Raja Udai Singh Chambavala." An examination of the Raja's facial features in the portrait sheds light on his health. His current appearance stands in stark contrast to previous images of him as a young man. As observed by me, his shoulders appear crooked, his eyes are drooping, and his mouth is deformed. Although he is obese, a condition with which he had struggled since childhood, this portrait is a dramatic contrast to the splendour expressed in his previous likenesses.



Fig. 4.68 Raja Udai Singh Holding a Falcon, Chamba, c. 1720,  
Accession No. 2744, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

A significant aspect that emerges from the study of Raja Udai Singh's six portraits is that each portrait is painted in a completely distinct style – revealing the presence of many painters belonging to different workshops active at Chamba during the early 18th century.

The subject-matter which remained in vogue in Chamba during the reign of Chhattar Singh, continued in the patronage of Udai Singh as well, with **Ragamala** (Fig. 5.95), **Dasavatara** (Fig. 5.23c) and **Bhagavata Purana** (5.49b) as the popular subject-matter of this period. Paintings based on themes such as the **Descent of Ganga** (Fig. 5.74) and the **Ordeal by Liquor** (Fig. 5.77) were also commissioned during this period.<sup>175</sup>

#### 4.2.5 Ugar Singh (1720—35)

The reign of Ugar Singh was comparatively short but not short of controversy for a Chamba Raja. As described in the previous chapter, while Ugar Singh was popular at the beginning of his reign, he soon fell out of favour with the masses, and was assassinated in the year 1735 CE. However, in my opinion, the patronage to painting in this period remained uninterrupted, and the Raja not only continued supporting painters already settled at Chamba, but also opened avenues for novel sensibilities to be assimilated into Chamba painting, which had begun to take a relatively homogeneous and individualistic form by the first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Ugar Singh was installed at the throne of Chamba by the help of Raja Dhruv Dev of Jammu<sup>176</sup> and was married to a Jammu princess.<sup>177</sup> The political and matrimonial allegiance which was shared between Jammu and Chamba manifested in the visual language of Chamba painting, which, in my view, could be due to the arrival of an itinerant painter from Jammu to Chamba.

As evidence and to throw light on this conjecture, I would like to draw attention to a portrait of Raja Ugar Singh (c. 1730), at the Victoria and Albert Museum that is attributable to this individual (Fig. 4.69). The portrait shows a middle-aged Raja,

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<sup>175</sup> The themes and subject-matter in vogue in Chamba painting are elaborated in Chapter 5

<sup>176</sup> Hutchison, J., and Vogel, J. Ph. 1933. *History of The Panjab Hill States: Vol. I*, 311.

<sup>177</sup> Hutchison, J., and Vogel, J. Ph. 1933. *History of The Panjab Hill States: Vol. I*, 311.

sporting a grey moustache, enjoying betel leaf in the company of two courtesans. He holds a hookah pipe in his left hand and a betel leaf in the other. The Raja appears middle aged, indicating that some time has passed since his marriage to the Jammu princess in c. 1720. This is the first Chamba painting with Jammu resemblance, and I attribute it to the painter who travelled from Jammu to Chamba and set the course for a distinct change. The painting's affiliation with Jammu is highlighted by Archer due to its severely geometric structure, grey background, rectangular white terrace, rectangular striped rug, distinctive female types and typically Jammu use of floral sprigs on the *jama* and the cushion.<sup>178</sup> He also adds that the portrait is made in a style which bears no resemblance to Chamba painting of the period but is clearly in line with that of Jammu.<sup>179</sup> While I acknowledge Archer's assertion regarding the authorship of the painting by a Jammu painter, I am convinced that the said artist created the artwork specifically for the Chamba court and was actively present in Chamba for an extended duration. This conclusion is drawn from the discernible presence of similar 'Jammu' stylistic elements in subsequent paintings associated with Chamba, a connection that can be substantiated through iconographic analysis.

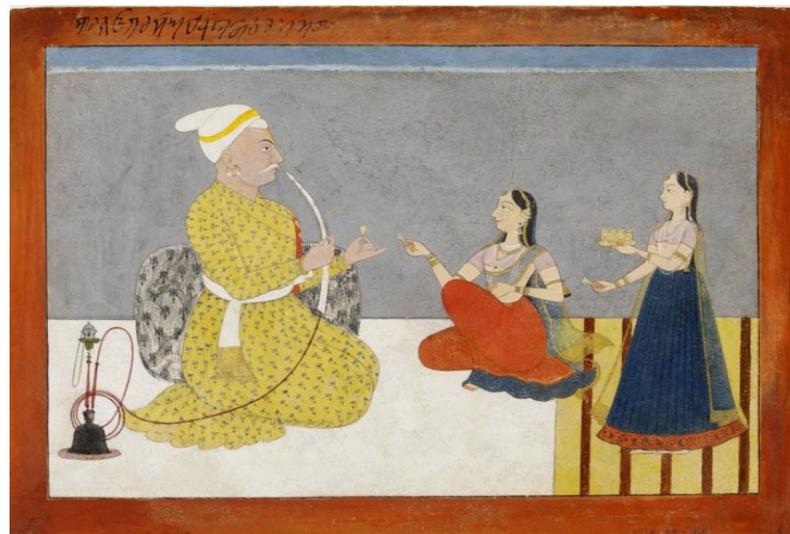


Fig. 4.69 Raja Ugar Singh of Chamba with Consorts, Jammu painter at Chamba, c. 1730, 20.5 x 29.3 cm, Accession No. IS.182-1951, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

<sup>178</sup> Archer, W.G., *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, Vol I, 192

<sup>179</sup> Archer, W.G., *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, Vol I, 192



Fig. 4.70 Dana-Lila: Taking of the Toll, Chamba, c. 1730, 20.95 x 16.51 cm, Accession No. AM-MIN-711, Allahabad Museum

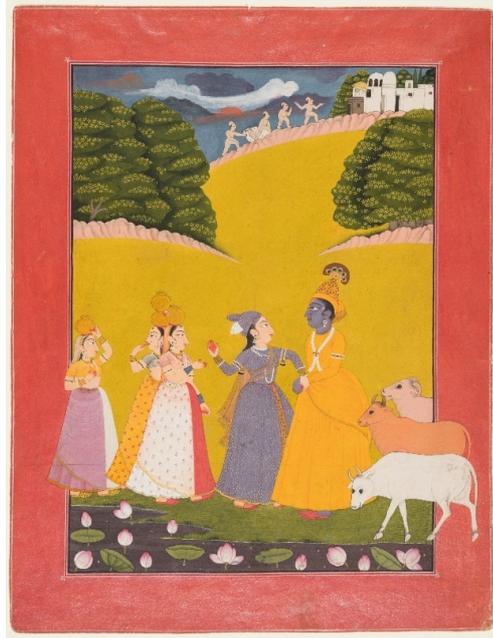


Fig. 4.71 Dana-Lila: Taking of the Toll, Chamba, c. 1730-40, 26.2 x 19.9 cm, Accession No. 2018.86, Cleveland Museum of Art

A sketch which is based on the theme of ‘Dana-Lila’<sup>180</sup> (Fig. 4.70), at the Allahabad Museum, is likely attributable to an artist of this workshop due to characteristics, such as – slanted forehead, arched eyebrows, elongated eyes, long nose with a round tip, thin lips, round chin, short and petite neck, narrow shoulders, slender limbs, broad bracelets, armbands with pom-poms, short torso supported on a slender lower half, suggesting the work of a Jammu hand.

I have identified a painting based on the above sketch in the Cleveland Museum of Art<sup>181</sup> (Fig. 4.71). Though based on the sketch by the Jammu artist, the pictorial elements in this painting establish this work to have been done at Chamba by a local artist. Hence, I assume, by 1730 CE, the Jammu sensibilities enter the Chamba canon and become part of the Chamba style.

<sup>180</sup> Dateable to c. 1730

<sup>181</sup> Dateable to around 1730-40

Contemporary to the reign of Raja Ugar Singh, commissioning of the murals of **Shakti Dehra temple** is also taking place, which is nine kilometres from the Chamba town. Although no date of the construction of the temple has come to light – neither in copper-plate charters nor inscriptions on the temple – the style and visual quality of the murals on the circumambulatory path suggests that the temple must have been constructed in the third decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (c. 1720-1730). The temple is dedicated to the Goddess Durga and is the family shrine of the Barotra family, a prominent local family having historical ties with the Chamba court. The family maintains that the temple was constructed by one of their ancestors, symbolising the financial affluence and political influence of the family in state affairs.

Through this example, one can perhaps discern that nobility, apart from the kings, were also patronising artists. Nobility of Chamba – comprising of the close relatives and inner circle of the Raja, as well as the officials and other important members of the court – could have been patronising paintings since the reign of Balabhadra Varmana, however, no documentary evidence, in the form of an inscribed colophon, or other corroborating material supporting such claim has come to my discovery.

The style of the murals of this 18<sup>th</sup> century temple, closely resemble the Chamba style of the 17<sup>th</sup> century which is found in the Bharat Kala Bhawan Bhagavata Purana set and Bathu set, which goes to prove that this workshop was working for over a hundred years and adds to the understanding that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Chamba style had achieved a stylistic diversification.

Murals in **Shakti Dehra** temple are laid on four walls of the cubic sanctum sanctorum, in a grid-like manner, with each wall comprising of three registers with six mural panels each, except for the southern wall, which contains seven mural panels. On western and the eastern walls, the middle portion of second register is reserved for windows ornamented with a *jalis*. It has come to my attention that total number of the mural panel, hence, amounts to be 57, out of which 39 have survived. Furthermore, each mural follows an unchanged compositional framework, with figures placed against a monochromatic deep red ochre backdrop within an ornamented multifoil arch.



Fig. 4.72 South wall of the cella of Shakti Dehra Temple, Chamba



Fig. 4.73 East wall of the cella of Shakti Dehra Temple, Chamba



Fig. 4.74 North wall of the cella of Shakti Dehra Temple, Chamba



Fig. 4.75 West wall of the cella of Shakti Dehra Temple, Chamba

The murals are based on the exploits of Devi, ten incarnations of Vishnu, and episodes from the *Dasham Skanda* (tenth canto) of Bhagavata Purana, with the latter occupying a predominant portion of the walls. Murals begin at the façade of the sanctum sanctorum (south wall) (Fig. 4.72), comprising of – a depiction of Chamunda and Hanuman; the Matsya incarnation of Vishnu; a representation of Balabhadra, Sudarshana and Subhadra; and Vaikuntha Vishnu. From this point onwards, the narrative is continued in an anti-clockwise fashion – from the east wall towards the west wall. In a similar manner, narrative of the exploits of Devi on the top-right corner of the façade is further continued on the top register of the east wall (Fig. 4.73). The bottom register of the façade, which comprises of two depictions of Balabhadra, Sudarshana and Subhadra; and Vaikuntha Vishnu are standalone panels, and the bottom registers of the following three walls is dedicated to Rajput warriors engaged in different activities.

The top and the middle registers of the north wall (Fig. 4.74) are dedicated to the episodes of Krishna-Lila. The panels do not follow a particular order, and the murals are not arranged in a linear fashion, in accordance with the narrative. The subject-matter of Krishna-Lila continues to the west wall (Fig. 4.75), with the Slaying of Bakasura being the last surviving panel dedicated to this subject-matter.

The contents of the four walls are elaborated in the following tables:

Table 4.1 Shakti Dehra South Wall

<p>Damaged</p>	<p>Damaged (if existed)</p>	 <p>Devi Riding a Tiger with a Demon figure (?)</p>
<p>Damaged</p>	<p>Door</p>	 <p>Matsya Incarnation</p>
 <p>Balabhadra Subhadra and Sudarshana</p>		 <p>Vaikuntha Vishnu</p>

Table 4.2 Shakti Dehra East Wall

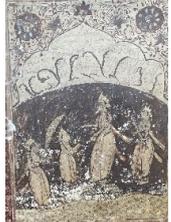
DMG	DMG				
		A Woman Praying to the Devi	Raktabija	Devi Slaying Mahishasura in the Warrior Form	Devi Slaying a Demon
DMG	DMG	Window			
				Balarama Changing the Course of Yamuna	Vamana Incarnation
DMG	DMG	DMG	DMG	DMG	
					A Noble with Attendants

Table 4.3 Shakti Dehra North Wall

					
Infant Krishna with a Gopa	Infant Krishna Stealing Butter	The Exchange of the Babies	Infant Krishna with Yashoda and Gopas	Vasudeva Carries infant Krishna Across the River	A Noble and Lady
					
Narasimha Incarnation	Gopas Cook in the Forest	Nanda and Yashoda with infant Krishna and a Linga	Slaying of Aghasura	Adoration of Ganesha	Vishnu Reclining on Shesha
					
A Noble and a Lady	A Noble and a Lady	Damaged panel with Gopis (?)	A Noble and a Lady	A Noble and a Lady with babies in their arms	A Noble Carrying a Plough Speaks to a Woman

Table 4.4 Shakti Dehra West Wall

 <p>Kubja</p>	 <p>Vishnu and Lakshmi on a Lotus</p>	 <p>Vishnu and Lakshmana with Hanuman</p>	 <p>Krishna Shoots the Butter-pots of Gopis</p>	<p>Damaged</p>	<p>Damaged</p>
 <p>Krishna Lifting Govardhana</p>	 <p>Slaying of Bakasura</p>	<p>Window</p>		<p>Damaged</p>	<p>Damaged</p>
 <p>A Noble Riding an Elephant</p>	 <p>A Rajput Warrior with a Spear</p>	 <p>An Equestrian Noble</p>	 <p>A Noble with Bow and Arrow</p>	<p>Damaged</p>	<p>Damaged</p>

The subject-matter comprises of – **Bhagavata Purana, Ragamala, Dasavatara, Parijata Harana, Ordeal by Liquor**, and episodes of **Dana-Lila**. Paintings based on the popular theme of the Descent of Ganga<sup>182</sup> has not come to light, albeit the possibility of the discontinuation of the subject-matter appears to be unlikely, as it again makes an appearance in the reign of Raja Umed Singh (r. 1748—1764).

#### 4.2.6 Dalel Singh (1735—1748)

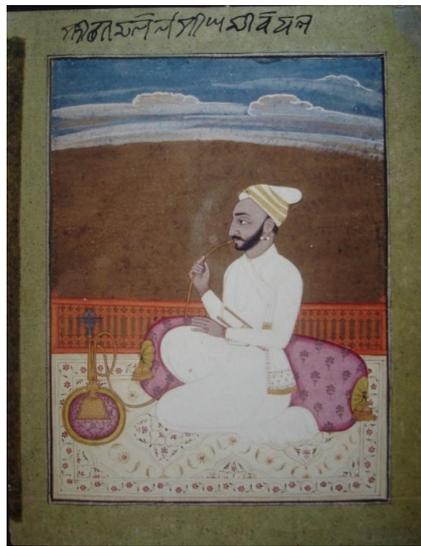


Fig. 4.76 Raja Dalel Singh of Chamba smoking a Hookah, Chamba, c. 1740, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

As mentioned previously, the end of the reign of Ugar Singh and the coronation of Dalel Singh on the throne of Chamba in 1735 was marked with political turbulence. The unavailability of substantial evidence and dip in the scale of production of paintings during this period, leads to the assumption that the patronage during the reign of Dalel Singh was limited and had been subdued, and a resurgence was observed in the reign of Umed Singh (r. 1748—64). A portrait of Raja Dalel Singh (Fig. 4.76), at the Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh, gestures towards the assimilation of Guler sensibilities into the workmanship of local artists, revealing that the migration of painters was an ongoing activity till the reign of Raja Dalel Singh as well.

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<sup>182</sup> The significance of Descent of Ganga paintings has been contextualised in Chapter 5.

This painting is ascribed to Fauju, a local artist of Chamba, however, a number of visual elements in the portrait appear to be derived from painters at Guler, which include – highlighting the clouds with a bright outline of white; thin washes of vermillion on the sky to suggest sunset; thin washes of white at the curved horizon; conical turban; shading underneath the eyebrows and at lower eyelids; shading underneath nasolabial folds; form of the hookah; and design on the carpet (personal observation). Although the lack of comparable material attributed to Fauju restricts the understanding of his technique and workmanship, I hold the opinion that the painter was certainly working in the influence of a Guler artist.

The popular subject-matter of this period, according to what survives, includes – **Dasavatara**, **Ragamala**, and the **Ordeal by liquor**. My analysis of the various stylistic traits in vogue at Chamba during the reign of Dalel Singh leads to the conclusion that the various styles propagated by painters who had migrated to Chamba during the earlier reigns of Prithvi Singh and Chattar Singh continued and evolved over the course of a century.<sup>183</sup>

Two other artists' name comes to light during the reign of Dalel Singh, credited with the design of the Torana of the Laxmi Narayana temple. An inscription, identified by Ohri<sup>184</sup>, pertaining to this commission mentions that the Torana was designed at the orders of Dalel Singh in the year 1747. I opine that this Torana is among the earliest known instances in which the names of the painters indulged in activities other than painting are mentioned.<sup>185</sup>

#### **4.2.7 Umed Singh (r. 1748—1764)**

Following the dip in scale of production during the reign of Dalel Singh, my discovery of a vast body of paintings belonging to the reign of Umed Singh is a heartening discovery that leads me to believe that an age of 'revival' in Chamba painting activity was ushered in during this period, as the scale of production was comparable to that in the reigns of Chattar Singh (1664–90) and Udai Singh (1690–1720). After escaping

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<sup>183</sup> The evolution and development of various painting styles at Chamba is elaborated in Chapter 7.

<sup>184</sup> Ohri, V.C. "Chamba Painting." PhD diss., Punjab University, Chandigarh, 1976.

<sup>185</sup> The contents of the Torana and its relationship with painting is detailed in 6.3

captivity<sup>186</sup> at Lahore and consolidating his power in 1748 CE with the help of Mir Mannu, the Mughal governor of Punjab, Umed Singh undertook several construction projects at Chamba, among which, the wooden temple of Devi-Kothi is noteworthy, particularly for its murals.

An inscription on the façade of the temple marks the date of construction to be 1754 CE.<sup>187</sup> The temple is situated in the valley of Churah, literally ‘four-paths’, which had geographically and politically strategic importance for the erstwhile state of Chamba, as it served as the North-Western frontier of the kingdom.<sup>188</sup> In my view, Raja Umed Singh, by constructing a temple in this region, strengthened his stronghold in the valley, which otherwise served as the crossroads between Chamba, Jammu, Bhadarwah and Ladakh. These murals bear strong stylistic, typological and compositional similarities with the Chamba trajectory of painting which was in practice since the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>189</sup>

Also, yet again, we find names of the painters Jhanda and Gurdev credited with the murals on the four walls.<sup>190</sup> The mural panels are enclosed within decorative borders in dark red, the designs of which, in my view, appear to be emulating the Mughal *pietra dura* inlay in marble. The ground is prepared in lime plaster and is of off-white colour.

Each wall features two vertical panels running parallel to the wooden doorway, with three compartments in each panel. The compartments are adorned with multifoil arches embellished by decorative floral motifs. In comparing the murals on the front (south) wall of the cubical sanctum (Fig. 4.77) to the façade of the Shakti Dehra temple (Fig. 4.72), similarities in arrangement and composition become evident.

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<sup>186</sup> Detailed in Chapter 3, 3.2

<sup>187</sup> Sharma, Sarang. "Devi Kothi Temple of Chamba: Arts and Influences." Sahapedia. UNESCO-Sahapedia Fellowship 2018. 2019. <https://www.sahapedia.org/devi-kothi-temple-chamba-art-and-influences>

<sup>188</sup> Sharma, Sarang, *Devi Kothi Temple of Chamba: Arts and Influences*, 2019

<sup>189</sup> Sharma, Sarang, *Devi Kothi Temple of Chamba: Arts and Influences*, 2019

<sup>190</sup> Sharma, Sarang, *Devi Kothi Temple of Chamba: Arts and Influences*, 2019



Fig. 4.77 Façade of the Devi-Kothi Temple, Chamba. Photographed on July 8, 2018

The left panel's top compartment portrays Shiva and Parvati in an affectionate embrace (Fig. 4.78), with Shiva holding various items and Parvati admiringly looking at him. The middle compartment depicts a Rajput noble with folded hands facing the entrance, likely a person of importance in the royal court. The bottom compartment shows a man carrying a bowl and a water vessel, probably a court attendant.



Fig. 4.78 Shiva embracing Parvati, detail from the left panel's top portion, south wall of the Devi-Kothi Temple



Fig. 4.79 Krishna with Gopi, detail from the right panel's top portion, south wall of the Devi-Kothi Temple

On the right panel's top portion (Fig. 4.79), a youthful Krishna wearing a gopa cap with a peacock feather is depicted playfully interacting with a gopi. Similar to the portrayal of Shiva and Parvati, this scene conveys the theme of love in union. The middle part of left panel shows considerable damage, while the right panel showcases a royal man of great stature, accompanied by two young boys of petite physique (Fig. 4.80). His appearance and likeness resemble that of Raja Umed Singh (Fig. 4.81), the temple's patron. This suggests that the depicted personality in the mural is likely Raja Umed Singh himself.

Finally, the bottom portion of the either panel displays four courtiers of varying sizes, presumably symbolic of their rank in the royal court. One figure, in particular, appears to be Mian Shamsher Singh (Fig. 4.82), the younger brother and Wazir of Umed Singh, based on his physical traits and likeness to a portrait depicting him smoking a hookah, in the British Museum ( Fig 4.83).



Fig. 4.80 Raja Umed Singh praying, detail from the right panel's middle portion, south wall of the Devi-Kothi Temple

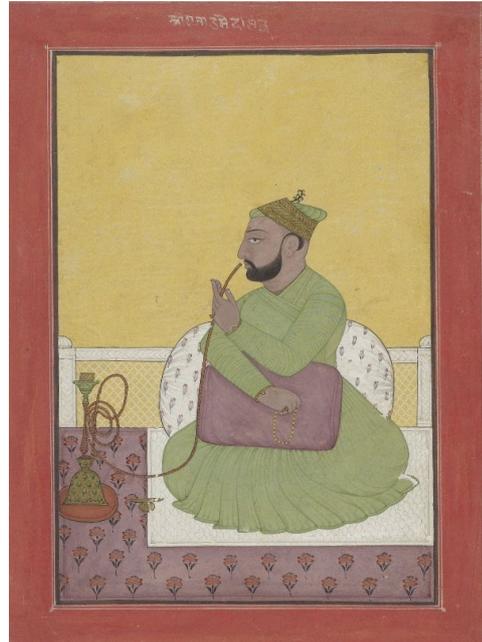


Fig. 4.81 Raja Umed Singh smoking a hookah, c. 1750, 20.6 x 14.9 cm, Object No. RP-T-1993-292, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Fig. 4.82 Mian Shamsheer Singh praying, detail from the right panel's bottom portion, south wall of the Devi-Kothi Temple

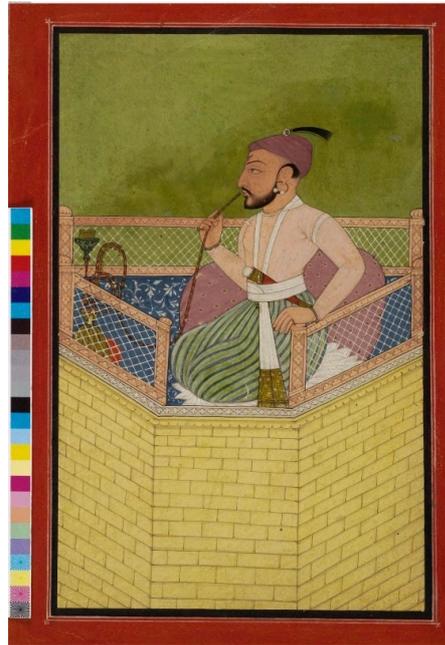


Fig. 4.83 Mian Shamsheer Singh smoking a hookah, c. 1750, 17.4 x 11 cm, Registration No. 1923, 0716,0.1, British Museum

The murals of the Devi-Kothi temple follow a clockwise sequence from the western to the eastern wall, aligned with the circumambulatory path around the sanctum sanctorum. Unlike the Shakti-Dehra temple murals, the narrative in Devi-Kothi lacks clear divisions, with episodes flowing seamlessly and sometimes merging. The west and north walls depict the Devi's triumph over demons, likely inspired by the Durga Saptasati, as indicated by a copper-plate charter and an illustrated manuscript from that era.



Fig. 4.84 West wall of Devi-Kothi temple depicting the Devi triumphing over demons. Photo Courtesy: Vijay Sharma

On the west wall (Fig. 4.84), the four-armed Devi rides a tiger, wielding various weapons, while demons with distinctive features confront her. The north wall (Fig. 4.85) continues the narrative, showcasing the Devi slaying more demons and ultimately defeating Mahishasura and Raktabija. Finally, the north wall portrays the Devi granting boons to gods at her mountain abode.



Fig. 4.85 North wall of Devi-Kothi temple depicting the Devi slaying Mahishasura and Raktabija.  
Photo Courtesy: Vijay Sharma

The east wall of the cella (Fig. 4.86) illustrates episodes from Krishna's early life, following a linear sequence from the story of his birth to the killing of his uncle, Kamsa. The murals are divided into four registers, developing the narrative from left to right.



Fig. 4.86 East wall of Devi-Kothi temple depicting episodes from the life of Krishna.  
Photo Courtesy: Vijay Sharma

Among the chief highlights of the painting activity in Chamba during reign of Umed Singh is the emergence of the painter **Laharu**. Laharu was a descendant of the renowned Gujarati-Manikant painter family, which had settled in Chamba since the early 17th century, discussion on which will appear in detail in 7.1.4.

Notably, Laharu's name first appears in historical records in the Torana of the Lakshmi Narayana Temple, dated 1747.<sup>191</sup> However, it is evident that Laharu's artistic activity must have commenced much earlier, likely during the reign of Raja Ugar Singh (r. 1720—35). Substantiating this hypothesis is the discovery of a portrait, executed in Laharu's distinctive style<sup>192</sup>, depicting the aged Raja Ugar Singh (Fig. 4.87), which serves as an important clue linking Laharu's presence and artistic output to the period preceding 1747 CE.

Further investigations have revealed that Laharu's active and prominent involvement in Chamba's artistic realm comes to the fore during the reign of Raja Umed Singh. Notably, two remarkable painting sets have been attributed to him during this period. The first is a **Bhagavata Purana** set, dated to the year 1757<sup>193</sup> (Fig. 4.88), and the second attributed set comprises scenes from the **Ramayana**, believed to have been executed around the years 1760-65<sup>194</sup> (Fig. 4.89), demonstrating the painter's versatility and stylistic as well as technical maturity in comparison to the previous Bhagavata Purana paintings.

A noteworthy artist named **Mahesh** emerges as a contemporary of Laharu. A Torana inscription discovered at the Lakshmi Narayana Temple serves as evidence of Mahesh's coexistence with Laharu, implying temporal proximity between the two artists. Additionally, Mahesh's artistic oeuvre exhibits striking affinities with Laharu's style, strongly implying tutelage within the same artistic workshop. As per my research, available historical documentation concerning Mahesh's genealogy remains scant and inconclusive, engendering uncertainties regarding his potential familial connections to Laharu.

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<sup>191</sup> Mentioned in 4.2.6

<sup>192</sup> Laharu's style is elaborately discussed in 7.1.4

<sup>193</sup> Discussed in 5.3

<sup>194</sup> Discussed in 5.4



Fig. 4.87 Raja Ugar Singh (r. 1720—35), attributed to Laharu, c. 1735, 21 x 14.2 cm, Accession No. RVI 1266, Museum Rietberg, Zurich



Fig. 4.88 Ugrasena is installed as King of Mathura, from a Bhagavata Purana, signed by Laharu, dated 1757, 17.8 x 22.5 cm, Accession No. 1908 D.30, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba



Fig. 4.89 Parasurama challenges Rama to stretch Vishnu's Bow, from a Ramayana, attributed to Laharu, c. 1760-65, 26.5 x 35.3 cm, Accession No. 1908 D.86, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba

Goswamy and Fischer attribute several significant painting sets to Mahesh, encompassing two sets of Dasavatara (c. 1725-1750<sup>195</sup> and c. 1750-1775<sup>196</sup>), a set of Astral figures (Fig. 4.90) (circa 1725-1750<sup>197</sup>), and a set of 24 Avataras (also created around 1725-1750<sup>198</sup>). Paradoxically, the conspicuous absence of any paintings bearing Mahesh's signature or a dedicated inscription detailing his identity raises intriguing questions pertaining to his actual existence as an artist. Consequently, this enigma necessitates a rigorous academic inquiry into Mahesh's life and artistic contributions, in order to elucidate his identity and assess his significance within the artistic milieu, which explore in 7.1.4.



Fig. 4.90 The Planet Rahu and other Astral Figures, from a set of Astral Figures, ascribed to Mahesh, c. 1725-50, 19.3 x 27.8 cm, Accession No. RVI 1255, Museum Rietberg, Zurich

Despite the ambiguity enshrouding Mahesh's authorship of the attributed works, the period of Umed Singh's reign emerges as a remarkable epoch for Chamba painting,

<sup>195</sup> Goswamy, B. N., and Eberhard Fischer. 1992. *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*. 174

<sup>196</sup> Goswamy, B. N., and Eberhard Fischer. 1992. *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*. 182

<sup>197</sup> Goswamy, B. N., and Eberhard Fischer. 1992. *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*. 181

<sup>198</sup> Goswamy, B. N., and Eberhard Fischer. 1992. *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*. 178

characterized by prolific artistic production. Whether these attributed works are genuinely the product of Mahesh or alternatively crafted by other anonymous artists, the creative output during this era constitutes a subject of profound scholarly interest.

Another salient facet of the painting tradition during this era pertains to the significant role played by **Mian Shamsheer Singh** (Fig. 4.83), the younger brother of Raja Umed Singh, in his position as the Wazir of Chamba. This elevated status as a Wazir positioned Mian Shamsheer Singh as a prominent patron of the arts, particularly painting, within the region. A pertinent inscription found on the 1757 Laharu Bhagavata Purana set explicitly attributes patronage to the Wazir.

Although Raja Umed Singh is historically acclaimed for his contributions to the architectural revival of Chamba, as evidenced by the construction of notable structures such as the Akhand Chandi Royal Palace, Rang Mahal Zenana Palace, Devi-Kothi Temple, and the restoration of the Chamunda Temple at Chamba, Mian Shamsheer Singh emerges as a noteworthy figure in the cultural upliftment of the region, especially concerning the patronage of painters.

Indeed, my opinion posits that while Raja Umed Singh was preoccupied with architectural endeavours, it was Mian Shamsheer Singh who assumed a more active role in supporting and nurturing painters during the mid-18th century in Chamba. This valuable insight into the dynamic of patronage sheds light on the nuanced relationship between the ruler and his esteemed Wazir concerning artistic endeavours. It indicates that the artistic community in Chamba enjoyed the patronage of individuals in influential positions.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the foundation of painting activity in Chamba was established by visionary figures like Bhalabhadra Varmana (second reign 1623—41), guided by Prithvi Singh (r. 1641—64), and solidified by Chattar Singh (1664—90). Initially, artists from diverse backgrounds arrived, each establishing their unique ateliers and contributing their artistic sensibilities. However, as time progressed, a confluence of styles occurred, with artists working closely together, resulting in the emergence of

distinct hallmarks and trajectories of Chamba painting while preserving their individual stylistic mannerisms. This convergence was facilitated by the social system, as artists intermingled through marriages, fostering the exchange of ideas and resources that is evident in the paintings of that era. Despite these transformations, migrations, confluences, and diversities in styles continued, leading to the continuous evolution and richness of Chamba painting's artistic heritage.

Further exploration of the popular subject-matter, its sources, and the contributing factors that shaped Chamba painting's development are expounded upon in the following chapter.