

Chapter 5

Themes and Subject-Matter in Chamba Painting:

An Analysis

Within the preceding chapter, I presented a comprehensive analysis of the evolutionary trajectory of Chamba painting, elucidating its inception during the early 17th century and its subsequent transformative progression, culminating in a phase of artistic maturity by the mid-18th century. With the foundation of this trajectory firmly established, the current chapter endeavours to delve further into the thematic and substantive elements that assumed prominence during this significant period of artistic advancement. By scrutinizing the prevalent themes and narratives, the objective is to critically examine the artistic preferences, cultural underpinnings, and historical contexts that profoundly influenced the visual lexicon of Chamba painting.

The central aim of this chapter is to analyse the prevalent themes and subject matter found in the miniature painting tradition of Chamba between the mid-17th and mid-18th centuries. This chapter plays a crucial role in understanding the factors that influenced the emergence of specific themes, the origins of their symbolic representation, and the transmission of visual elements across successive generations of painters.

The primary focus of the chapter encompasses several key aspects, namely the diverse subjects that gained popularity, the politics of their commissioning, the visual elements associated with these themes and their origins, and the gradual development of iconographic syntax over time, culminating into the school of Chamba painting.

5.1 Portraiture

Historically, there has existed a close interconnection between portraiture and patronage. The act of commissioning portraiture predominantly stems from patrons seeking to commemorate themselves, their families, or individuals of significant personal value. Patrons engage in the commissioning of portraits as a means to manifest their social standing, affluence, authority, or lineage. Portraits possess the

capacity to serve as visual archives of the patron's societal influence, while concurrently functioning as symbols denoting their affiliations with prominent figures or noteworthy occurrences.

The association between portraiture and patronage transcends the realm of mere commissioning, as patrons frequently assume an active role in shaping the artistic vision and portrayal of the subject. They proffer detailed instructions to the artist, specifying the desired depiction encompassing attire, accessories, and desired attributes. The artistic choices undertaken by the portrait artist are understood to be influenced by the patron's preferences and expectations, and the portrait artist endeavours to fulfil the patron's wishes while showcasing their own artistic aptitude and capturing the essential essence of the subject.

Prior to the development of painting, portraiture existed in Chamba in the form of funerary plaques, hero-stones, votive reliefs, fountain-stone slabs, and decoration on temple *rathas*. However, the identities of several subjects of what are indisputably portraits cannot be determined due to a lack of physical resemblance or because the likeness has been idealised or conventionalized to the point of unrecognizability. Given the vast availability of hero-stones in Chamba around fountains, ponds, and Pipal trees, it is safe to assume that portraiture in Chamba was predominantly posthumous in nature, and stone plaques were carved to commemorate those who died untimely without a progeny.

I hold the opinion that the tradition of posthumous portraiture continued into the early stages of painting activity at Chamba, as the first portrait commissioned by a Chamba Raja was the one of Janardan Varmana by Prithvi Singh (Fig. 5.1). However, the tradition of recording the likenesses of living figures must have emerged simultaneously, as a portrait study of Mian Bishambar, the brother of Janardan Varmana and Mian Vidyut Pal of Kutlehr state is discovered (Fig. 5.2), belonging to the reign of Raja Balabhadra Varmana (r. 1589—1613/1623—1641). The practice of recording portraits of reigning chieftains, members of the royal families and neighbouring Raja thrived in Chamba for over a century as portraits of Balabhadra Varmana, Prithvi Singh, Chattar Singh, Udai Singh, Ugar Singh, Dalel Singh and Umed Singh have been discovered and identified. Simultaneously, the tradition of

posthumous portraiture also continued, a claim supported by discovery of posthumous portraits of Prithvi Singh (Fig. 5.3) and Chattar Singh (Fig. 5.4) belonging to the reign of Umed Singh (r. 1748—64).

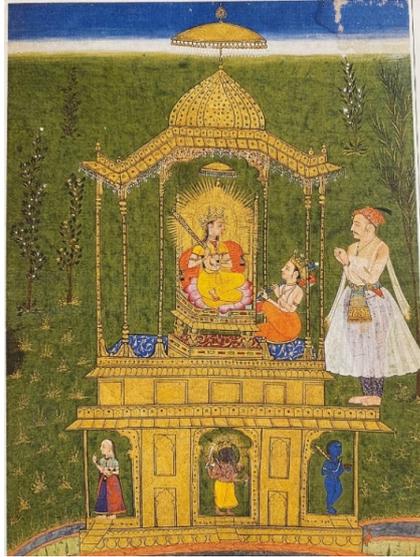


Fig. 5.1 Posthumous Portrait of Raja Janardan Varmana of Chamba Praying at a Devi Shrine, Chamba, c. 1645, Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery, Vadodara

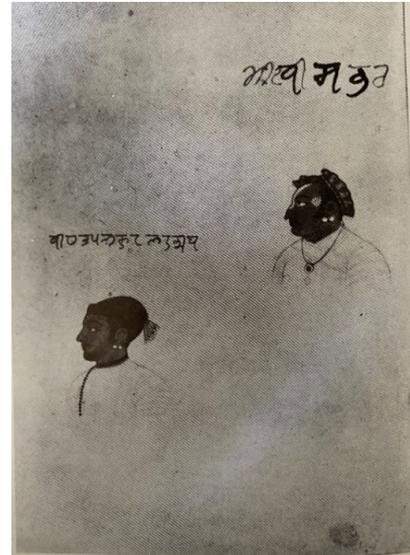


Fig. 5.2 Portrait Studies of Mian Bishambar of Chamba and Mian Vidyut Pal of Kutlehr, Chamba, c. 1630, Himachal State Museum, Shimla



Fig. 5.3 Posthumous Portrait of Raja Prithvi Singh, Chamba, c. 1750-60, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba



Fig. 5.4 Posthumous Portrait of Raja Chattar Singh, Chamba, c. 1750-60, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba

An analysis of the themes prevalent in the portraits of the Chamba Rajas suggests that the primary reason behind the commission must have been to preserve the likeness of the chieftains as a visual documentary evidence for future generations. As per my observations, the portraits depict the Rajas holding courts, meeting delegates of other states, smoking hookahs, enjoying singing and dancing performances, in the company of courtesans, or praying at shrines. Through the medium of these portraits, the Rajas were able to record their political affiliations, preference of leisure, and religious inclinations. In majority of portraits discovered from Chamba, a few points have come to my attention to be common: a monochromatic background, preferably green (Fig. 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10 and 5.11); the Raja taller than other figures to emphasise his status (Fig. 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.12, 5.13, 5.14, 5.9 and 5.11); stripped *durries* (Fig. 5.9, 5.11, 5.12, 5.14 and 5.15); reclining on huge bolsters (Fig. 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.9, 5.10, 5.11, 5.12 and 5.13); a rectangular cushion under the arm (Fig. 5.5, 5.9, 5.10, 5.12 and 5.15) and attendants holding peacock-feather whisks (Fig. 5.5, 5.6, 5.12, 5.8 and 5.9). Other than these, the likenesses of Mughal emperors such as Akbar (Fig. 5.16) were also recorded.



Fig. 5.5



Fig. 5.6



Fig. 5.7



Fig. 5.8



Fig. 5.9



Fig. 5.10



Fig. 5.11



Fig. 5.12



Fig. 5.13

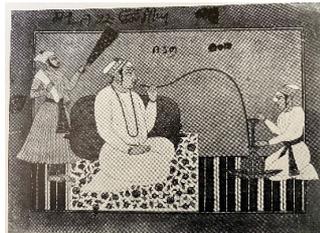


Fig. 5.14



Fig. 5.15



Fig. 5.16

5.2 Dasavatara and its Sources

As described in Chapter 3, Pandit Suranand and the ruling family supported the expansion of Vaishnavism in Chamba in the late 16th century. Rajas supported Vaishnavism wholeheartedly and erected Vishnu temples out of devotion as well as a political tool. Beginning with the construction of the Narasimha temple in Bharmour in early 7th century, Vishnu-related imagery was prevalent in stone and metal sculpture heritage of Chamba. With passage of time, depictions of ten avatars of Vishnu were added to *rathas* of stone temples in the capital – Chamba, including Laxmi Narayana Temple, Vamsigopala Temple, and Hari Rai Temple, to name a few, as discussed in Chapter 3.

It is intriguing that the iconography of Dasvatara in the early Chamba painting style draws minimal inspiration from an age-old sculpture tradition and follows a completely different visual lexicon. In my observation, while the iconography of Dasavatara paintings begins to impact the sculpture and woodcarving heritage of Chamba, the early painters of mid-17th century do not appear to be drawing inspiration from the sculptures. The imagery instead appears to have been derived from a local oral tradition, according to which the incarnations are represented participating in a popular episode related with their narrative. Artists of the earliest Dasavatara sets from Chamba must have been conversant with the subject matter due to their participation in the *Kathavachana* tradition. With time, the pictorial language of the early Dasavatara sets became standardised in a continuous tradition, with successive painters adding features and additions in accordance with their own skill and understanding.

5.2.1 Dasavatara sets

As noted in the previous chapter, the earliest known Dasavatara set from Chamba was produced during the reign of Raja Balabhadra Varmana (r. 1589—1613/1623—41), in Popular Mughal style (Fig. 5.17). Although only a single leaf depicting the Narasimha incarnation has survived from the set, the possibility of the depiction of other incarnations cannot be ruled out, as it is highly unlikely that a sole Narasimha page would have been produced (personal observation).

I discovered that this Dasavatara set was soon followed by the dispersed '**Bharat Kala Bhavan**' Dasavatara set which was also patronized by Balabhadra Varmana, dateable to around 1635-40 CE.¹⁹⁹ No known Dasavatara sets produced during the successive reign of Raja Prithvi Singh (r. 1641—1664) have come to light, which I attribute to the Raja's devotion to the Devi.



Fig. 5.17 Narasimha incarnation of Vishnu, Chamba, c. 1630-1640, auctioned by Sotheby's on 8-9 October 1979

The next Dasavatara imagery from Chamba was in the form of the dispersed **Bathu** manuscript commissioned during the reign of Raja Chattar Singh (r. 1664—90).²⁰⁰

A number of Dasavatara paintings belonging to the respective reigns of Raja Udai Singh (r. 1690—1720), Raja Ugar Singh (1720—1735), Raja Dalel Singh (r. 1735—48) and Raja Umed Singh (r. 1748—64) have also come to my attention. This suggests that Dasavatara remained a popular theme throughout the trajectory of Chamba painting.

The iconographic parallels between the Bharat Kala Bhavan Dasavatara and the succeeding Dasavatara paintings show us that a definite iconographic format for

¹⁹⁹ Elaborated in detail in 4.2.1

²⁰⁰ The contents of the Bathu set have been discussed in detail in Chapter 4.2.3

Chamba Dasavatara paintings was already established by this point which was followed ardently for a century.

In the context of art and cultural expression, innovation often emerges as artists experiment with new ideas, techniques, and motifs. These innovations can be driven by various factors, such as changes in society, influence of other art forms, or individual artistic vision. Initially, these innovative approaches may be unique and stand out from existing traditions. The Bharat Kala Bhavan Dasavatara served as a catalyst in this context and introduced a novel iconographic format for portraying the ten incarnations of Vishnu.

In my opinion, subsequent artists in Chamba discerned the innovative qualities of the Bharat Kala Bhavan Dasavatara and recognized the value in embracing and perpetuating this particular iconographic format. Consequently, they undertook the adoption of this format as a new tradition, diligently fashioning their own Dasavatara paintings according to the same iconographic and typological scheme. The transition from innovation to tradition likely derived impetus from factors such as the composition's aesthetic allure, the commendation it garnered from patrons, and the artists' inclination to align themselves with what they read as traditional iconographic lexicon.

Over the passage of time, adherence to the prescribed iconographic format for Chamba Dasavatara became deeply ingrained within the painter community and the broader cultural milieu. Artists in Chamba, for well over a century, persisted in replicating and reinterpreting this established composition, dutifully transmitting it from one generation to the next. This process served to solidify the innovative approach as a tradition, transforming it into a customary practice that epitomized the Chamba Dasavatara paintings.

5.2.2 Iconographies of Chamba Dasavataras Across the Sets

Matsya Avatara

The first incarnation of Vishnu, Matsya, derives its name from the Sanskrit word Matsya, meaning fish. According to the text of Bhagavata Purana, a demon Hayagriva steals the Vedas, which escape from the yawn of a sleepy Brahma. On discovering the theft, Vishnu descends to earth in the form of a little fish. One day, the king Satyavrata cups water in his hand for libation in the Kritamala river where he finds the little fish, and the fish asks him to save him from predators and let it grow. The king, moved by sympathy for the little fish, places him in a pot, then a well, then a tank, and when it outgrows the tank, he releases it into the ocean, but the fish outgrows the ocean quickly. Satyavrata asks the magical fish to reveal its actual identity and quickly discovers it to be Vishnu.

Vishnu as Matsya then warns the king of the oncoming seven-day deluge. The king is instructed to collect all animal, plant, and seed species, as well as the seven sages aboard a boat, using Vasuki serpent to tether the boat to its horn. On the flood's approach, Matsya imparts to Satyavrata and seven sages the ultimate wisdom to prepare them for the next cycle of existence. In the end, Matsya slays the demon Hayagriva and retrieves the Vedas after the deluge.²⁰¹ The slaying of Hayagriva by the Matsya incarnation is also mentioned in various sources, such as Agni Purana²⁰², Garuda Purana²⁰³, and Narada Purana²⁰⁴. In the Skanda Purana, Matsya is described slaying Shankhasura, the conch demon.²⁰⁵ However, the legend of Matsya slaying a demon to rescue the stolen Vedas remains consistent. Matsya is referred to in the Gita Govinda²⁰⁶ in the following verse:

²⁰¹ Shastri, J. L. and G. V. Tagare. 1999. *The Bhagavata Purana*. Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1116-1118.

²⁰² Shastri, J. L., Bhatt, G. P., Gangadharan, N. 1998. *Agni Purana*. Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 734.

²⁰³ *The Garuda Purana*. 2002. Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 411.

²⁰⁴ *The Narada Purana*. Vol. 4. 1997 [1952]. Motilal Banarsidas, 1978-9.

²⁰⁵ *The Skanda Purana*. Vol. 5. 1998 [1951]. Motilal Banarsidas, 227.

²⁰⁶ Gita Govinda is an important source of Dasavatara iconography as it extensively describes the appearances of the ten incarnations of Vishnu, along with vivid accounts of their renowned deeds and associated narratives. By drawing on the Gita Govinda, artists could have imbued their Dasavatara depictions with authenticity and adherence to established traditions.

pralaya-payodhi-jale dhatavan asi vedam
vihita-vahitra-caritram akhedam
keshava dhata-mina-sharira jaya jagadisha hare. 1.

O Hari [Vishnu]! From your eternal spiritual abode,
You descend to this temporary world in the form of a fish and
save the Vedas from the ocean of universal devastation, just as
a ship effortlessly rescues a drowning man. O supreme lord,
You have appeared as Matsyavatara. May you be victorious.²⁰⁷

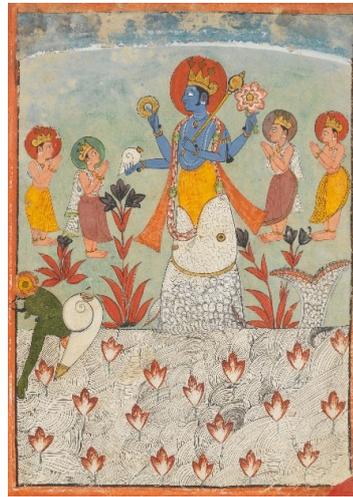


Fig. 5.18a



Fig. 5.18b



Fig. 5.18c

²⁰⁷ Goswami, J. 2013. *Gita Govinda*. Ratan Press, 13.

In terms of iconography, the representation of the Matsya incarnation in Chamba painting (Fig. 5.18a-c) appears to be based upon the legend of Skanda Purana, as the incarnation is consistently depicted slaying the conch-demon Shankhasura. The episode takes place in the dark and turbulent waters of the ocean, against a solid monochromatic background with clouds gathering in the sky. The detail at the horizon is minimal, with the exception of tufts of grass and a handful of conical trees. The four-armed Vishnu, adorning a white *vaijayantimala* and flowing *uttariya*, is portrayed in an anthropomorphic form, emerging from the mouth of a giant fish leaping out of the ocean. He rips open the belly of Shankhasura, from which the four Vedas appear in personified form, with hands folded in devotion to Vishnu. It is worth noting that each of the four Vedas are rendered in a different colour.

Kurma Avatara

The second incarnation of Vishnu, in the form of a tortoise, finds association with the narrative of the churning of the ocean. As per the text of the Agni Purana, following the defeat of Devas to the Asuras in battle, the former seek refuge in Vishnu. Asuras and Devas collaborate to churn the ocean of milk, with Mount Mandara serving as the churning rod and Vasuki as the rope. The mountain is supported by Kurma, the tortoise incarnation. The oceanic toxin Halahala is consumed by Shiva in order to preserve the world. Various divine items then emerge from the ocean's churning, culminating with the god Dhanavantri holding the vessel of Amrita. When the Asuras steal the pot, Vishnu adopts the form of the seductress Mohini to recover it and distribute it to the gods. Rahu takes the shape of a god, consumes the amrita, and is beheaded by Vishnu.²⁰⁸

A similar narrative is also given in the Vishnu Purana, where Vishnu is described to participate in the churning in many forms - Kurma as the base of the mount, in one form he sits on top of Mandara and in other form, helps the gods and the demons pull the serpentine rope.²⁰⁹ The Brahmanda Purana states that Vishnu in the form of

²⁰⁸ Shastri, J. L., Bhatt, G. P., Gangadharan, N. 1998. *Agni Purana*. Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 5-7.

²⁰⁹ Wilson, H. H. 1862. *The Vishnu Purana: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition*. Vol. VI. Trübner, 143.

Brahma supports the mount, while Narayana invigorated the gods.²¹⁰ The Vayu Purana, the Padma Purana have similar narratives; the Bhagavata Purana also narrates the tale.²¹¹ The Kurma incarnation is referred to in Gita Govinda in the following verse:

knitir ati-vipula-tare tinohati tava panohe
dharaei-dharaea-kiea-cakra-garinohe
keshava dhata-kashyapa-rupa jaya jagadisha hare. 2.

O Hari! Assuming your tortoise form,
You held the Earth on one part of your expansive back.
The fame of the impression made by the earth on your
back is ever increasing. May you be victorious!²¹²

The examination of the iconography of the Kurma incarnation as depicted in Chamba painting reveals that it is closely based on the description in the Vishnu Purana, as Vishnu is represented thrice in the composition. In my opinion, the early portrayals of the Kurma incarnation at Chamba followed a syntax of simplistic nature, which was elaborated further by later painters. The earliest known depiction of the Kurma incarnation is in the Bharat Kala Bhawan Dasavatara set (Fig. 5.19a), which shows a four-armed Vishnu seated atop the cosmic mountain Mandara, with the churning stick supported at the bottom on the back of Kurma. Serpent Vasuki, serving as the churning rope, is held by Vishnu and Brahma on the tail end of the serpent, while the demons hold on to the serpent by its neck. Among the articles which emerged out of the depths of the ocean include the seven-headed horse Uchchaihshravas and the elephant Airavata.

A later Kurma Avatara painting belonging to the reign of Raja Chattar Singh (r. 1664—90) has come to my attention that showcases embellishments that the Chamba Kurma incarnation iconography has attained over the course of half a century (Fig. 5.19b). Other than the Uchchaihshravas and Airavata, the composition also includes

²¹⁰ Wilson, H. H. 1862. *The Vishnu Purána: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition*. Vol. VI. 146-8

²¹¹ Wilson, H. H. 1862. *The Vishnu Purána: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition*. Vol. VI. 146-8

²¹² Goswami, J. 2013. *Gita Govinda*. Ratan Press, 15.

the celestial nymph Rambha, an inflamed vessel containing poison, the divine physician Dhanvantari, the wish-fulfilling cow Surabhi, the moon, the bow, the Parijata tree and the pot of nectar. In my view, the choice of the artist to favour a horizontal layout over a vertical frame also allowed him to fill the composition with more detail. A comparative analysis of this iconographic syntax with a c. 1765 CE composition of Kurma Avatara (Fig. 5.19c) reveals that this iconography became staple at Chamba.

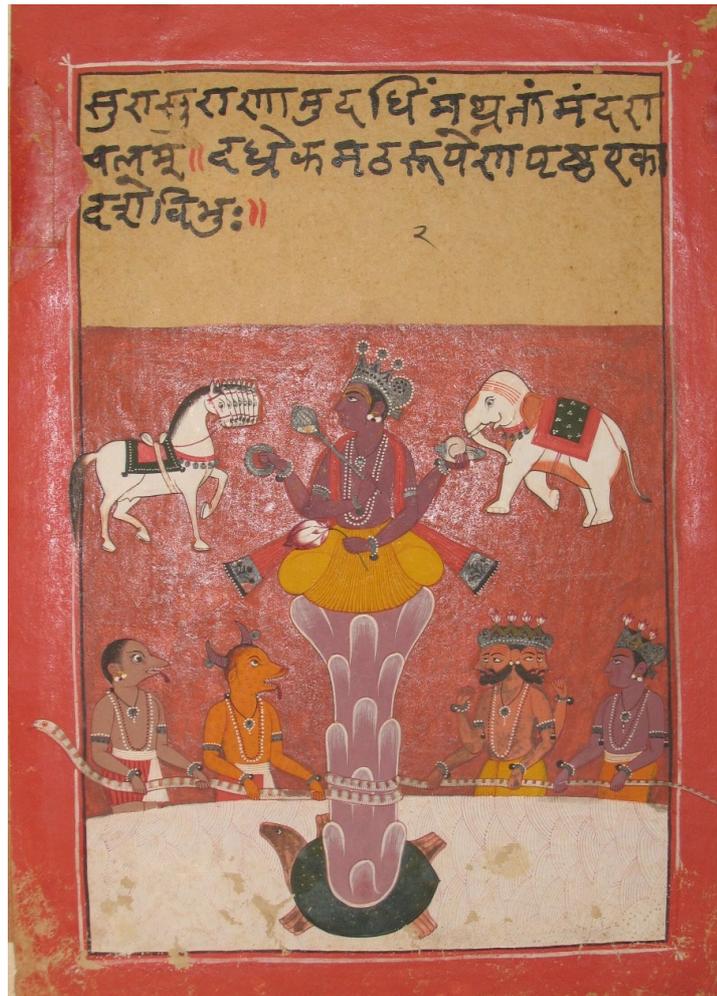


Fig. 5.19a



Fig. 5.19b



Fig. 5.19c

Varaha Avatara

While episode of annihilation of Hiranyaksha by the hands of Varaha, the boar incarnation of Vishnu, appears in Shiva Purana²¹³, a more detailed account of the origin of the demon is provided in the Bhagavata Purana. As per the narrative, Jaya and Vijaya, the doorkeepers of Vishnu's abode Vaikuntha, were reincarnated as demons, following the curse of the four Kumaras. Jaya was reborn as the demon Hiranyakashipu, and Vijaya was reborn as Hiranyaksha, as the twin sons of Diti and the sage Kashyapa. Hiranyaksha was able to receive a boon from Brahma which provided him absolute strength and challenged Vishnu for a duel.²¹⁴ The Garuda Purana also alludes to the curse in the Hiranyaksha narrative. As per the text, Hiranyaksha after receiving the boon from Brahma, abducts the earth to the netherworld. Vishnu, as Varaha, enters the netherworld through the ocean, annihilates the demon and lifts the earth on its tusks.²¹⁵ Similar accounts are also mentioned in the Uttarakanda of the Padma Purana and the Skanda Purana.²¹⁶ The Varaha incarnation is referred to in Gita Govinda in the following verse:

vasati dashana-shikhare dharaiye tava lagna
shashini kalaika-kaleva nimagna
keshava dhata-shukara-rupa jaya jagadisha hare. 3.

O Jagadisha! O Keshava! O Hari! O you who have assumed the
form of a boar! The Earth rests upon the tip of your tusks like
a tiny spot upon the moon. May you be victorious!²¹⁷

²¹³ Shastri, J. L. 2000 [1950]. *The Shiva Purana*. Vol. 2. Motilal Banarsidas, 978-84.

²¹⁴ Shastri, J. L. and G. V. Tagare. 1999. *The Bhagavata Purana*. Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 294.

²¹⁵ *The Garuda Purana*. 2002. Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 270.

²¹⁶ *The Skanda Purana*. Vol. 5. 1998 [1951]. Motilal Banarsidas, 204

²¹⁷ Goswami, J. 2013. *Gita Govinda*. Ratan Press, 16.

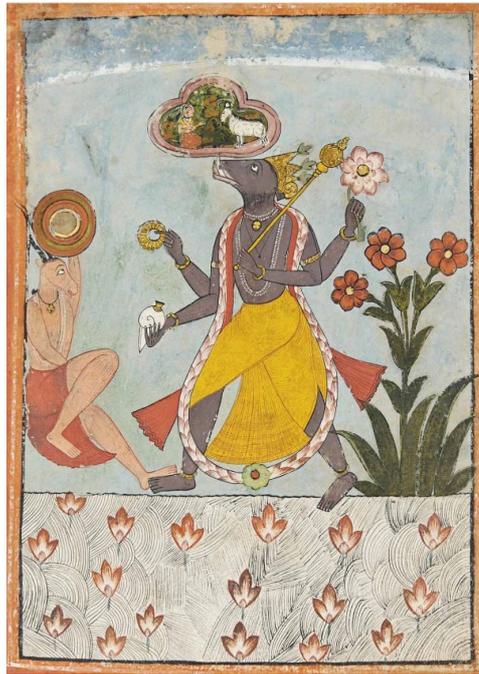


Fig. 5.20a



Fig. 5.20b

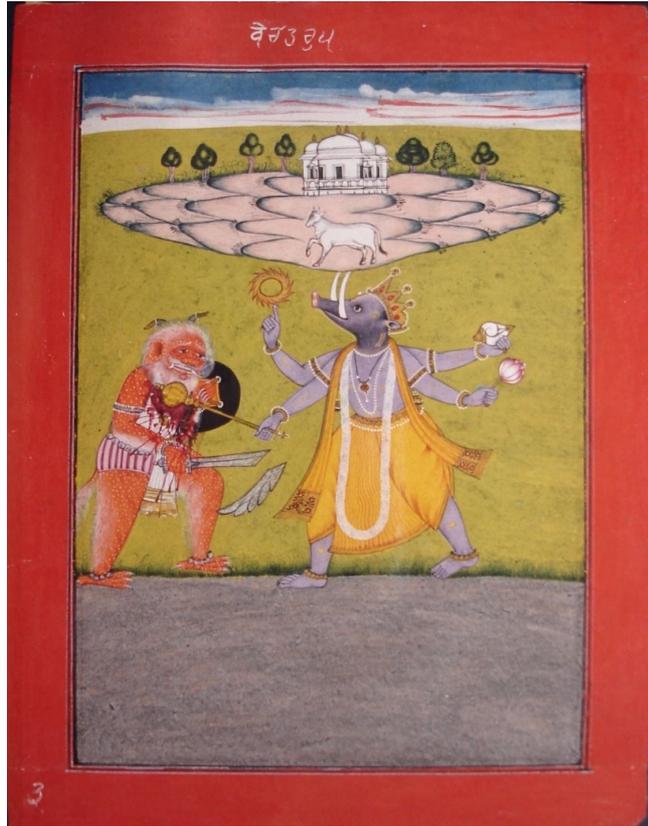


Fig. 5.20c



Fig. 5.20d

Varaha iconography in Chamba is of particular interest for the placement of a cow on the earth rescued by Varaha, resting on his tusks. Varaha folio from the Bathu set (Fig. 5.20a) is the earliest known Varaha depiction from Chamba to have come to my attention, dateable to c. 1665 CE. Varaha lifts Bhudevi on his tusks heroically with the deer-headed Hiranyaksha about to fall. The depiction of the cow appears to be symbolic for earth, the source of life and food. A Varaha folio auctioned by Christies in 2018 (Fig. 5.20b) deserves notable attention, as it is a detailed rendition of the same composition. Varaha, having defeated Hiranyaksha, triumphantly places his right foot on the demon's corpse while the fishes and a crocodile surround the boar incarnation in devotion. A tree breaks the monotony of the green background and a thin strip of white clouds at the horizon divides the ground from the blue sky.

The same iconography is repeated in another Varaha folio, dateable to 1730 CE, in the Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh (Fig. 5.20c). The painting is a simplified interpretation of the Christies Varaha, omitting several decorative motifs in favour of a flat composition to highlight the dynamism of Varaha's posture. Appearing in a heroic fashion, Varaha delivers a fatal blow with his mace on Hiranyaksha's chest and breaks his sword. The cow element repeats itself again, and for the fourth time in a Varaha composition from Museum Rietberg, Zurich (Fig. 5.20d). This painting is a more elaborate composition with rich depiction of floral motifs and gathering clouds. The cow on the earth is joined by a peacock, perhaps for decorative purpose, as is the case with the hexagonal building.

Narasimha Avatara

The Narasimha (half-man half-lion) incarnation of Vishnu finds detailed description in the text of Bhagavata Purana, as the slayer of the demon Hiranyakasipu.²¹⁸ According to the narrative, the demon Hiranyakasipu was granted a boon by Brahma that prevented him from dying inside or outside any dwelling, during the day or night, on the ground or in the sky. His demise could not have been caused by any weapon, nor by a person or an animal. It was granted to him that he would not be killed by any

²¹⁸ Gupta, R. M., and Kenneth R. Valpey. 2013. *The Bhagavata Purana: Sacred Text and Living Tradition*. Columbia University Press, 21–23.

living or non-living thing. Hiranyakasipu began to persecute Vishnu worshippers once he became mighty and indestructible after receiving the new boon. Prahlada, the son of Hiranyakasipu, opposed and rebelled against his father, becoming a devotee of Vishnu. This infuriated Hiranyakasipu, who attempted to kill Prahlada, but each time, the kid was protected by Vishnu's supernatural power. Prahlada refused to recognise his father as the highest lord of the universe and asserted that Vishnu is all-pervasive and omnipresent when questioned about this.

Hiranyakasipu pointed to a nearby pillar and asked if "his Vishnu" was inside. Prahlada responded, "He was, He is, and He will be." Unable to control his rage, Hiranyakasipu destroyed the pillar with his mace, and after a tumultuous noise, Vishnu in the form of Narasimha emerged from it and moved to confront Hiranyakasipu in defence of Prahlada. To murder Hiranyakasipu without disturbing the blessing granted by Brahma, the guise of Narasimha was chosen. Hiranyakasipu was unkillable by humans, gods, and animals. Narasimha was neither of these, as he was an incarnation of Vishnu as a part-human, part-animal being. He encountered Hiranyakasipu at dusk, on the threshold of a courtyard (when it is neither day nor night) and placed the demon on his thighs (neither earth nor space). He disembowelled and killed the demon king with his keen fingernails, which were neither living nor inanimate.²¹⁹

Narasimha was in rage and seeing this, Lord Brahma sent Prahlada to pacify him. Prahlada sang hymns and the 'Ugra' Narasimha now became peaceful 'Soumya' or 'Shant' Narasimha.²²⁰

The following verse is dedicated to Narasimha in the text of Gita Govinda:

tava kara-kamala-vare nakham adbhuta-sringam
dalita-hiranyakashipu-tanu-bhringam
keshava dhata-narahari-rupa jaya jagadisha hare

²¹⁹ Gupta, R. M., and Kenneth R. Valpey. 2013. *The Bhagavata Purana: Sacred Text and Living Tradition*. Columbia University Press, 21–23.

²²⁰ Krishnan, S. A. 2017. *Prahlad and Holika: The Narasimha Avatar*. SA Krishnan. p. 30

O Jagadeshvara! O Hari! O Keshava! You have assumed the form of Narasimha, part man and part lion. With the wonderful sharp tips of the nails of your excellent lotus hands, you rip apart the body of Hiranyakasipu just as a bumblebee tears a flower. May You be victorious!²²¹

The popular iconography of Narasimha paintings in Chamba is the front facing half-man half-lion incarnation of Vishnu disemboweling Hiranyakashipu with his claws with the broken pillar out of which he emerged depicted behind his shoulders. Prahlad and his mother Kayadhu stand on the either side of Narasimha with hands folded in devotion. Among the earliest depictions of Narasimha that come to my attention is in the form of Fig. 5.21a. The iconographic traits of Narasimha become staple by c. 1665 CE, with a representation in the dispersed 'Bathu' set (Fig. 5.21b). A third Narasimha painting in the Bhuri Singh Museum Chamba, dateable to mid-18th century CE (Fig. 5.21c) reveals that the Narasimha iconography at Chamba remained consistently uninterrupted for the course of a century. The same composition is repeated in the Rietberg Narasimha (Fig. 5.21c).



5.21a

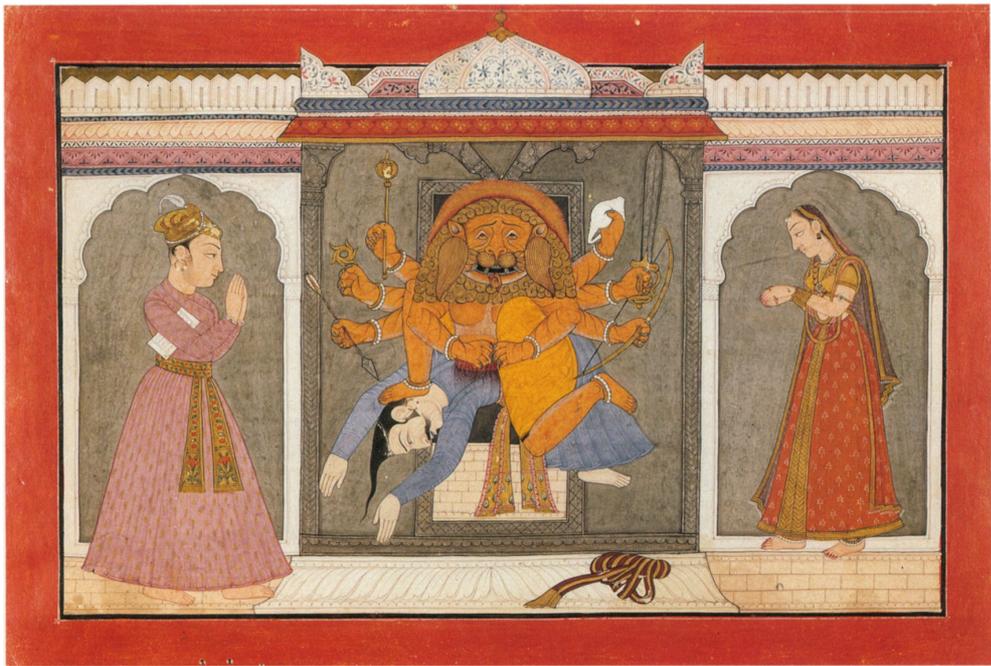
²²¹ Goswami, J. 2013. *Gita Govinda*. Ratan Press, 17.



5.21b



5.21c



5.21d

Vamana Avatara

The legend of the Vamana avatara, the dwarf incarnation of Vishnu, is largely associated with the myth of the taking back of the three worlds from the King Bali in Bhagavata Purana.²²² As per the legend, after defeating Indra, Bali arranges a ritualistic sacrifice to mark his sovereignty over the realms, which is attended by Vishnu in the form of a dwarf Brahmin (Vamana). Renowned for his selflessness, Bali is requested only three steps of land by Vamana. Though being warned by his preceptor, the sage Sukra, who realises the true form of Vishnu, Bali agrees to the sacrifice. To this, Vamana grows to an enormous size and in mere three strides encompasses the three realms. Hence, the three worlds are restored to Indra, and Bali is banished to the netherworld.

The following verse is dedicated to Vamana in the text of Gita Govinda:

chalayasi vikramane balim adbhuta-vamana
pada-nakha-nira-janita-jana-pavana
keshava dhrita-vamana-rupa jaya jagadisha hare

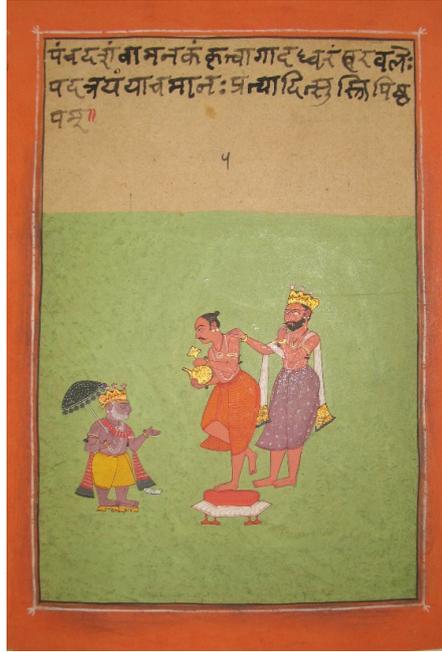
O Master of the entire universe! O Keshava! Assuming the form of a dwarf, you cheat King Bali on the pretext of begging for three paces of land. The population of the universe has become purified by the water that touched your toenails. May You be victorious!²²³

Vamana in Chamba painting is depicted as an old dwarf ascetic, sporting a grey beard and clad in a yellow dhoti. Occasionally he holds an umbrella over a shoulder. Raja Bali, who is usually depicted facing Vamana, pours a stream of water on Vamana's hand, symbolizing the completion of the ritual. The fair complexioned sage Shukra is usually depicted standing behind Bali, cautioning him of Vamana's designs. He is

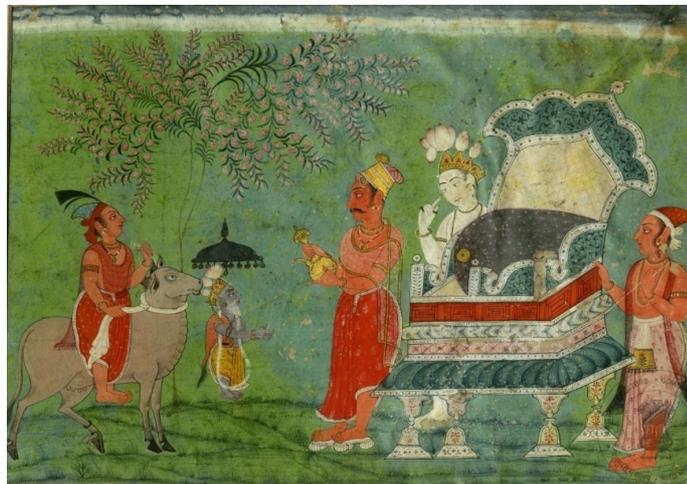
²²² Prabhupada, Swami. "Srimad Bhagavatam: Canto 8: Withdrawal of the Cosmic Creations." vedabase.io. Retrieved March 15, 2020

²²³ Goswami, J. 2013. *Gita Govinda*. Ratan Press, 18.

always depicted in a three-quarterly fashion to emphasise on his blinding of one eye.²²⁴
Popular specimens of Chamba Vamana depictions include Fig. 5.22 (a-d).



5.22a

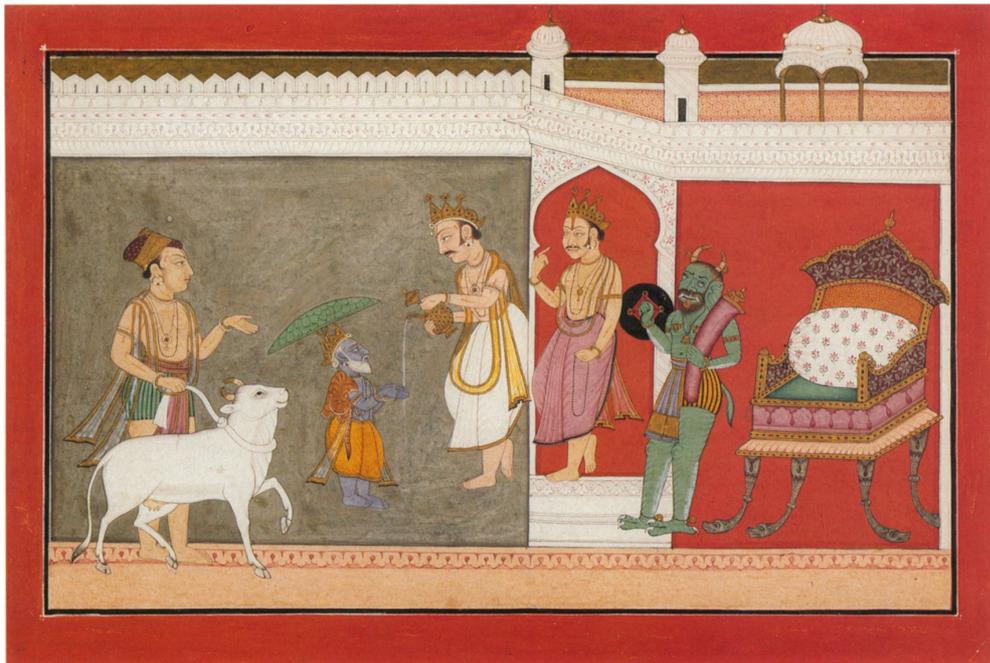


5.22b

²²⁴ As per the text of Bhagavata Purana, when the overzealous sage Shukra saw that his disciple had turned a deaf ear to him, he assumed a miniature form and entered into the ritual pot to block the stream of water. To this, Vamana pulled out a straw and inserted into the spout. Shukracharya immediately came out of the pot, blinded in one eye.



5.22c



5.22d

Parasurama Avatara

As per the text of Bhagavata Purana, Sage Jamdagni, the father of Parasurama (Rama with an axe), had a wish-fulfilling cow called Surabhi. A king by the name Kartavirya Arjuna²²⁵ learnt about the cow and asked Jamdagni to part with it, which the sage refuses. While Parasurama was away from the hermitage, the king decided to take the cow by force and killed Jamdagni. On learning of this crime, Parasurama challenged Kartavirya Arjuna for a duel and smit him with his axe, avenging the murder of his father.²²⁶

The following verse is dedicated to the Parasurama incarnation in the text of Gita Govinda:

kshatriya-rudhira-maye jagad-apagata-papam
snapayasi payasi shamita-bhava-tapam
keshava dhrita-bhrigupati-rupa jaya jagadisha hare

O Hari! Taking the form of Bhrigupati (Parasurama), You dispelled the anguish of the material world by destroying the dynasty of the reigning military caste (the kshatriyas) and purifying the universe with the streams of their blood. May You be victorious!²²⁷

Among the earliest depiction of Parasurama in Chamba is a folio from the 'Bathu' manuscript, showing Parasurama, outside his hermitage, wielding an axe to strike Kartavirya Arjuna with (Fig. 5.23a). Kartavirya's many arms lay lifeless at his feet. The wish-fulfilling cow Surabhi escapes in the sky, while Parasurama's mother Renuka supports Jamdagni's corpse at a corner.

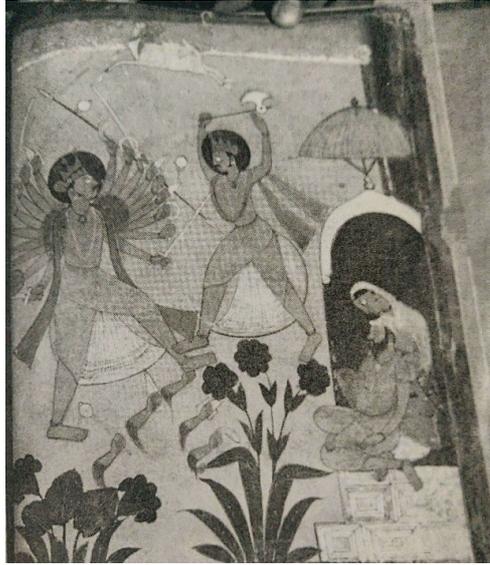
Around four different paintings belonging to later dates have been identified by me, exhibiting a repetition in the iconographic format of the Parasurama representation

²²⁵ Kartavirya Arjuna is alternatively known as Sahastrabahu, referring to his thousand arms.

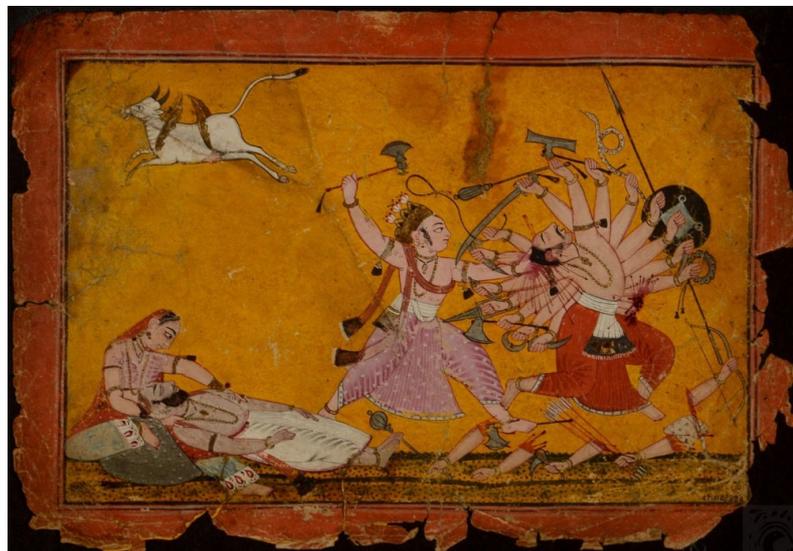
²²⁶ Thomas, Lynn. 2014. "Parshurama and Time." In *Myth and Mythmaking: Continuous Evolution in Indian Tradition*, edited by Julia Leslie, 64–66.

²²⁷ Goswami, J. 2013. *Gita Govinda*. Ratan Press, 19.

(Fig. 5.23b-d), with minute decorative changes introduced by the later painters, as per my observations.



5.23a



5.23b



5.23c



5.23d

Rama Avatara

In my view, the depiction of Rama in Chamba painting was done in three separate mediums – in the sets of Ramayana; in stray Dhyana paintings; and lastly, in Dasavatara sets, as the seventh incarnation of Vishnu. The epic of Ramayana has an important role to play in the society of Chamba, as the Suryavamshi Rajputs of Chamba claim their descent from the lineage of Rama²²⁸, and the legend of Rama is celebrated in the bardic traditions of the Gaddi Rajput shepherds of Bharmour as *Ramyan* (personal communication with Gaddi shepherds in Bharmour). The assumption that the inspiration for the iconography of Rama Avatara in Chamba painting emerges from a single source is unfounded, given the prevalent popularity of the Rama cult within Chamba society.

The following verse is dedicated to the Rama incarnation in the text of Gita Govinda:

vitarasi dikshu rane dik-pati-kamaniyam
dasha-mukha-mauli-balim ramaniyam
keshava dhrita-raghupati-rupa jaya jagadisha hare

O master of the universe! Assuming the form of Sri Rama, during the battle with the ten-headed demon King Ravana, you threw his extremely attractive crowned heads in all directions as a pleasing offering to Indra and the other demigods presiding over all the points of the compass. O Rama, may you be victorious!²²⁹

Keeping with the tradition of the depiction of the most popular episode associated with the incarnation of Vishnu, the sole exception arises in the case of Rama Avatara, who is depicted in two separate manners – enthroned with Sita; and smiting the ten-headed demon Ravana with his arrows, with the former appearing to be of older origin.

Among the earliest available portrayals of Rama enthroned with Sita belongs to the late 17th century (Fig. 24a), depicting Rama, with a bow in his hand, seated on a golden

²²⁸ Hutchison, J., and Vogel, J. Ph. *History of The Panjab Hill States: Vol. I*, 278

²²⁹ Goswami, J. 2013. *Gita Govinda*. Ratan Press, 20.

throne, joined by Sita with her hands folded in devotion. Rama is joined by Hanumana, adorning a conical cap, gently placing Rama's foot in his lap. Lakshmana is also depicted standing behind Rama's throne. A similar version of this iconography include (Fig. 24b).

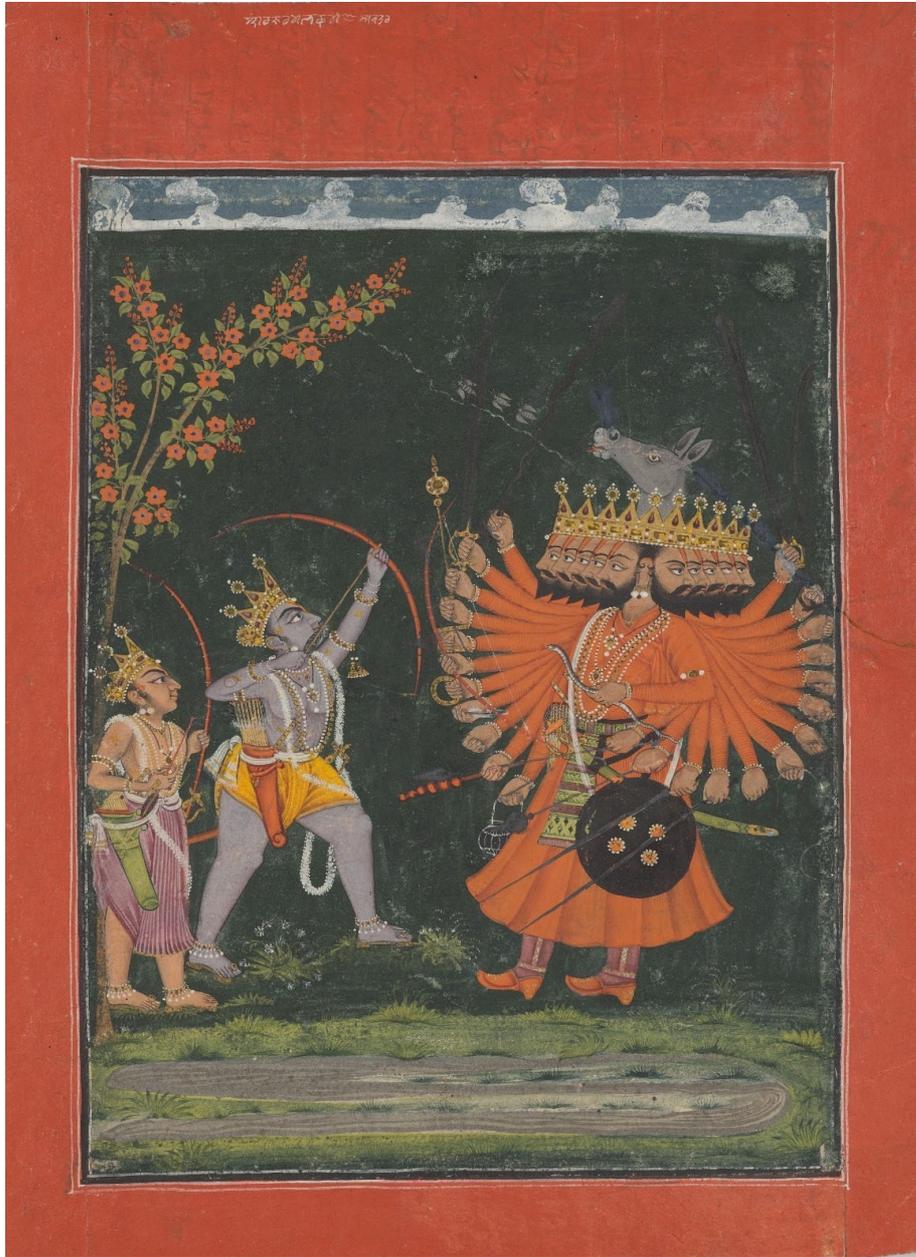
The second manner of Rama iconography depicts him smiting Ravana with his arrows (Fig. 24c). The ten-headed and many-armed Ravana, with a donkey-head mounted on his crown, charges at Rama with a variety of weapons at his disposal. The blue-complexioned Rama aims an arrow at the donkey-head, about to release it from the chord. A watchful Lakshmana stands behind Rama, readying an arrow of his own.



5.24a



5.24b



5.24c

Balarama Avatara

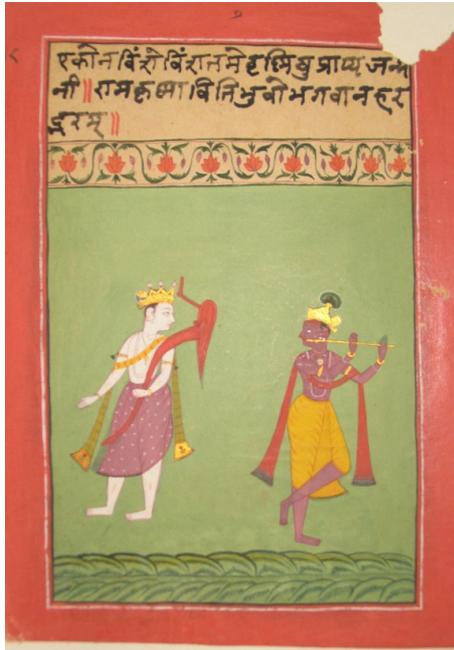
While the Agni Purana, Padma Purana, Garuda Purana, Linga Purana, Narada Purana, Skanda Purana, and Varaha Purana do not include Balarama as an incarnation of Vishnu, a major source which includes both Balarama and Buddha as the eighth and ninth incarnations of Vishnu is Jayadeva's Gita Govinda. The following verse is dedicated to the Balarama incarnation in the text of Gita Govinda:

vahasi vapushi vishade vasanam jaladabham
hala-hati-bhiti-milita-yamunabham
keshava dhrita-haladhara-rupa jaya jagadisha hare

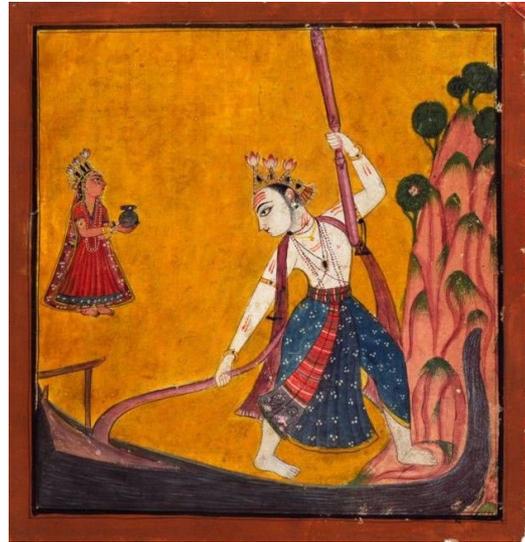
Taking the form of Baladeva, you sport brilliant white complexion and blue clothes that resemble the beauty of fresh rainclouds. It seems that the river Yamuna has hidden in your cloth, fearing the blow of your plough. O wielder of the plough, may you be victorious!²³⁰

The study of the iconography of the Chamba Balarama points towards its origin in the Gita Govinda couplet. In the Balarama folio of the 'Bharat Kala Bhawan' Dasavatara (Fig. 5.25a), a white-complexioned Balarama, clad in a blue dhoti holds a plough above his shoulder, while a fluting Krishna glances at him devotionally. The episode of Balarama changing the course of the river Yamuna finds its manifestation in the earliest available depiction in the form of a folio dateable to the reign of Raja Udai Singh (r. 1690—1720) (Fig. 25b). In the painting, Balarama, sporting a blue dhoti and a white *uttariya*, and holding a baton in his left hand, drags his plough along the river Yamuna originating from a rocky mountain, and changes its course in the opposite direction. The personification of river Yamuna holding a pitcher of water in her hand is depicted in the background. The same composition is repeated in a painting dateable to c. 1740 (Fig. 5.25c), in which Balarama, now clad in a blue courtly *jama*, changes the course of river with his plough. In the latter depiction, Balarama is joined by Krishna while the personification of Yamuna emerges out of the water in adoration to Balarama.

²³⁰ Goswami, J. 2013. *Gita Govinda*. Ratan Press, 21.



5.25a



5.25b



5.25c

Buddha Avatara

The Buddha is mentioned as an incarnation of Vishnu in the Harivamsa Purana (1.41), Vishnu Purana (3.18), Bhagavata Purana (1.3.24), Garuda Purana (1.1, 2.30.37, 3.15.26), Agni Purana (16, 49.8), Naradiya Purana (2.72), Linga Purana (1.71), and the Padma Purana (3.252). The text of Agni Purana has provided further detail regarding the iconography of Buddha who is described as ‘calm, having long ears, white complexion, wearing a cloth, and seated on lotus with its petals upwards and as conferring favour and protection’. The following verse is dedicated to the Buddha incarnation in the text of Gita Govinda:

nindasi yajna-vidher ahaha shruti-jatam
sadaya-hridaya darshita-pashu-ghatam
keshava dhrita-buddha-sharira jaya jagadisha hare

O Hari! You have assumed the form of Buddha. Being compassionate and sensitive, you decry the Vedas when you see the violence inflicted upon animals in the course of sacrificial performances. May you be victorious!²³¹

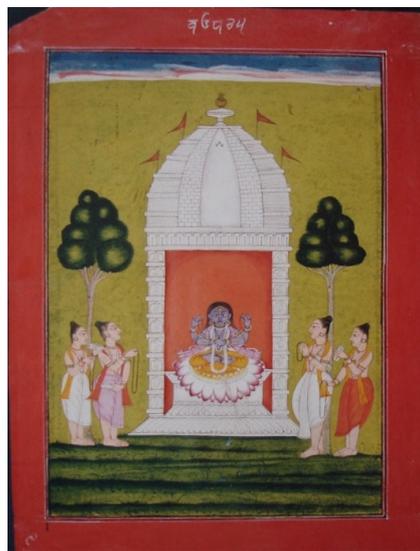
Goswamy and Fischer have opined that by the 18th century, awareness of the Buddha had been virtually wiped off from Pahari minds.²³² Buddha in Chamba painting is usually depicted as an icon installed in a temple decorated with saffron flags (Fig. 5.26a). The four-armed Buddha figure is front facing, with two hands clasped together, long tresses of hair falling at his back, and a third eye amidst Shaivite markings. The blue-complexioned Buddha is clad in a yellow dhoti while a lilac *uttariya* flows freely over his shoulders. The Buddha receives the worship of priests holding religious texts and rosaries. In my view, the iconographic source of the Buddha iconography is the idol of Avalokiteshwara at Udaipur (present-day Lahul) (Fig. 5.26b), which is worshipped by the local Buddhists as a Buddhist icon while the Hindu populace worships it as Triloki Nath, a form of Shiva.

²³¹ Goswami, J. 2013. *Gita Govinda*. Ratan Press, 22.

²³² Goswamy, B. N., and Eberhard Fischer. 1992. *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*. 184

Comparing the Buddha representation in Fig. 5.26a with the Avalokiteshwara idol with emphasis on the placement of his hands, tresses of hair, lobed earrings, and third eye reveals the iconographic connection between the two.

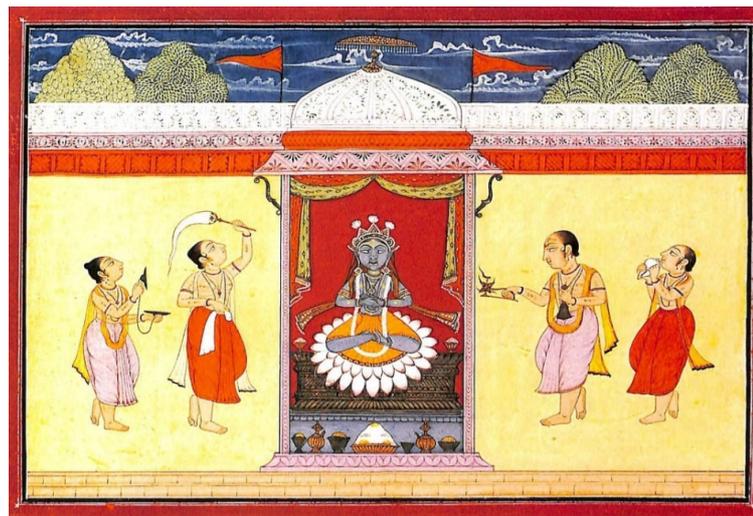
A second Buddha painting which is attributed to Mahesh of Chamba²³³ (Fig. 5.25c) is suggestive that in the course of a generation, the ‘Vaishnavisation’ of the Buddha iconography has been done with the removal of the third eye, the two arms and the addition of a gold crown on his head.



5.26a



5.26b



5.26c

²³³ Goswamy, B. N., and Eberhard Fischer. 1992. *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*. 182

Kalki Avatara

The description of Kalki as the tenth incarnation of Vishnu to end the darkness, degeneration and chaos of the Kali Yuga finds mention in almost all of the Vaishnavite Puranas. The Kalki Purana mentions his white horse Devadatta, who is regarded as a manifestation of the Garuda, and a jewelled sword.²³⁴ The following verse is dedicated to the Kalki incarnation in the text of Gita Govinda:

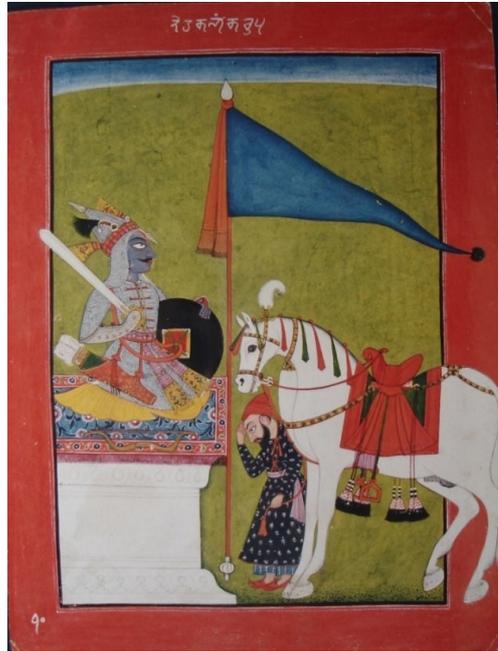
mleccha-nivaha-nidhane kalayasi karavalam
dhumaketum iva kim api karalam
keshava dhrita-kalki-sharira jaya jagadisha hare

O Hari! Adventing as Kalki, you wield a fearsome sword that resembles a foreboding star as you slaughter the barbarians. May You be victorious!²³⁵

Compared to the previous incarnations of Vishnu, the Kalki incarnation is yet to be manifested, hence no popular episode is associated with his being. Therefore, the depiction of the Kalki Avatara is generally in the form of a Rajput warrior clad in armour, seated on pedestal with a sword and a shield in his hand (Fig. 5.27a). Facing Kalki is a groom who brings the white horse Devadatta to him and salutes in adoration. Comparison of Fig. 5.27a to the later depictions of Kalki at Chamba suggests that the iconographic formula of Kalki incarnation in Chamba remained largely unchanged over the generations (Fig. 5.27b), with just minor variations.

²³⁴ Rocher, Ludo. 1986. *The Puranas*. Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 183.

²³⁵ Goswami, J. 2013. *Gita Govinda*. Ratan Press, 22.



5.27a



5.27b

5.3 Bhagavata Purana



Fig. 5.28 Krishna Lifting Mount Govardhana, Chamba, c. 1650, NCM 117, NC Mehta Collection, Lalbhai Dalpatbhai Museum, Ahmedabad

As discussed in Chapter 3, the mention of Sanskrit texts such as Bhagavata Purana and Harivamsa Purana in the legal documents and copper-plate charters belonging to the early 17th century CE points towards the popularity of Vaishnavite literature in Chamba during the period. The available tangible evidence in the form of paintings such as ‘Krishna Lifting the Mount Govardhana’ (Fig 5.28), and the dispersed Bharat Kala Bhawan Dasavatara set reveals that paintings pertaining to Vaishnavite subject-matter were already being commissioned at the Chamba court during the second quarter of the 17th century, coinciding with the beginning of painting activity at Chamba. A number of copper-plate charters issued during the corresponding reigns of Janardana Varmana (1631—23) and Balabhadra Varmana (1589—1613, 1623—

41) mention land grants made to Brahmins ‘out of devotion to Krishna’.²³⁶ A 1619 CE copper-plate charter issued by Raja Balabhadra Varmana, granting land to a Sarasvata Brahmana named Mishra Govardhana of Kasi on the recitation of the Harivamsa Purana²³⁷ suggests that the recitation of Puranic literature of Vaishnavite subject-matter was considered an important event. Bhagavata Saptah, the week-long recitation of the Bhagavata Purana, is a traditional event in the North-Western Himalayas that is often organised in various villages of the region, where folks assemble to partake in the recital.²³⁸

The major Bhagavata Purana sets from the neighbouring hill-states of Guler and Kangra comprise of episodes from the 12 *skandas* (cantos), recounting the legend of Vishnu, his various incarnations, and the stories related to his devotees.²³⁹ However, the analysis of the Chamba Bhagavata Purana sets has revealed that the paintings prominently revolve around the episodes of the Dasham Skanda (10th canto), i.e., the story of Krishna. In my view, the Bhagavata Purana sets produced at Chamba consciously put Krishna in a position above the other incarnations as the supreme deity, with the intention to celebrate his legend – beginning from his birth, the slaying of several demons, his dalliance with the Gopis, and concluding with the killing of Kamsa. This opinion is further corroborated by the fact that the walls of the two Devi temples – Shakti Dehra temple at Gand Dehra and Devi-Kothi temple at Churah – are adorned with murals depicting the deeds of Krishna up to the killing of Kamsa.

While Krishna as a subject starts to appear during the reign of Prithvi Singh in the mid-17th century (Fig. 5.28), I attribute a corpus of Bhagavata Purana paintings to the reign of Chattar Singh (1664-90). A folio based on the subject of Krishna swallowing forest fire at the Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh (Fig. 5.29), deserves attention. The episode of ‘Davanala Achamana’ is not among the popular episodes of Krishna, particularly to have been recorded as a stand-alone folio. Hence, I assume that the folio must have been part of an elaborate Bhagavata Purana set

²³⁶ Chhabra, B.C. 1957. *Antiquities of Chamba State, Part 2: Medieval and Later Inscriptions*. Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India; 72. Page 114.

²³⁷ The recitation corresponded with the birth of the future Raja Prithvi Singh (Chhabra, B.C. 1957, 114)

²³⁸ Sharma, V. 2020. *Painting in the Kangra Valley*. Niyogi Books, 175.

²³⁹ Sharma, V. 2020. *Painting in the Kangra Valley*. Niyogi Books, 172.

commissioned during the reign of Raja Chattar Singh (r. 1664—90), as the painting is stylistically similar to the work of the master attributed with the portraits of the Raja²⁴⁰. Other paintings of the set, however, remain undiscovered.

Another painting, rendered in a different sensibility depicting Krishna and Balarama at school, has come to my attention (Fig. 5.30), which also appear to be belonging to the same period. It is unclear whether the painting was once part of a larger set as no other painting in a similar style has come to light.



Fig. 5.29 Krishna swallowing Forest Fire, from a Bhagavata Purana Chamba, c. 1680, Accession No. 1283, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig. 5.30 Krishna and Balarama at school, from a Bhagavata Purana, Chamba, c. 1690, Accession No. 1316, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

²⁴⁰ Stylistic qualities of this workshop are discussed in 7.1.1

As per my observation, the earliest known comprehensive set of Bhagavata Purana from Chamba is found to be made during the reign of Chattar Singh (c. 1690), presently at the Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh. Goswamy and Fischer while attributing the set to the principality of Mankot, note: “The important Bhagavata Purana series that we ascribe, together with many other paintings, to a master painter settled in the small principality of Mankot, contains no clue to its authorship. In the form in which it has survived, it can only be seen as a fragment of a once extensive series, but there is no opening leaf or colophon. Nor is there any note in the hand of an owner, contemporary or late, providing information of use or value. It is only on the basis of two circumstances, both slightly extraneous to the paintings themselves, that the series is associated with a Mankot atelier at all. First, these paintings, for the most part, are known to have come out of the family collection of a descendant of the royal house of Mankot, Tikka Indra Vijay Singh, who was settled in the little village of Salangri in Kangra District forty years ago. Secondly, in the making of the wasli (many-layered sheet) of one of these paintings, an old paper, a letter from one Ajab Singh addressed to Raja Mahipat Dev of Mankot, was used. The writing on the sheet shows through the back of the painting and it was possible to read most of the text of that letter, now rather faint, when it was photographed and printed in reverse. A physical connection of this Bhagavata Purana series and related paintings with Mankot is thus established. But these circumstances do not add in any way to our information about the atelier or the master painter responsible for this work.”²⁴¹ Goswamy and Fischer also note that the registers of the *pandas* at pilgrimage centres have provided no information regarding the settling of any painting families in Mankot.

I attribute the Bhagavata Purana set, previously assigned to Mankot, to Chamba on three important grounds:

1. Stylistic grounds: On analysing the style of the painter of the Mankot Bhagavata Purana²⁴² (‘Horizontal’ Bhagavata Purana hereafter) (Fig. 5.31), it becomes evident that the painter must have belonged to the workshop of a

²⁴¹ Goswamy, B. N., and Eberhard Fischer. 1992. *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*, 96

²⁴² Detailed analysis of this style is in 7.1.7

painter family active in Chamba since the reign of Prithvi Singh. Important works of this family workshop include a *jharokha* portrait of Prithvi Singh (Fig. 5.32), the ‘Seven Sages’ (Fig. 3.33), a portrait of Udai Singh (Fig. 5.34), and a ‘Taking of Toll’ folio (Fig. 5.35).²⁴³ I opine that as the painters of this workshop were continuously active in Chamba from 1650-1760, the likelihood of the Horizontal Bhagavata Purana set to have been commissioned by the Chamba court cannot not be ruled out.



Fig. 5.31

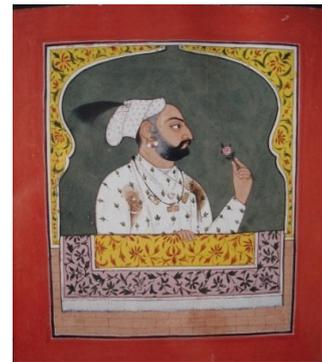


Fig. 5.32

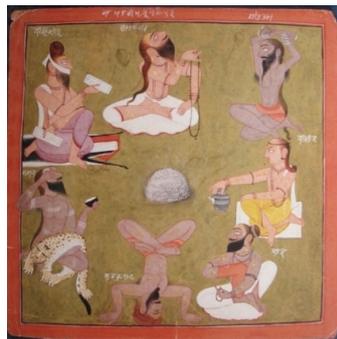


Fig. 5.33



Fig. 5.34

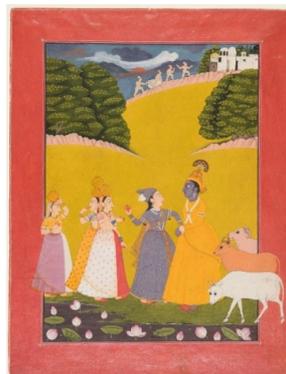


Fig. 5.35

²⁴³ The stylistic traits of this workshop are elaborated in Chapter VII

2. Compositional analysis: The paintings are almost identical in terms of composition and iconography to the murals of Devi-Kothi and the 1757 Laharu Bhagavata Purana. While it is difficult to assume the iconographic source for the paintings of the set, a comparative study with later sets highlights its influence on the murals and the Laharu Bhagavata Purana. I have come to opine that the paintings of this set influenced the later Bhagavata Purana sets as well, which could not have been possible unless the painters of the later sets had access to the preparatory material of this Bhagavata Purana as reference.



Fig. 5.36a



Fig. 5.36b



Fig. 5.36c

Fig. 5.36 (a-c): Compositional similarities in the Horizontal Bhagavata Purana (c. 1690), Murals of Devi-Kothi (dated 1954), Laharu Bhagavata Purana (dated 1957)

3. Palaeographic grounds: Folios of the Horizontal Bhagavata Purana are inscribed on the top border in black ink (Fig. 5.37), identifying the subject of the paintings. The hand in which the inscriptions are written is comparable to the inscriptions on a portrait of Raja Udai Singh (Fig. 5.38). Considering that the scribe who inscribed the portraits of the Chamba Raja was active in Chamba around the 1700s, it is highly likely that he would have inscribed the paintings of this Bhagavata Purana, which is only possible if the paintings were produced in Chamba.



Fig. 5.37: Takri inscription on Horizontal Bhagavata Purana painting, c. 1690



Fig. 5.38: Takri inscription on the portrait of Raja Udai Singh, c. 1710

In my view, the inferred criteria of the authors for assigning the Bhagavata Purana set to Mankot is inadequate and unsuitable. Primarily, miniature paintings are known to exchange hands as diplomatic or matrimonial gifts, due to the migration of painters or acquisition by other means. For example, A batch of charred paintings was collected from Nurpur²⁴⁴, believed to have been acquired in Chamba by Raja Bir Singh Pathania of Nurpur, during his stay as a political guest of his brother-in-law Raja Charhat Singh of Chamba (r. 1808—44).²⁴⁵ Another example is a set of Ragamala paintings attributed to Chamba on stylistic grounds bearing the stamp of Mandi library on the versos, indicating that while the set was produced at Chamba, it formed a part of the Mandi royal library (personal communication with Catherine Glynn Benkaim). Based on the discussion above, these paintings are definitely a product of the Chamba school.

²⁴⁴ Archer, William G. 1973. *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills: A Survey and History of Pahari Miniature Painting: Vol. II*, Fig. 3,4.

²⁴⁵ Archer, William G. 1973. *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills: A Survey and History of Pahari Miniature Painting: Vol. I*, 384

The second major Bhagavata Purana set from Chamba is the dispersed ‘**Vertical Bhagavata Purana**, dateable to c. 1720. These paintings are identical in style and composition to the Horizontal Bhagavata Purana and are attributed by Goswamy and Fischer to a member of the same Mankot workshop as the Horizontal Bhagavata Purana²⁴⁶. However, in my opinion, paintings appear to be modelled on their ‘Horizontal’ predecessors, with adjustments in terms of division of space in order to transform the horizontal compositions into vertical formats (Fig. 5.39a-b). Paintings of the Vertical Bhagavata Purana in turn influenced the 1757 Laharu Bhagavata Purana (Fig. 5.40a-b), with which it shares typological similarities. These are inscribed on the top border in white ink, as had become customary for the Chamba scribes from c. 1720 CE onwards.



Fig. 5.39 (a-b): Compositional similarities in the Horizontal Bhagavata Purana (c. 1690) and the Vertical Bhagavata Purana (c. 1720)

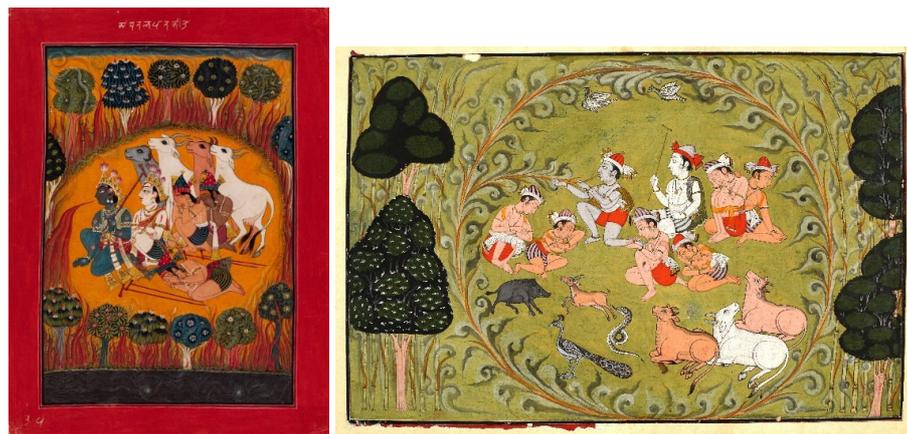


Fig. 5.40 (a-b): Compositional similarities in the Vertical Bhagavata Purana (c. 1720) and the Laharu Bhagavata Purana (dated 1757)

²⁴⁶ Goswamy, B. N., and Eberhard Fischer. 1992. *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*, 97

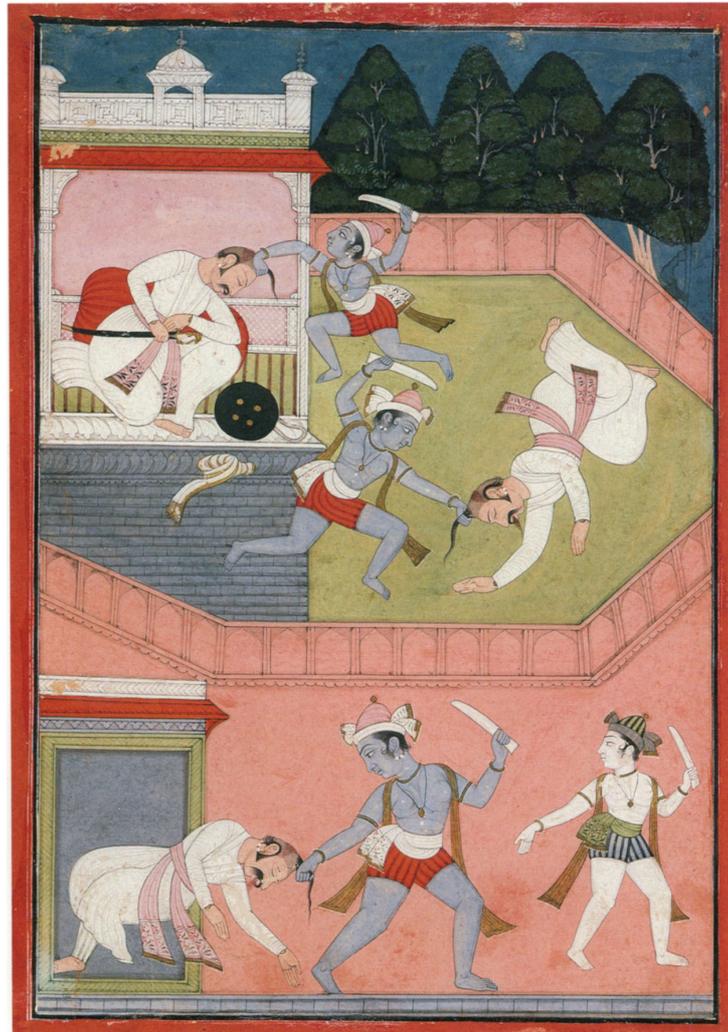


Fig. 5.41: Krishna kills Kamsa, from the Laharu Bhagavata Purana, dated 1757 CE, 28.5 x 20.3 cm, Accession No. 1908 D.29, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba

The third major Bhagavata Purana from Chamba is the one attributed to **Laharu**. Comprising of both horizontal and vertical compositions, the set was commissioned by Mian Shamsheer Singh, the brother and Wazir of Raja Umed Singh (r. 1748—64) in the year 1757, as mentioned in the colophon of the set.²⁴⁷ Compared to the previous

²⁴⁷ Goswamy, B. N., and Eberhard Fischer. 1992. *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*, 151

two Bhagavata Purana sets, both horizontal and vertical, the compositions of the Laharu Bhagavata Purana do not suffer from *horror vacui*, and the figures are not cluttered and appear to be floating freely in an atmospheric space (Fig. 5.41). In a fashion similar to the Vertical Bhagavata Purana, the paintings of **Laharu Bhagavata Purana** are also scribed in white ink on the top border.

The contents of the three Bhagavata Purana sets of Chamba are largely similar in nature, with little variations acquired over the course of time. Popular episodes from these sets include: Krishna Appearing to Devaki and Vasudeva (Fig. 5.42), Vasudeva Carrying Infant Krishna Across the River (Fig. 5.43), Yogamaya Slips from the Hands of Kamsa's Servant (Fig. 5.44), Killing of Putana (Fig. 5.45), Killing of Kamsa (Fig. 5.41), Installation of Ugrasena on the throne of Mathura (Fig. 5.46).



Fig. 5.42 Krishna Appears to Devaki and Vasudeva, Chamba, c. 1690, Accession No. 1277, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig. 5.43 Vasudeva Carrying Infant Krishna Across the River, Chamba, c. 1690, Accession No. 1271, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig. 5.44 Yogamaya Slips from the Hands of Kamsa's Servant, from the Laharu Bhagavata Purana, Chamba, dated 1757, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba

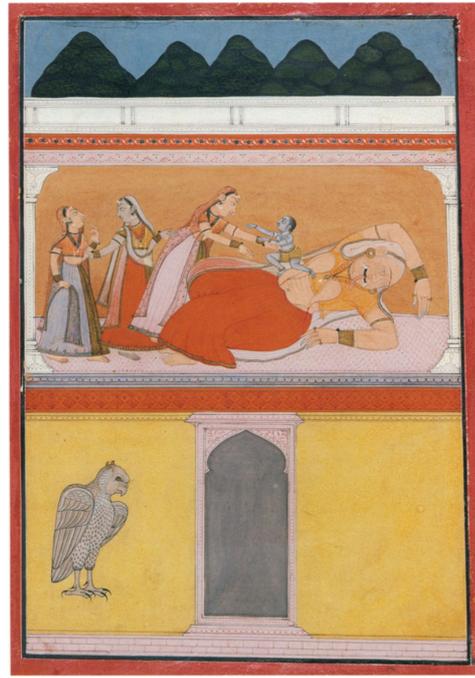


Fig. 5.45 Krishna kills the Demoness Putana, from the Laharu Bhagavata Purana, Chamba, dated 1757, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba



Fig. 5.46 Ugrasena is appointed on the Mathura throne, from the Laharu Bhagavata Purana, Chamba, dated 1757, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba

5.4 Ramayana

The cult of Rama was already in vogue in Chamba by the time painting activity started becoming popular in the region in the 17th century, a fact corroborated by the construction of a Rama temple in the town by Prithvi Singh, who also named two of his sons after Rama –Raghunath Singh and Ram Singh. There is also the recurring mention of Rama in the copper-plate charters of the 17th century. A painting depicting Chattar Singh, son of Prithvi Singh, praying at a Rama shrine has also surfaced (c. 1680) (Fig. 5.47), further solidifying the claim. Other than the many depictions of Rama in the Dasavatara sets, a number of standalone images of Rama have also come to my attention, reflecting the presence of the Ayodhya prince in the consciousness of the society of Chamba. Despite the popularity of Rama in the consciousness of the society of Chamba, no Ramayana set produced in Chamba during the 17th century has come to my attention.

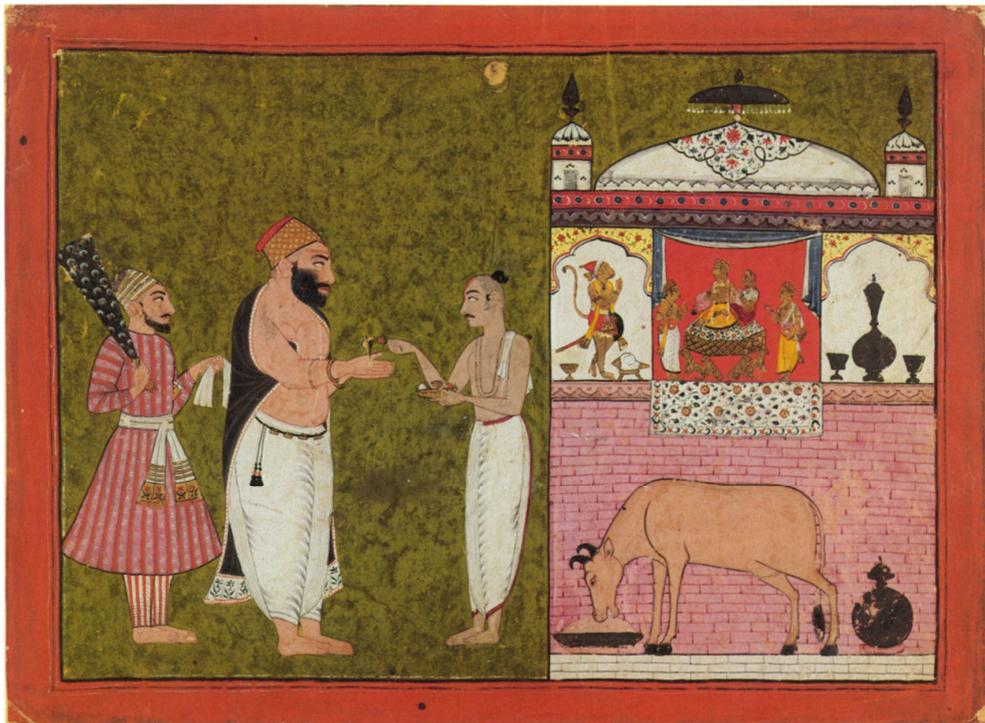


Fig. 5.47 Raja Chattar Singh Praying at a Rama Shrine, Chamba, c. 1680, 21.2 x 28.2 cm, Accession No. RVI 1250 Museum Rietberg, Zurich

A dispersed Ramayana set dated c. 1700-20 CE has surfaced from Nurpur (Fig. 5.48), however, leading to the implication that Ramayana paintings were already being commissioned in the neighbouring states. While the folios of the Nurpur set are inscribed on the verso in Sanskrit, the language, however, is coarse and is not a part of Valmiki's original treatise. In my view, the text of the Nurpur Ramayana set must have been a reiteration of the original text of Valmiki's Ramayana composed by a local poet at Nurpur. While a major Ramayana commission was taking place in the neighbouring Nurpur, the consideration that Ramayana set(s) were not being produced in Chamba during this period seems unlikely.



Fig. 5.48 Sugriva Challenges his brother Vali to a duel, folio from a Ramayana, Nurpur, c. 1700-20, 20.7 x 31 cm, Accession No. 1973.103, Cleveland Museum of Art

A dispersed set of Ramayana drawings has emerged from Chamba, dateable to around 1725-1750 (Fig. 5.49). These drawings serve as the basis for a set of Ramayana paintings, attributed to Laharu (Fig. 5.50).²⁴⁸ The **Laharu Ramayana**, hence, is the only known major Ramayana set from Chamba, dateable to 1760-65, in the mid-18th century.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Goswamy, B. N., and Eberhard Fischer. 1992. *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*, 151

²⁴⁹ Goswamy, B. N., and Eberhard Fischer. 1992. *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*, 151

Currently dispersed, the set consists of 37 folios housed in the Bhuri Singh Museum at Chamba, depicting episodes from the Bala Kanda and the Ayodhya Kanda. While it remains unclear if the paintings aimed to recreate each drawing from the earlier series, the likelihood suggests that the project was abruptly interrupted rather than completely terminated (personal observation). Noteworthy paintings from this set include: The birth of Rama and his brothers (Fig. 5.50), Parasurama Challenges Rama to Stretch Vishnu's Bow (5.51), and Dasaratha Cremates Shravana and his Parents (Fig. 5.52).

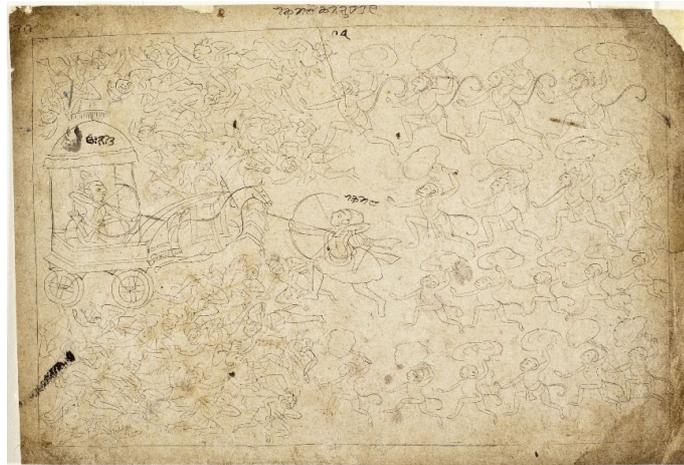


Fig. 5.49 Lakshmana battles Indrajit, folio from a Ramayana, Chamba, c. 1725-50, 19.05 x 27.94 cm, Accession No. M.72.83.2, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

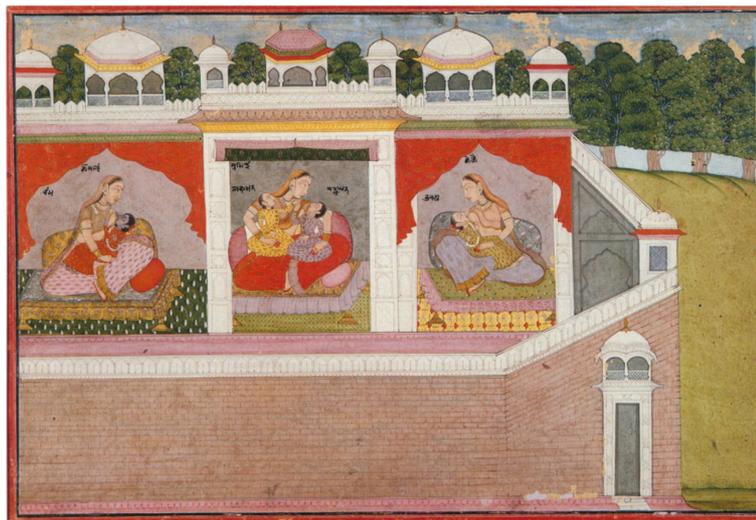


Fig. 5.50 Birth of Rama and his brothers, folio from a Ramayana, Chamba, c. 1760-65, 27 x 35.4 cm, Accession No. 1908 D.69, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba



Fig. 5.51 Parashurama Challenges Rama to Stretch Vishnu's Bow, folio from a Ramayana, Chamba, c. 1760-65, 26.5 x 35.4 cm, Accession No. 1908 D.86, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba



Fig. 5.52 Dasaratha cremates Shrivatsa and his Parents, folio from a Ramayana, Chamba, c. 1760-65, 27.2 x 34 cm, Accession No. 1908 D.103, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba

A minor set of Ramayana paintings has come to my attention, displaying both stylistic and typological resemblances to the Laharu Ramayana. The stylistic characteristics in this set strongly resemble those of the Laharu Ramayana, suggesting that the same artist, Laharu himself, might have created both sets. Nevertheless, this particular set stands out due to its smaller size compared to its larger counterpart. Additionally, the compositions in this minor Ramayana lack the intricacies present in the former, featuring simplified figures against monochromatic backgrounds and sparing use of expensive pigments like gold and silver.

Based on these observations, it is reasonable to conclude that the **'Small' Laharu Ramayana** paintings were commissioned by a non-regal patron, potentially a courtier or an unidentified priest. It is likely that these paintings were produced around the same period as the former set since both sets appear incomplete, primarily focusing on episodes from the Bala Kanda and Ayodhya Kanda. The precise number of folios in this dispersed set remains uncertain, as only six paintings have come to my attention, with five being in the British Museum, and an additional painting in the Rijksmuseum. One of the paintings in the British Museum, which portrays Rama stretching the bow of Shiva (Fig. 5.53), is labelled with the Takri number 15. This suggests that there were likely at least 15 paintings that originally constituted the set. However, due to the set's dispersed nature, the exact number of paintings that were originally part of it remains uncertain. Notable examples from the set include 'Rama and Lakshmana Battle Hordes of Demons at Vishvamitra's Hermitage' (5.54), 'Meeting of Dasaratha and Janaka' (5.55) and 'Wedding of Rama and Sita' (5.56).

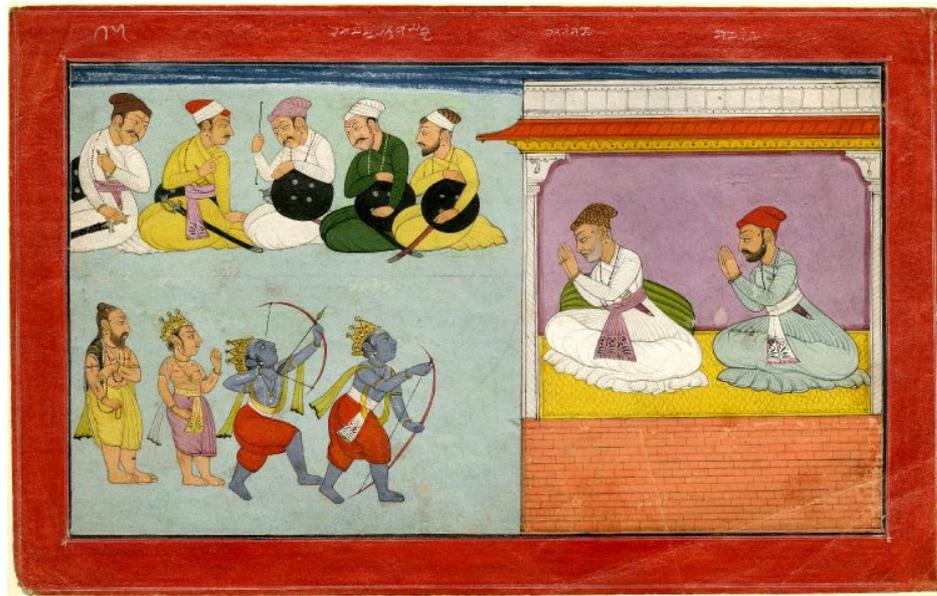


Fig. 5.53 Rama stretches Shiva's Bow, folio from the 'Small' Laharu Ramayana, Chamba, c. 1760-65, 14 x 23.80 cm, Museum No. 1923,0716,0.4, British Museum



Fig. 5.54 Rama and Lakshmana battle hordes of Demons at Vishvamitra's Hermitage, folio from the 'Small' Laharu Ramayana, Chamba, c. 1760-65, Museum No. RP-T-1993-295, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Fig. 5.55 Meeting of Dasaratha and Janaka, folio from the 'Small' Laharu Ramayana, Chamba, c. 1760-65, 17 x 27.70 cm, Museum No. 1923,0716,0.6, British Museum



Fig. 5.56 Wedding of Rama and Sita, folio from the 'Small' Laharu Ramayana, Chamba, c. 1760-65, 14 x 23 cm, Museum No. 1923,0716,0.7, British Museum

5.5 Parijata Harana

The legend of the Parijata tree finds mention in the chapter 67 of the Vishnu Parva of the Harivamsa Purana.²⁵⁰ According to the legend, Narada once brought Krishna a flower of the Parijata tree from Indra's garden, which Krishna then offered to his first wife Rukmini. Narada then proceeded towards the bedchambers of Satyabhama, Krishna's second and favourite wife, causing her to become resentful and envious of Rukmini. She threw her ornament onto the bed and then began to wallow in despair. Witnessing this, Krishna attempted to caress her unsuccessfully. To appease her, Krishna picked up a fan and began to slowly fan her. The breeze generated by the fan dispersed the scent of the Parijata flower that Krishna had touched, filling the bedchamber with an ethereal fragrance. Being infatuated with the scent of the Parijata, Satyabhama requested Krishna to fetch her the Parijata flower, to which Krishna travelled to Indra's abode and stole the Parijata tree. Indra, enraged by the sight of Krishna escaping with the sacred tree, challenged Krishna to a combat. The two engaged in a hard struggle, from which Krishna emerged triumphant. Indra relinquished the Parijata tree to Krishna, who returned with it to his palace and planted it near the entrance to Satyabhama's apartments. Satyabhama, pleased with her husband, praised Narada for his assistance and presented him with a cow in exchange. In the end, peace was restored in Krishna's palace.²⁵¹

The humorous, dramatic, and light-hearted quality of the legend must have made it dear to the Rajas of Chamba, who were well familiar with the Harivamsa Purana. In my view, the character of Narada as an informer, instigator and mischief-maker in the narrative would have captured the fancy of the patrons. A set of ten paintings of the **Parijata Harana** was discovered by me in the Government Museum and Picture Gallery, Chandigarh (Fig. 5.57-5.66). Stylistically, the paintings bear hallmarks that were in vogue during the end of the reign of Raja Chattar Singh (r. 1664-90), and it is likely that the paintings were made during the same period.

²⁵⁰ Pandey, Pandit Ramnarayanadatt Shastri. 1955. *Sri Harivamsa Purana*. Gitapress Gorakhpur, 177

²⁵¹ Pandey, *Sri Harivamsa Purana*, 180



Fig. 5.57 Indra dispatches Narada to Krishna's home, Chamba, c. 1690, Accession No. 1351, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig. 5.58 Narada incites Satyabhama against Rukmini, Chamba, c. 1690, Accession No. 1341, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

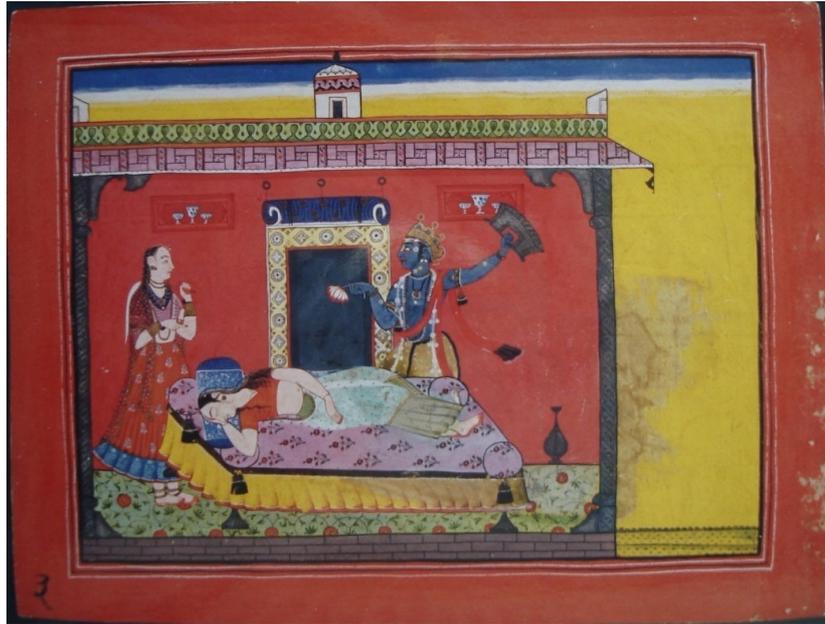


Fig. 5.59 Krishna consoles fainted Satyabhama, Chamba, c. 1690, Accession No. 1293, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig. 5.60 Narada informs Indra about the situation at Krishna's home, Chamba, c. 1690, Accession No. 1348, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig. 5.61 Krishna uproots the Parijata Tree, Chamba, c. 1690, Accession No. 1292, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig. 5.62 Krishna battles Indra, Chamba, c. 1690, Accession No. 1290, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig. 5.63 Satyabhama prepares for Cow Sacrifice to Narada, Chamba, c. 1690, Accession No. 1287, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig. 5.64 Satyabhama performs Cow Sacrifice to Narada, Chamba, c. 1690, Accession No. 1288, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig. 5.65 Satyabhama pays Obeisance to Narada, Chamba, c. 1690, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig. 5.66 Satyabhama pays Obeisance to Narada, Chamba, c. 1690, Accession No. 1289, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

5.6 Durgasaptasati

Rajas of Chamba venerated Durga and her many forms by constructing several Devi temples across the state, including Lakshana Devi Temple, Bharmour; Shakti Dehra, Chattarari; Mahishasuramardani temple, Vajreshwari temple, Chamba town; and Devi-Kothi temple, Churah to name a few.

Prithvi Singh (r. 1641—64) donated a silver plaque at the Hidimba temple at Mehla (Fig. 5.67), depicting him praying to the Goddess. Portraits of Chattar Singh (Fig. 5.68) and Udai Singh (Fig. 5.69) have also surfaced, showing them adorning Shakta markings on their forehead. Although a number of isolated paintings of Durga have been found in Chamba belonging to different periods (Fig. 5.70 and 5.71), paintings based on the exploits of Devi have not been found prior to the murals of the Shakti-Dehra temple, Gand-Dehra.



Fig. 5.67 Adoration of Chamunda, silver plate installed in the Hidimba Temple by Raja Prithvi Singh, Chamba, c. 1650, Hidimba Temple, Mehla, Chamba



Fig. 5.68 and 5.69 Details from Portraits of Raja Chattar Singh and Uday Singh depicting them adorning Shakta markings on forehead.



Fig. 5.70 Devi Enthroned, Chamba, c. 1650, Jagdish and Kamala Mittal Museum, Hyderabad

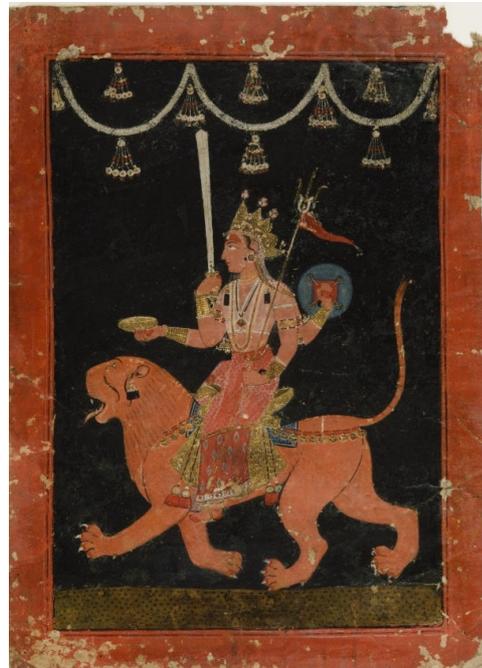


Fig. 5.71 The Great Goddess Durga Riding Her Lion, Chamba, c. 1690, 28.9 x 20.6 cm, Accession No. 1994-148-486, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Rajas of Chamba shared familiarity with the text of Durgasaptasati, as a number of handwritten manuscripts on the subject has come to light (personal communication with Dr. Vijay Sharma). A copper plate charter dated 1748 CE mentions a land grant to a Brahmin for the recitation of the Durga Saptasati.²⁵²

Apart from murals and the isolated paintings, only one illustrated painted manuscript has come to my attention, presently at the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba (Fig. 5.72). Likely once a complete manuscript, only two pages from the book have survived. The paintings are in the style of Laharu, and hence dateable to the reign of Umed Singh (r. 1748—64).



Fig. 5.72 Adoration of Devi, page from a Durgasaptasati manuscript, attributed to Laharu, Chamba, c. 1755-60, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba

The development of the elaborate and intricate murals discovered within the Devi-Kothi in the absence of any known reference material, presents a remarkable phenomenon that can be likened to their emergence seemingly out of nothingness. Similar to the Krishna panel of the Devi-Kothi murals, which draws inspiration from pre-existing Bhagavata Purana sets, it is possible to entertain the idea that a comparable Durgasaptasati set may also have existed but remains undiscovered. This

²⁵² Chhabra, BC. 1957. *Antiquities of Chamba State, Part 2: Medieval and Later Inscriptions*. Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India; 72, 162.

speculation suggests the possibility that there could be a set of murals depicting scenes from the Durgasaptasati, waiting to be found and studied, potentially shedding light on the artistic and religious practices of the time.

5.7 Descent of Ganga

As observed by me in conversations with the native population of Chamba, hydromythology forms an important aspect of the regional folklore especially associated to the shortage of water which could only be solved by a sacrifice.

As per one such local legend, immediately after the shift of capital from Brahmapura (Bharmour) in the 11th century, the town of Chamba underwent a dire shortage of water. To curb this issue, Raja Sahilla was advised by a saint to sacrifice a member of the ruling family, to which Rani Naina (also Sunaina) decided to give her life. In the end, the queen was buried alive in a wall and a stream of water emerged from that spot²⁵³. The point of burial is venerated greatly by the local populace and an annual fair is organised to commemorate the queen's sacrifice.

In my view, the true inspiration behind the subject of the Descent of Ganga in Chamba painting is the convergence of hydromyths with the origin of the Ravi river in the south-eastern region of the state. The Dhauladhar mountain range in Bharmour valley is the origin point of the Ravi basin, as well as the Manimahesha peak, which is believed by the Gaddi tribe to be the Kailash – abode of Shiva. I opine that the belief that Shiva resides in Bharmour from where the river Ravi originates has to contribute to the popularity of the Descent of Ganga subject-matter in Chamba painting.

²⁵³ This legend is a common narrative associated with the shortage of water across South Asia.

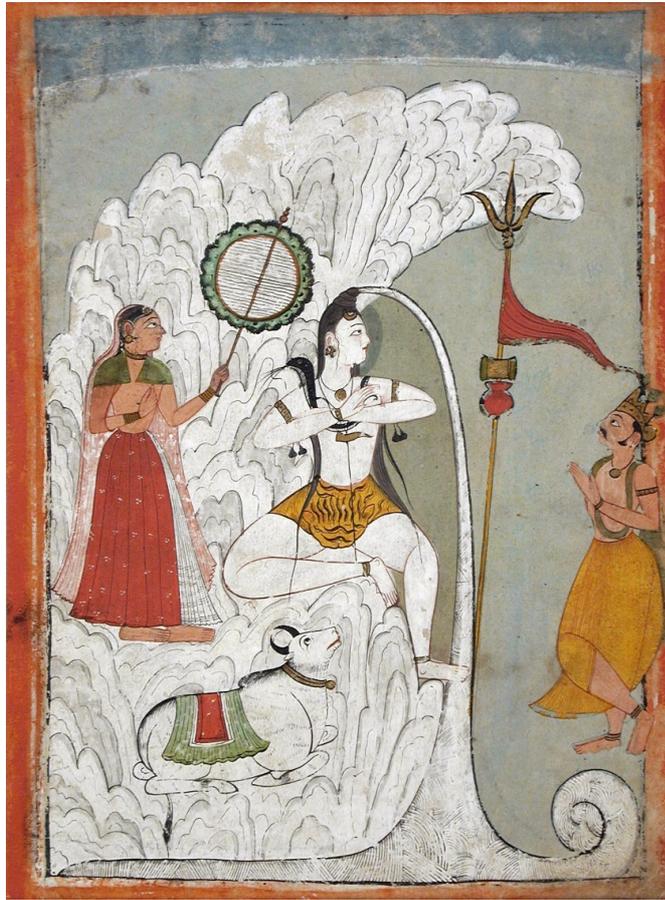


Fig. 5.73a Descent of Ganga, from the Bathu set, Chamba, c. 1665,
26.35 x 18.73 cm, Accession No. M.86.345.6, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

The earliest instance of a known **Descent of Ganga** painting dates to the reign of Chattar Singh (Fig. 5.73a), attributed c. 1665 CE. The composition shows Shiva and Parvati on the Kailash while Bhagiratha stands at the foot of the snow-capped mountain with hands folded in devotion. The same composition was repeated dateable in 1680 (Fig.5.73b), in which Chattar Singh's likeness has been used to denote Bhagiratha.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Sharma, Vijay, ed. 2008. *Vision of an Enlightened King*. Department of Language and Culture, Himachal Pradesh. 86.



Fig. 5.73b Descent of Ganga, Chamba, c. 1680, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba

A third Descent of Ganga composition was discovered by me in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art (Fig. 5.74). Dateable to c. 1720 on stylistic grounds, the painting is the most elaborate of the three compositions, with embellishments added by the painter in the form of three Shaivite yogis seated by a lake. In my view, the artist has attempted to emulate the lake at the foot of the Manimahesh Kailash (Fig. 5.75), on the banks of which an annual fair is observed in autumn.



Fig. 5.74 Descent of Ganga, Chamba, c. 1720, 20.8 x 29.8 cm,
Accession No. 2018.111, Cleveland Museum of Art



Fig. 5.75 Camps of Sadhus by the Dal Lake, Manimahesh Kailash, Bharmour (Chamba)

5.8 Ordeal by Liquor

The legend of the Vaishnavite priests Bhagwanji and Narainji, two mahants of the Pindori *gaddi*, is subject of a number of paintings produced in Chamba. Narainji, a disciple of Bhagwanji is remembered in the oral tradition of the region for surviving an ordeal by liquor administered by Jahangir during his visit to Nurpur in 1621 CE. In Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri, Jahangir records, “At this time it was reported that a sanyasi *moni* lived in the vicinity, and he had totally given up all voluntary motion. [...] One of them is the *moni*, who give up personal decision and surrender themselves. They absolutely do not let their tongues speak, and if they stand for ten days and nights in the same place they don’t even move their feet backwards or forwards. In general they make no voluntary movement and are like inanimate objects. When they brought him into my presence, an investigation was made. An amazing rigidity could be seen in him. It occurred to me that in a state of drunkenness or unconsciousness some external movement might happen. He was therefore given several bowls of double-distilled spirits to drink. He was in such control of himself that he didn’t change an iota and stood just as rigidly as before until he lost consciousness and was carried away like a corpse. God was merciful that no mortal injury was done to him. He certainly had a strange, powerful rigidity of its kind.”²⁵⁵

A brief historical account present at the Pindori shrine refers to the Rajas of Chamba as being devotees of the establishment²⁵⁶, which could justify the popularity of the narrative in Chamba painting. The earliest known depiction of the **ordeal of liquor** is determined by me to be in the ‘**Bathu**’ set (Fig. 5.76), dateable to c. 1665. Adorning conical caps with a *chhatra* like projection, the two sages are seated across one another. Bhagwanji, the elder mahant is identified with his elongated cap and grey beard, and Narainji is depicted with his arms crossed, possibly to symbolise his vow to give up voluntary motion. A noble seated at a Jharokha, in all likelihood to be Jahangir, hands over cups of the poisonous concoction to a Muslim servant who administers it to Narainji.

²⁵⁵ Jahangir and W. M Thackston. 1999. *The Jahangirnama : Memoirs of Jahangir Emperor of India*. New York: Freer Gallery of Art Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in association with Oxford University Press, 375.

²⁵⁶ Goswamy, B. N., and Eberhard Fischer. 1992. *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India*, 140



Fig. 5.76 Ordeal of Narainji, from the Bathu set, Chamba, c. 1665

A second painting, belonging to the reign of Udai Singh (1690—1720), is based on the same subject (Fig. 5.77), which depicts a bearded Muslim noble, identified from the Takri inscription on the top border as ‘Patishah Jahangir’, pouring wine into a cup then administered by a pageboy to Narainji. The likeness of the two saints is identical to the previous composition, as the similarities can be observed in their headgear, apparel, postures and facial details. A third composition from the same time period depicts the scene in an identical fashion (5.78).



Fig. 5.77 Ordeal by Liquor, Chamba, c. 1720, National Museum, New Delhi.



Fig. 5.78 Ordeal by Liquor, Chamba, c. 1720, Accession No. AM-MIN-770, Allahabad Museum.

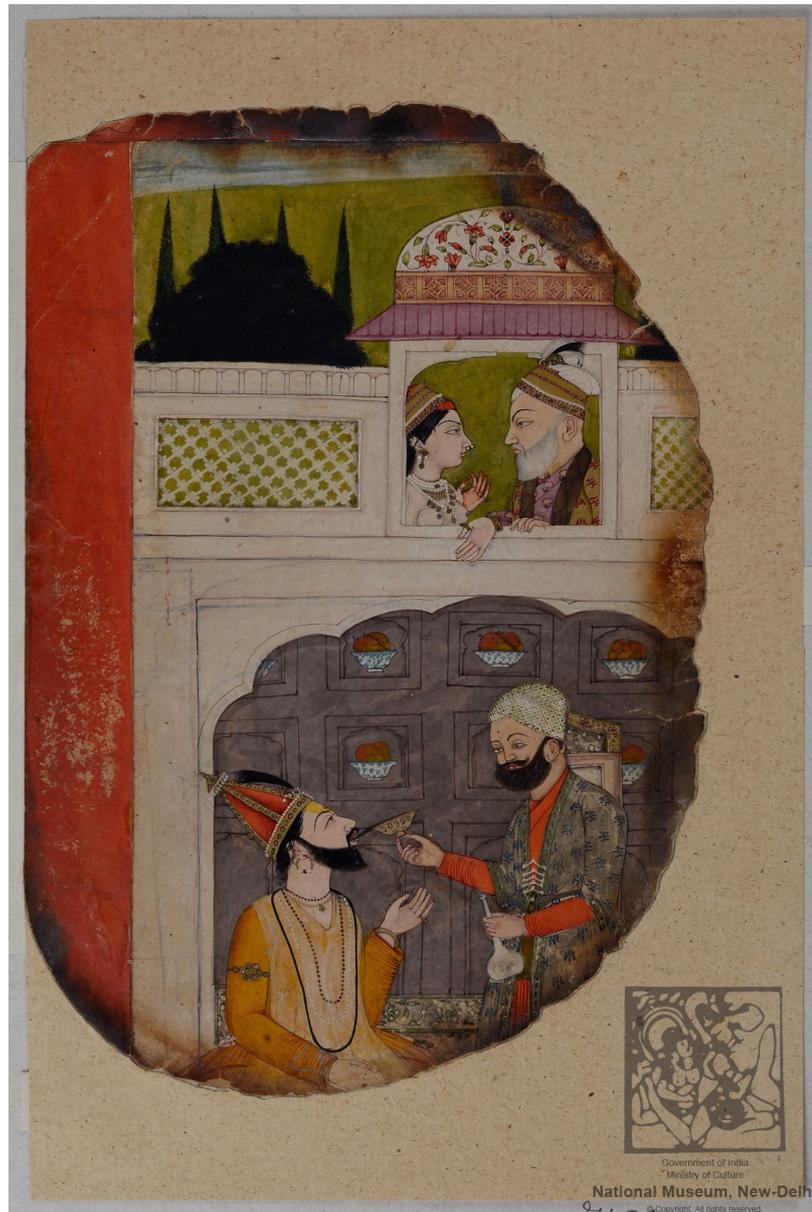


Fig. 5.79 Ordeal by Liquor, Chamba, c. 1770, National Museum, New Delhi.

A fourth painting based on the same theme, belonging to the third quarter of the 18th century, was discovered by me in the National Museum, New Delhi (Fig. 5.79). It depicts an old Muslim noble, sporting a grey beard, seated on a *jharokha* with a lady, observing a scene in the lower chamber. In the chamber below, a Muslim servant draped in a Turkish robe administers a cup of wine to Narainji, who adorns the same headgear as in the previous compositions. Comparing the composition to the previous paintings of the same subject-matter, it can be assumed that the charred portion of the

painting would have the likeness of Bhagwanji with a veena. While only three paintings based on the subject-matter was discovered by me, in my opinion, the fact that the paintings were produced in different periods over the course of a century signifies that the subject-matter remained popular in Chamba for long, and the possibility of several more paintings made on the subject-matter remains.



Fig. 5.80 Detail from a portrait of Jahangir, Mughal, c. 1615-20, 22.5 x 14.9 cm, Accession No. 13.228.47, Metropolitan Museum of Art

In my view, the depiction of Jahangir deserves special attention in the three paintings, as it is not remotely similar to the known likenesses of the Mughal emperor (Fig. 5.80). I hold the opinion that the explanation for the inconsistency can be credited to the fact that the court of Chamba was under the subjugation of Nurpur for the most period after coming into contact with the Mughal emperor, restricting exchange of any manner. At the period of reconciliation of the Chamba state by Prithvi Singh in 1641 CE, Jahangir had been succeeded by Shah Jahan as the emperor. A posthumous portrait of Akbar discussed in the previous chapter (Fig. 5.81), is strikingly similar to the known portrayals of the emperor, since it was reproduced from a Mughal original (Fig. 5.82).

Hence, the inconsistency in the depiction of Jahangir could be a result of the unavailability of a likeness of the Mughal emperor at Chamba. Therefore, his fantastic representation is based on the platitudinal portrayal of an Islamic ruler.



Fig. 5.81 Posthumous portrait of Akbar holding a falcon, Chamba, c. 1655-60, Accession Number 1195, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig. 5.82 Posthumous portrait of Akbar holding a falcon, Mughal, c. 17th century, 28.2 x 21.5 cm, Accession Number 15.41, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

5.9 Dana-Lila

The subject-matter of *Dana-Lila*, or Taking of the Toll, stands out for its theme of love and sensuality from the popular subject-matter of Chamba painting which is predominately religious in nature. Dana-Lila is among the most celebrated and popular in the tradition of classical Hindi poetry based on *sringara rasa*. As per the narrative, Krishna would tease the Gopis by demanding that they pay him a toll in order to cross the Yamuna river.²⁵⁷ On the pretext of collecting the toll, Krishna's behaviour would then change, turning the toll into a demand of sexual advances.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ Sharma, V. 2020. *Painting in the Kangra Valley*. Niyogi Books, 224.

²⁵⁸ Sharma, V. 2020. *Painting in the Kangra Valley*. Niyogi Books, 224.

The Gopis, as a measure of retaliation against Krishna, disguise Radha as one of Kamsa's soldiers to arrest him for creating the commotion. As she tries to catch him by his hands, their hands touch, and a shiver of ecstasy runs through her body. Her frowns disappear, and she smiles at his mischief.²⁵⁹



Fig. 5.83 Dana-Lila: Taking of the Toll, Chamba, c. 1730, 20.95 x 16.51 cm, Accession No. AM-MIN-711, Allahabad Museum

The earliest composition discovered by me is in the form of a drawing at the Allahabad Museum (Fig. 5.83), dateable to c. 1730 on stylistic grounds.²⁶⁰ It depicts Radha and Krishna in the centre of the composition. Radha, adorning a turban, holds Krishna by one hand and raises the other to strike him on his face, much to the dismay of the Gopis standing behind her. As she prepares to strike, she is enchanted by Krishna's touch, and her hand freezes in mid-air. A number of cows stand behind Krishna,

²⁵⁹ Sharma, V. 2020. *Painting in the Kangra Valley*. Niyogi Books, 224.

²⁶⁰ Elaborated in Chapter VII

observing the scene with curiosity. The narrative is taking place on the banks of the river Yamuna, suggested by the stream of calm water in the foreground. Thick foliage of trees in the back indicates a forest, while Krishna's companions return to Braj in the background, completely unaware of the developments.

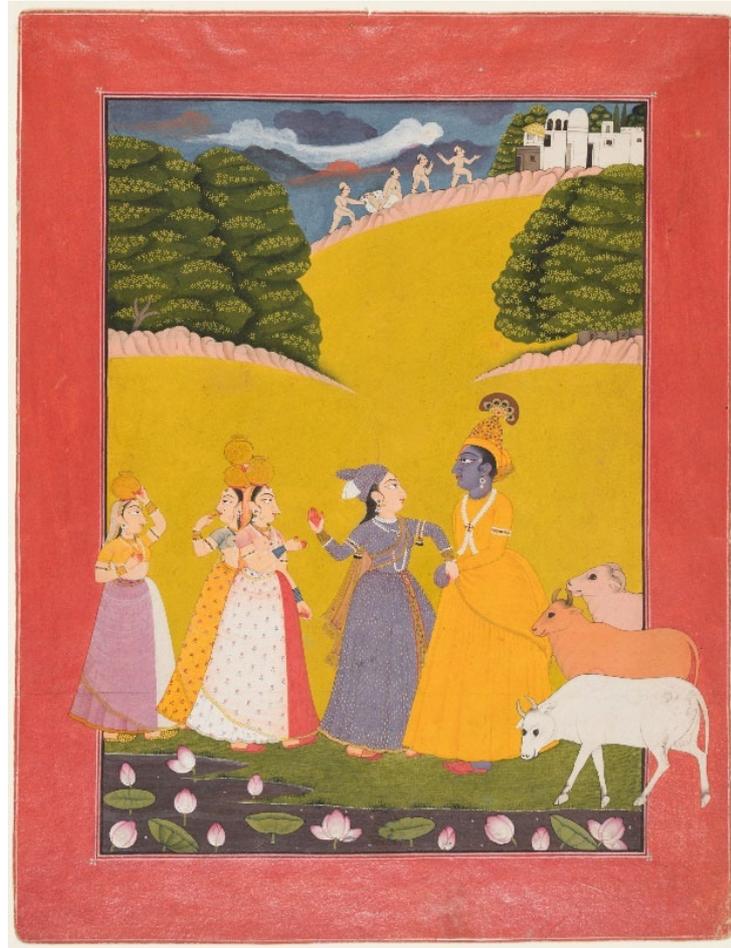


Fig. 5.84 Dana-Lila: Taking of the Toll, Chamba, c. 1730-40, 26.2 x 19.9 cm, Accession No. AM-MIN-711, Allahabad Museum

A similar composition is rendered by a different painter in c. 1730-40 in the form of a painting at the Cleveland Museum of Art (Fig. 5.84), staying faithful to the original. The painter has added embellishments to the painting in the form of the lotuses in the river, a colourful pattern of gathering clouds in the sky, and flowers decorating the trees. A third painting on the same theme (Fig. 5.85) was published by Khandalawala in 1958, who attributed the painting to Mankot. However, given the remarkable

similarity of the composition to the pre-existing paintings from Chamba, it is plausible to assume that the painting in question was also produced at a Chamba workshop.²⁶¹

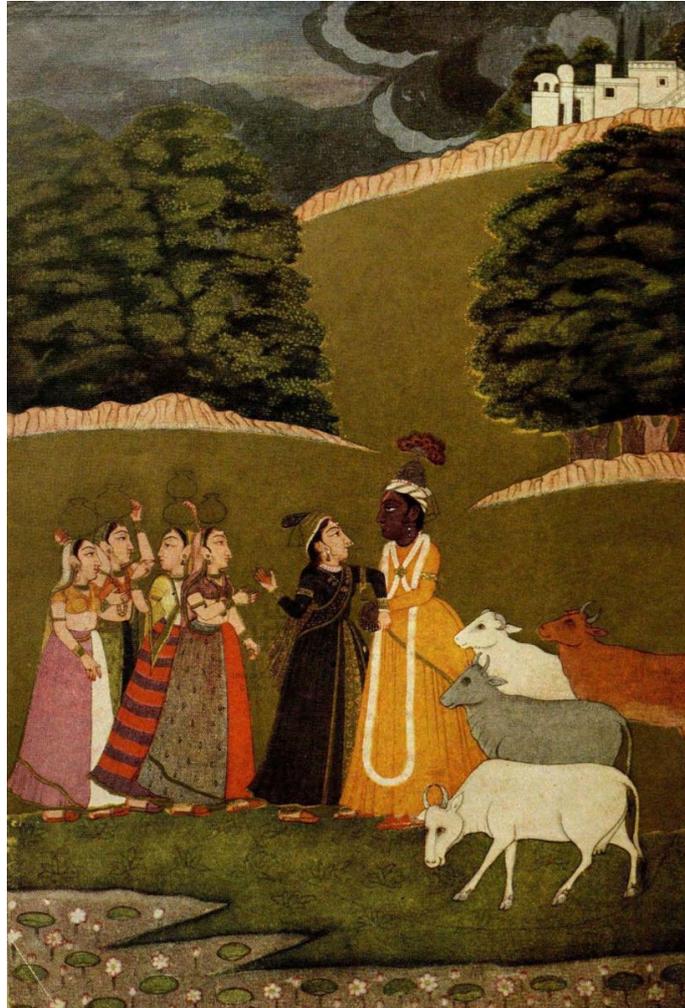


Fig. 5.85 Dana-Lila: Taking of the Toll, Chamba, c. 1740-50
Provenance unknown.

The last known Dana-Lila painting to surface from Chamba is in the Museum Rietberg, Zurich (Fig. 5.86), attributable to 1750-60 CE. The painting, clearly the work of a later master taking elements from the previous compositions, is a noteworthy specimen of the artist's incorporation of his own unique characteristics into the customary iconographic lexicon. The artist has exhibited his dexterity as a painter in the depiction of the vegetation, which appears denser and more polyhued, the sophisticated colour composition, and details in the clothing and jewellery of Radha.

²⁶¹ The stylistic analysis of this workshop is detailed in 7.1.7



Fig. 5.86 Dana-Lila: Taking of the Toll, Chamba, c. 1750-60, 27 x 24 cm, Accession No. RVI 931, Museum Rietberg, Zurich

5.10 Ragamala

Analysing the contents of the Ragamala paintings produced at Chamba leads to the implication that the paintings are based on the text of the 16th century Sanskrit poet Kshemakarna, as paintings follow the Kshemakarna convention of classifying the 84 musical modes into Ragas, Raginis (wives of the Ragas) and Ragaputras (sons of the Ragas). The poet has distributed the modes into six primary families, each comprising of the head Raga, his five Raginis and eight Ragaputras, on the basis of their sound, notation, and the time of performance.²⁶² Furthermore, each of these 84 modes has been personified, with a detailed description of their origin and place of residence, physical attributes, costumes, ornaments, weapons, character, expressions, and related activities.²⁶³ Other than the personification of Ragas, the poet also provides sound imagery for each mode, comparing their notation and the emotion they generate to the various sounds found in nature, including but not limited to, the sound of a cascade, the braying of a donkey, and blowing of wind.²⁶⁴

As per my observations on analysing the Chamba Ragamala sets, it is evident that the painters drew inspiration for the iconography from either the personification of the Raga or alternately their accompanying sound imagery. However, I also discovered a third group that can only be described as the artist's own interpretation of the Raga. In my opinion, the bulk of the Ragas, Raginis and Ragaputras interpreted by the artist in their unique fashion have plausible origins in their terminology and nomenclature.

For instance, the Ragaputra Vardhana is described by Kshemakarna as a man clad in white, amusing himself with a sword²⁶⁵, while his sound imagery is compared to showering rain. In the Chamba system, the Ragaputra Vardhana is instead depicted as a warrior taking leave from a woman, while a groom stands with his horse at a distance. In my view, the variation in terms of iconography is plausibly related to the Chambiali term '*vardhana*', translated as 'to depart'.

²⁶² Gupta, Rama. 2003. *Ragamala*. Rajasthan Sanskrit Academy, xii

²⁶³ Gupta, Rama. 2003. *Ragamala*. Rajasthan Sanskrit Academy, xii

²⁶⁴ Gupta, Rama. 2003. *Ragamala*. Rajasthan Sanskrit Academy, xv

²⁶⁵ Gupta, Rama. 2003. *Ragamala*. Rajasthan Sanskrit Academy, 26

In a similar fashion, while the personification of Ragaputra Jalandhara is compared by Kshemakarna to Krishna lifting the mount Govardhana²⁶⁶, and his sound imagery is similar to thunderous rain²⁶⁷, he is depicted in the Chamba system as a noble drinking water from a *surahi*. I consider it plausible that the painter must have interpreted the Raga as '*jaladhārā*', literally 'a stream of water'.

While in the majority of depictions the painters remain faithful to Kshemakarna's system, a handful of paintings exhibit iconographic liberties taken by the painters. In my view, the varying iconographies were considered by the painter only in the case when the description of two modes was too similar to one another. Hence, in order to avoid repetition in terms of visuals, the painter used his own intellectual abilities to create further distinctions, which, with the course of time, resulted in a very esoteric and unique iconographic system at Chamba, which is not adopted in other Pahari Ragamalas. The descriptions of the various Raga, Raginis and Ragaputras, their sound imageries, and depiction in the Chamba Ragamala system are detailed in the following tables:

²⁶⁶ Gupta, Rama. 2003. *Ragamala*. Rajasthan Sanskrit Academy, 50

²⁶⁷ Gupta, Rama. 2003. *Ragamala*. Rajasthan Sanskrit Academy, 52

Table 5.1 Raga Bhairava and his Raginis

	Name	Personification	Sound Imagery	Iconography
Raga	Bhairava	White skin and garment, crescent on his forehead, braided hair pile, a face like Shiva	Cow	Bhairava riding a bull.
Raginis				
1.	Bangali	A beautiful woman gifted with many talents	Sound of grinding	A woman playing Vina
2.	Bhairavi	A woman glowing like gold, moonlit face, bejewelled and clad in white garment.	Bull	A lady fondling a bull
3.	Bilavali	A white complexioned woman, bejewelled, and clad in beautiful clothes	Infant crying	A lady playing with a child
4.	Punyaki	A generous woman clad in yellow clothes, wearing a flower garland	Rushing water	A lady giving alms
5.	Snehi	A beautiful woman with white skin and veil of hair, clad in yellow garments	Drying body with cloth	A woman giving letter to messenger

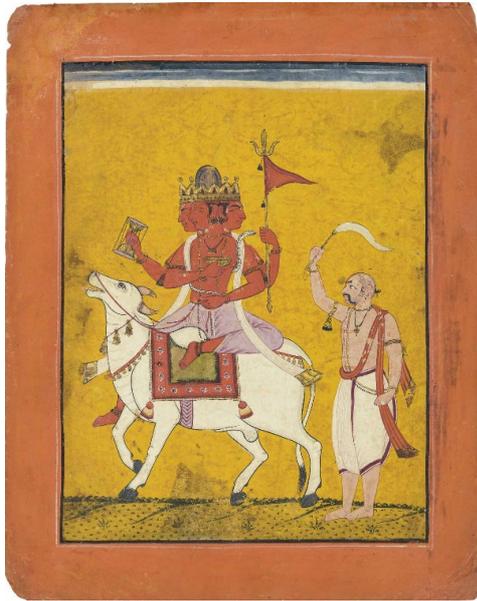


Fig. 5.87 Raga Bhairava, c. 1680



Fig. 5.88 Ragini Bangali, c. 1760

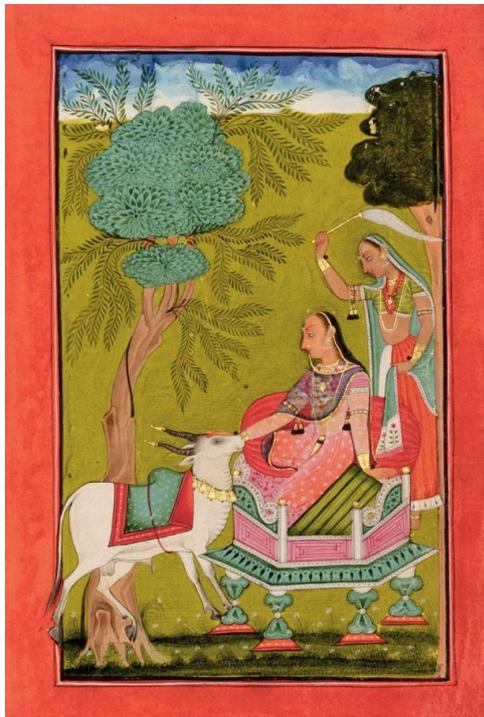


Fig. 5.89 Ragini Bhairavi, c. 1690

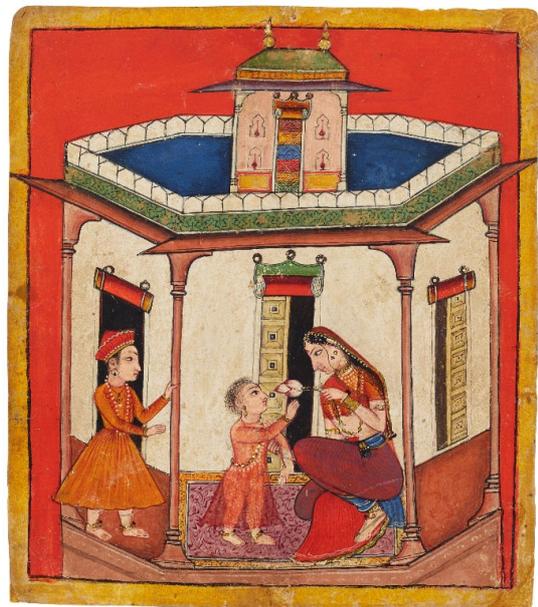


Fig. 5.90 Ragini Bilavali, c. 1690



Fig. 5.91 Ragini Punyaki,
c. 1680

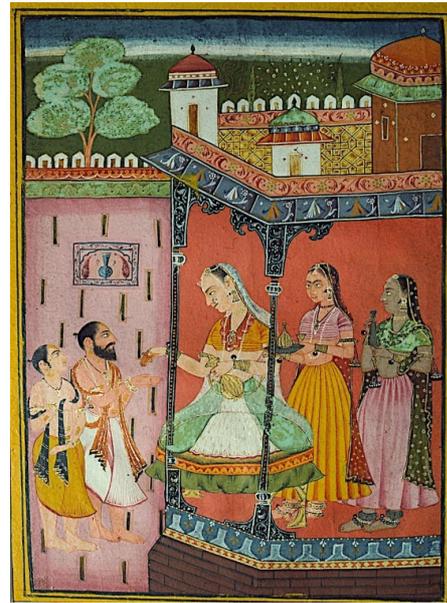


Fig. 5.92 A later rendition of
Ragini Punyaki,
c. 1685-90

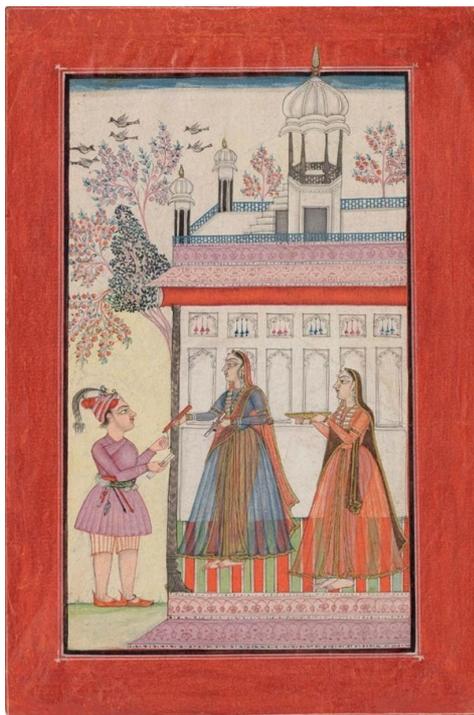


Fig. 5.93 Ragini Snehi,
c. 1720-1730



Fig. 5.94 Ragini Snehi,
c. 1720-1730

Table 5.2 Ragaputras of Bhairava

S. No.	Name	Personification	Sound Imagery	Iconography
1.	Bangala	A beautiful man with rosary, fond of singing and dancing	Beans being ground on stone	A man dances while women play percussions
2.	Panchama	Dark skinned man with lotus in hand, keeps a flute and cymbals	Cuckoo	A noble in the wilderness with animals
3.	Madhu	Handsome man with a pleasant voice, wearing red garments	Swarm of bees	A man drinks in company of a woman
4.	Harsha	A smiling man wearing blue garments, a pearl necklace	Running water	A man and a woman kissing
5.	Deshaka	A strong physique with broad shoulders, a trained wrestler, with a lot of strength	Ladel in clarified butter'	A man riding a horse
6.	Lalita	Wears yellow <i>tilaka</i> on forehead, a champaka garland on the neck, a betel nut leaf in hand	Swan	A man with swans
7.	Bilavala	Wearing a gem studded crown and earrings, a fair man with cymbals and tambourine	Pigeon	A noble listening to music
8.	Madhava	Wearing expensive garments, earrings and a pearl necklace	Bee in a lotus	A man looks at his reflection in a mirror



Fig. 5.95 Ragaputra Bangala,
c. 1710-1720

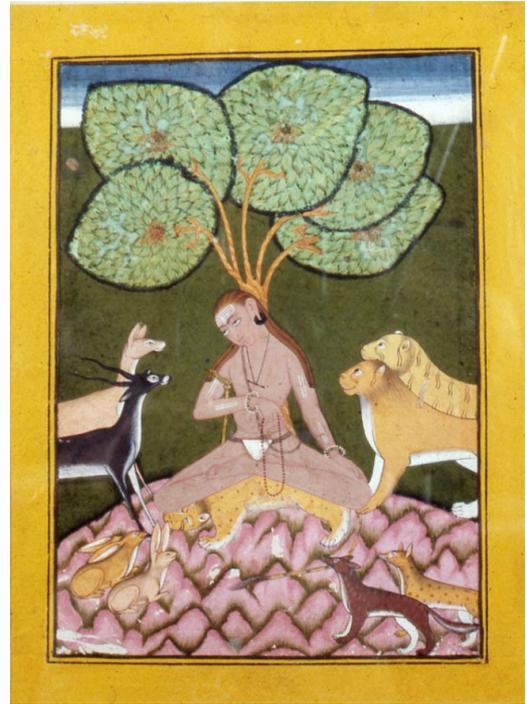


Fig. 5.96 Ragaputra Panchama,
c. 1685-90

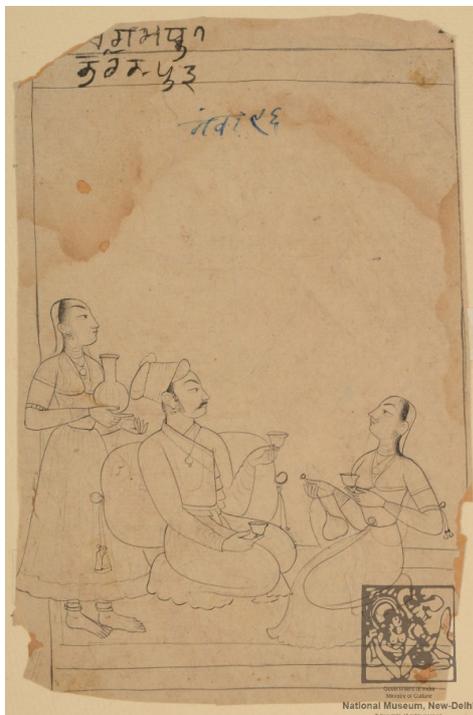


Fig. 5.97 Ragaputra Madhu,
c. 1720-30

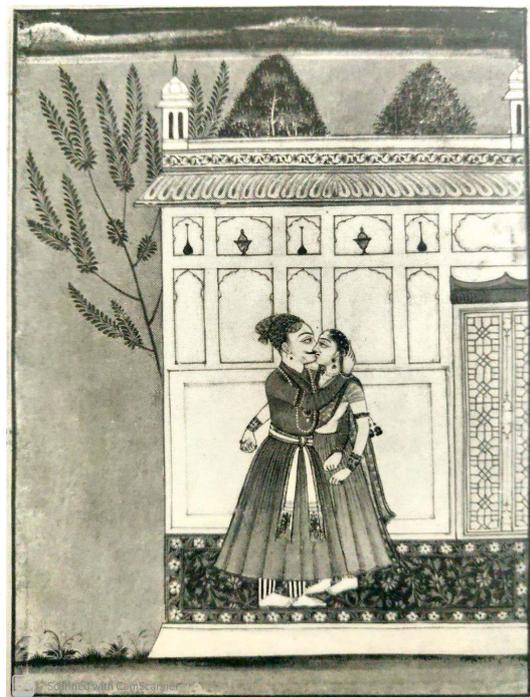


Fig. 5.98 Ragaputra Harsha,
c. 1760



Fig. 5.99 Ragaputra Deshaka,
c. 1685-90



Fig. 5.100 Ragaputra Lalita,
c. 1680-90

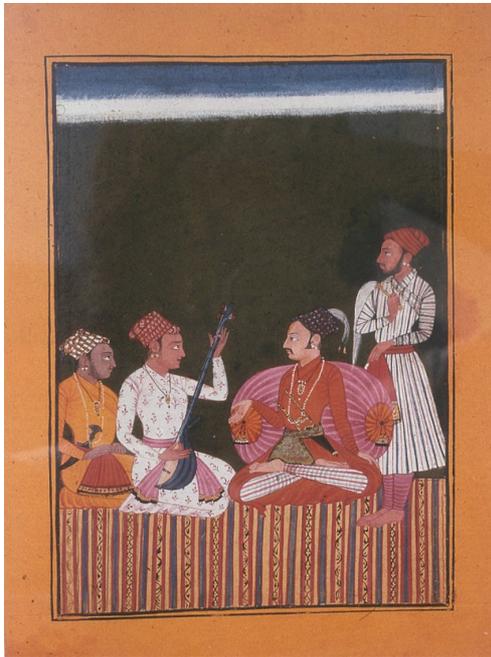


Fig. 5.101 Ragaputra Bilavala,
c. 1685-90

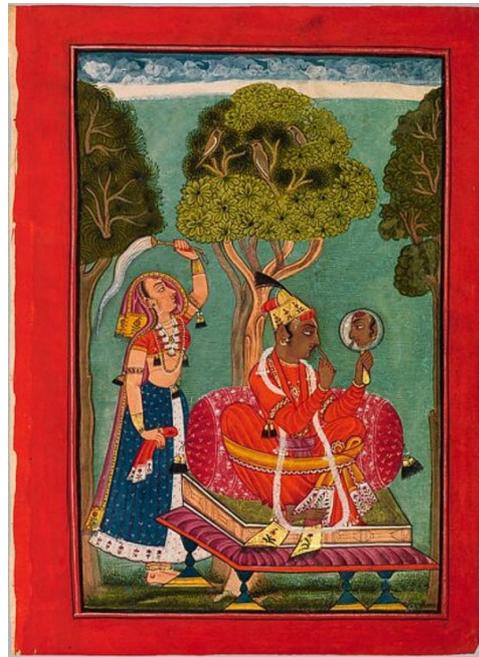


Fig. 5.102 Ragaputra Madhava,
c. 1710-20

Table 5.3 Raga Malakaus and his Raginis

	Name	Personification	Sound Imagery	Iconography
Raga	Malakaus	Dark skinned man wearing yellow clothes, originated from Krishna's throat, holds a flute in <i>tribhanga</i> posture	Ram	Infant seated on lotus (at times depicted as Balagopala) attended by two women, usually with a ram
Raginis				
1.	Gundakari	A fair skinned woman with loose hair, wearing red garments, holds a lotus leaf in hand	Boar	A lady fondling a boar
2.	Devagandhari	A dark complexioned woman clad in white garments and wears a garland on her neck holding a betel nut leaf	Wagtail	A noble woman worships a Shiva linga
3.	Srihati	A woman with eyes like the lotus, with Vina	A gold chord	Lady with two pet tigers
4.	Andhrayali	A woman with the speed of wind, walks in forest with girlfriend	Wolf's howl	Two women stuck in a storm
5.	Dhanasri	A woman with blue hair, clad in colourful garments, with pomegranate in hand	Rabbit	A noble woman with rabbits



Fig. 5.103 Raga Malakaus,
c. 1680-90

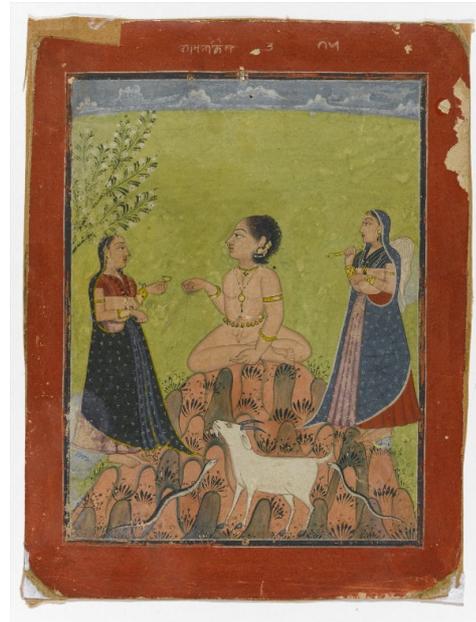


Fig. 5.104 A later rendition of
Raga Malakaus,
c. 1730-1740

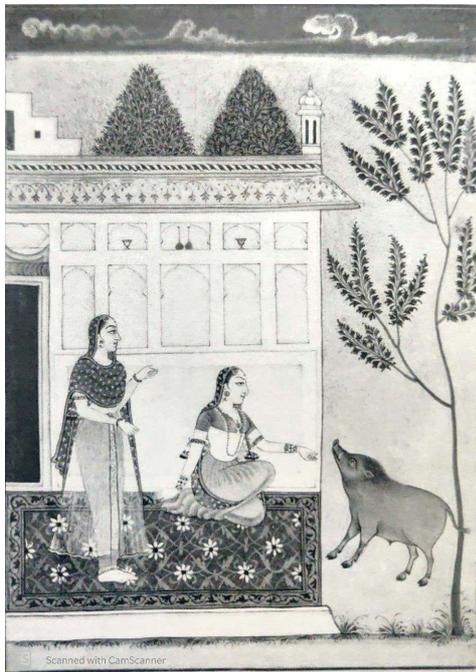


Fig. 5.105 Ragini Gundakari,
c. 1760

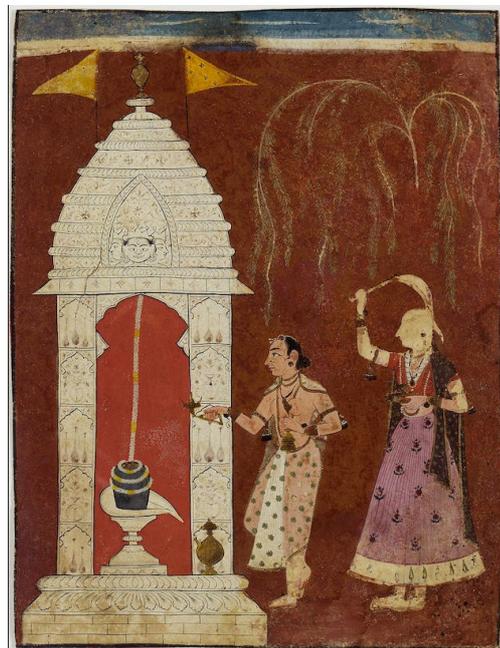


Fig. 5.106 Ragini Devagandhari,
c. 1680



Fig. 5.107 Ragini Srihati,
c. 1760

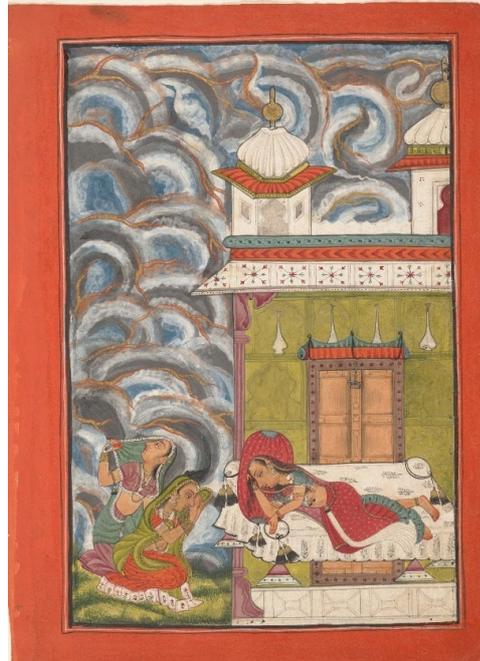


Fig. 5.108 Ragini Andhrayali,
c. 1690

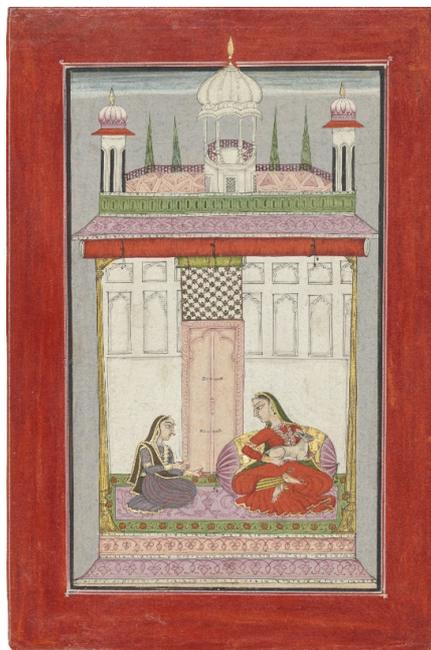


Fig. 5.109 Ragini Dhanasri,
c. 1720-1730



Fig. 5.110 Ragini Dhanasri,
c. 1720-1730

Table 5.4 Ragaputras of Malakaus

S. No.	Name	Personification	Sound Imagery	Iconography
1.	Maru	A man with spear, wearing a crown	A monkey climbing tree	An equestrian warrior in battle
2.	Mewar	A youthful man in colourful garment, having great strength, wielding sword, with flower crown	Leather bag	A man in European dress plays bagpipe
3.	Barbala	A youthful man with a champaka garland on the neck	Kite	A noble flies a kite
4.	Mishtang	Wears a flower crown on his head and a pearl necklace, enjoys in a champaka garden	Sound of sugar cooking on fire	A woman offers a man sweet rice
5.	Chandrakasa/ Chandrakaya	Holds a lotus in hand, a bow made of flowers	Sound of saffron cooking	A man ritually worships the moon
6.	Bhramarananda ²⁶⁸	Wears a flower garland on neck with flower crown on head, is clad in unconventional clothing	Flying bee	A man wearing foreign costume dances with bees atop his head
7.	Kashta	Not included in the Kshemakarna system	Not included in the Kshemakarna system	A parrot perches on a man's hand
8.	Khokhara	A man singing and dancing merrily to the sound of drums	Parrot	A <i>malakhamba</i> performance

²⁶⁸ Kshemakarna calls him Bhramara. In my opinion, the painter system of Chamba Ragamala iconography fuses the personification of Bhramara with the personification of Ananda (fourth son of Hindola), to create the composite Ragaputra Bhramarananda. In return, Ananda is replaced in the Chamba system with Vihaga/Vihagada. This phenomenon cannot be justified by a plausible argument.

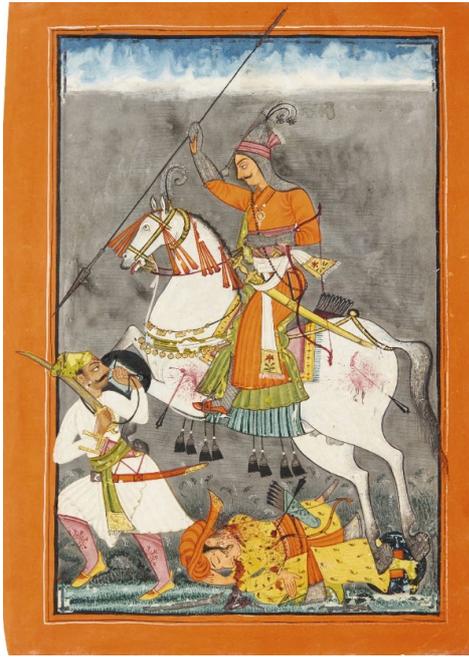


Fig. 5.111 Ragaputra Maru,
c. 1710-20



Fig. 5.112 Ragaputra Mewar,
c. 1720-30



Fig. 5.113 Ragaputra Barbala,
c. 1760

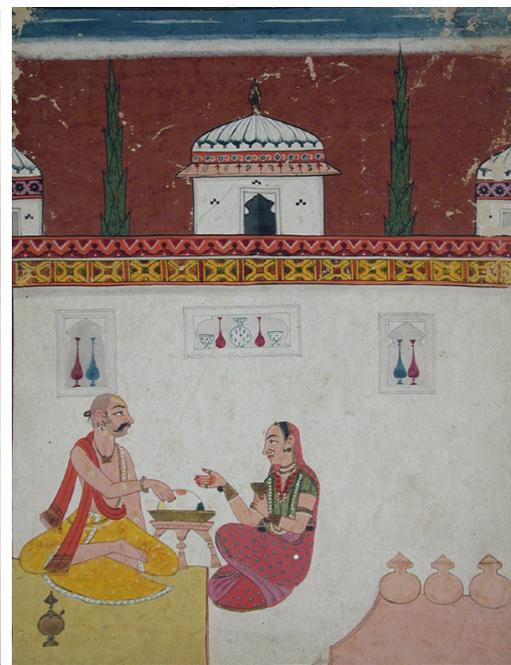


Fig. 5.114 Ragaputra Mishtang,
c. 1680

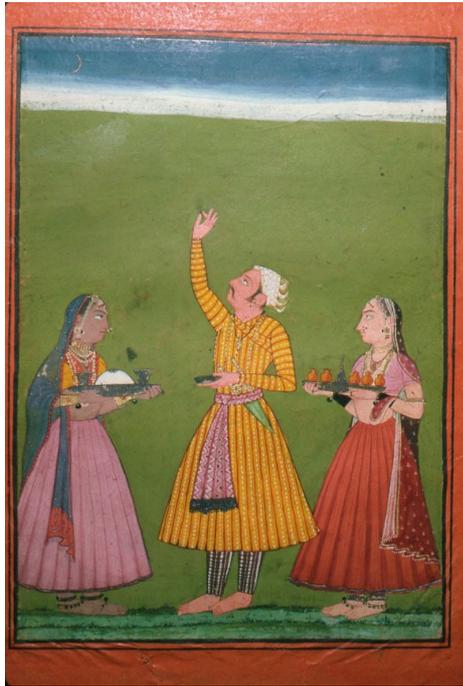


Fig. 5.115 Ragaputra Chandrakaya,
c. 1685-90

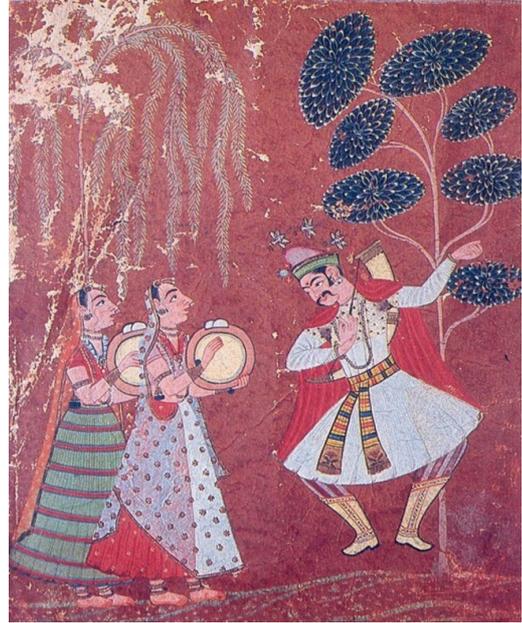


Fig. 5.116 Ragaputra Bhramarananda,
c. 1670

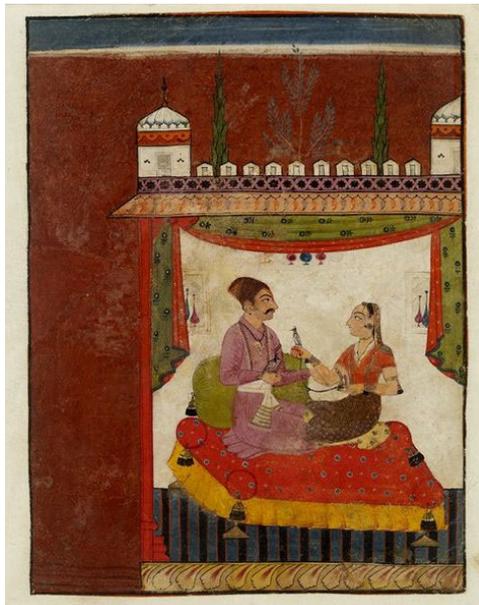


Fig. 5.117 Ragaputra Kasta,
c. 1680

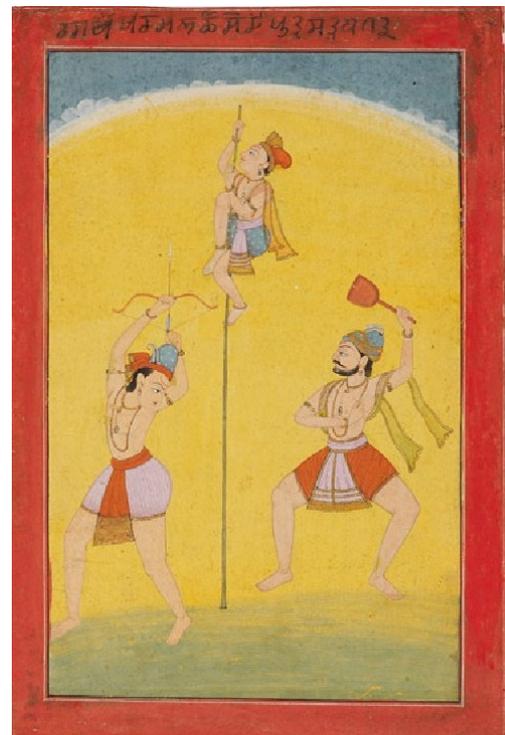


Fig. 5.118 Ragaputra Khokhara,
c. 1730

Table 5.5 Raga Hindola and his Raginis

	Name	Personification	Sound Imagery	Iconography
Raga	Hindola	A crowned white skinned lord with bow and lotus arrows	Goat	Krishna riding a swing
Raginis				
1.	Telangi	A beautiful woman in the company of women fanned with <i>chamara</i>	Grindstone and iron striking	A woman receiving oil massage by two women
2.	Devagiri	A beautiful woman bejewelled with the finest gemstones	Dripping of clarified butter	A woman prays to Garuda
3.	Vasanti	A beautiful woman with curly hair	Pheasants clucking	Two women pluck flowers
4.	Sindhuri	A beautiful woman with golden flower garland around her neck, chews a betel nut leaf	Cooking of vermilion	A group of women swim in a river
5.	Ahiri/Abhiri	A dark complexioned woman adorned with gold and pearl jewels, holds a mirror in her hand	Snake	A woman offers milk to snakes emerging out of pitchers

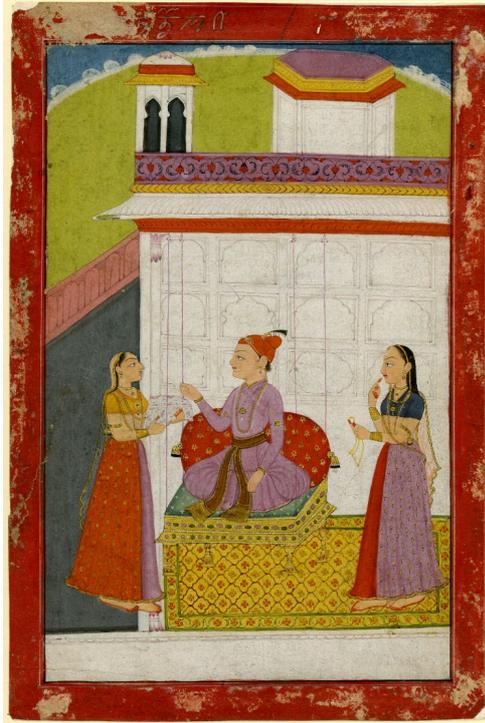


Fig. 5.119 Raga Hindola,
c. 1740

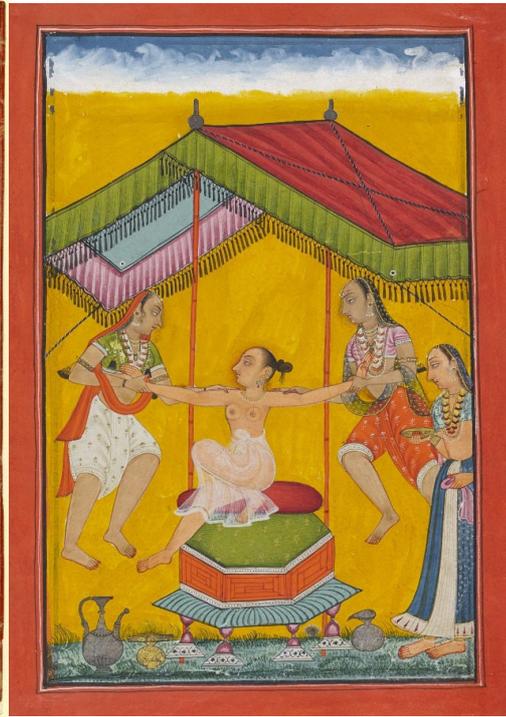


Fig. 5.120 Ragini Telangi,
c. 1710-20

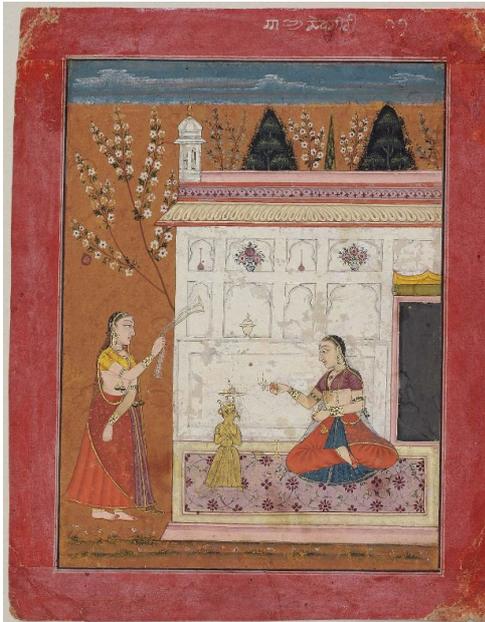


Fig. 5.121 Ragini Devagiri,
c. 1740

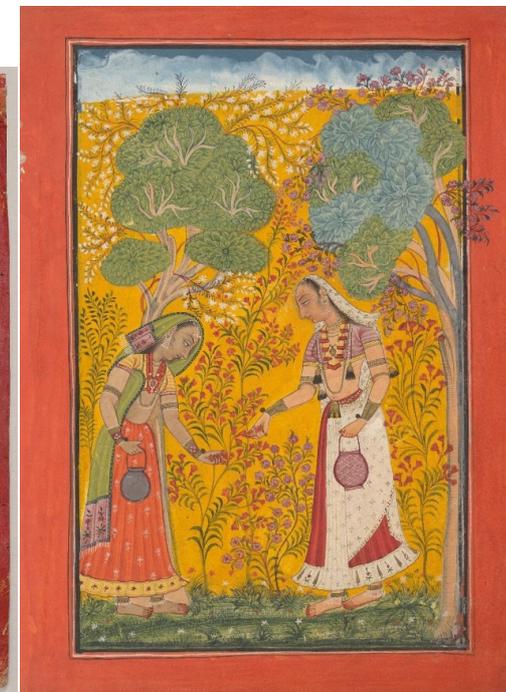


Fig. 5.122 Ragini Vasanti,
c. 1710-20

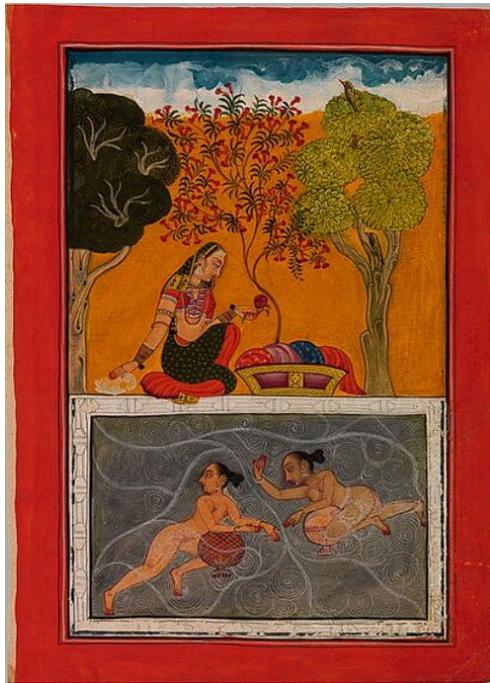


Fig. 5.123 Ragini Sindhuri,
c. 1690

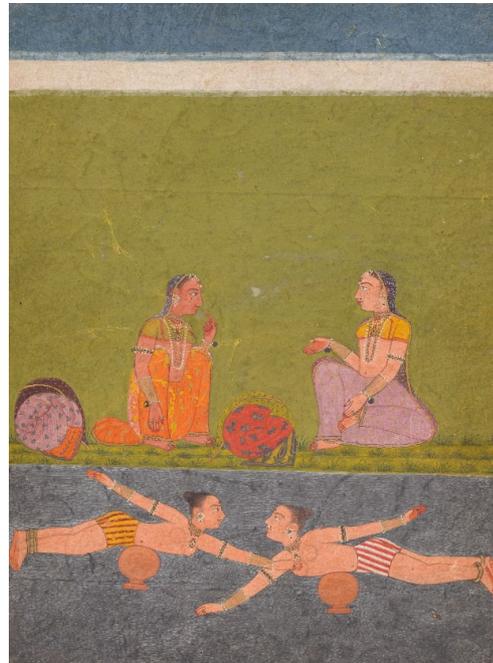


Fig. 5.124 A different rendition of
Ragini Sindhuri, c. 1685-90



Fig. 5.125 Ragini Ahiri,
c. 1760

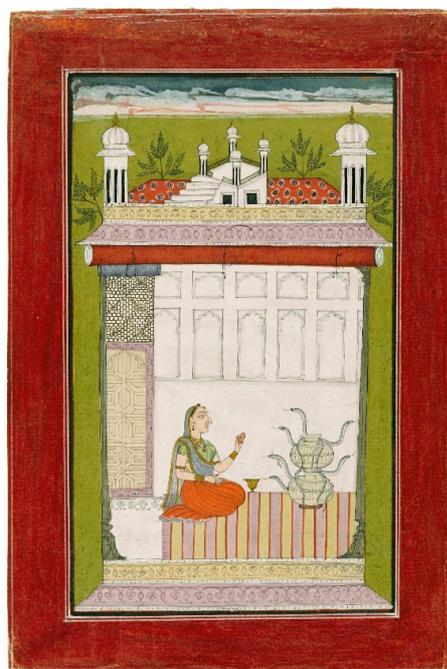


Fig. 5.126 Ragini Ahiri,
c. 1730-40

Table 5.6 Ragaputras of Hindola

S. No.	Name	Personification	Sound Imagery	Iconography
1.	Mangala	A man wearing crown, with body like Kamadeva	Cow	A noble enjoys a music performance
2.	Chandra Bimb/Chandra	A man dressed in lotus leaves, holding drums	Muskkrat	Chandra riding a deer chariot
3.	Vivica ²⁶⁹	Not found in Kshemakarna's system	Not found in Kshemakarna's system	A noble listening to drums
4.	Vihagada/ ²⁷⁰ Vigada	A white complexioned man, clad in white garments, a devotee of Vishnu	Frog	A man and a woman stretch in the morning
5.	Bhaskar ²⁷¹	A man in colourful garments teaching parrot to talk	Sparks of fire	A woman milks a cow in the morning
6.	Vardhana	A man in white garment, with a sword, amusing with friends	Bird flying in the sky	A noble departs from his wife
7.	Vasanta	A man surrounded by blossoms, bees, women and laughter in a flower garden	Rooster	Two nobles pluck flowers in a garden
8.	Vinoda	A man amusing himself with betel and friends	Drilling of pearls	A noble sits in the company of two women

²⁶⁹ Replaces Subhanga, the second son of Hindola

²⁷⁰ Replaces Ananda, the fourth son of Hindola. In the Kshemakarna system, Vigada is the sixth Ragaputra of Sri Raga.

²⁷¹ Kshemakarna calls him Vibhasa. Vibhas, meaning brilliant, is often used as an adjective for the sun. Bhaskar is another name for the sun.

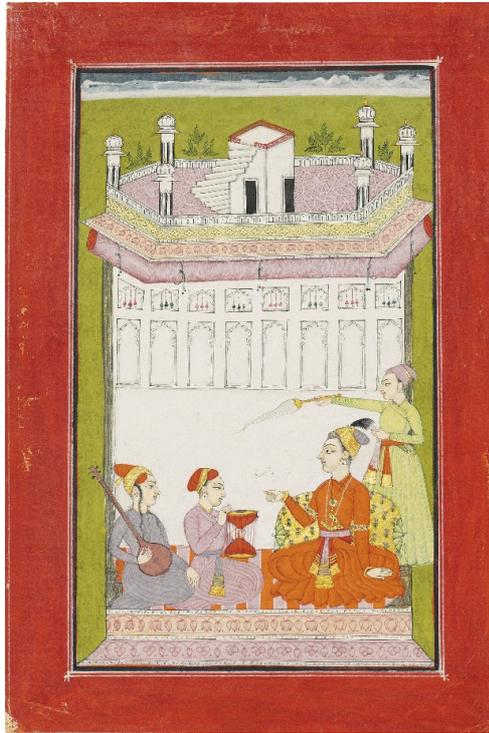


Fig. 5.127 Ragaputra Mangala,
c. 1730-40



Fig. 5.128 Ragaputra Chandra,
c. 1710-20



Fig. 5.129 Ragaputra Vivica,
c. 1710-20



Fig. 5.130 Ragaputra Vihagada,
c. 1690

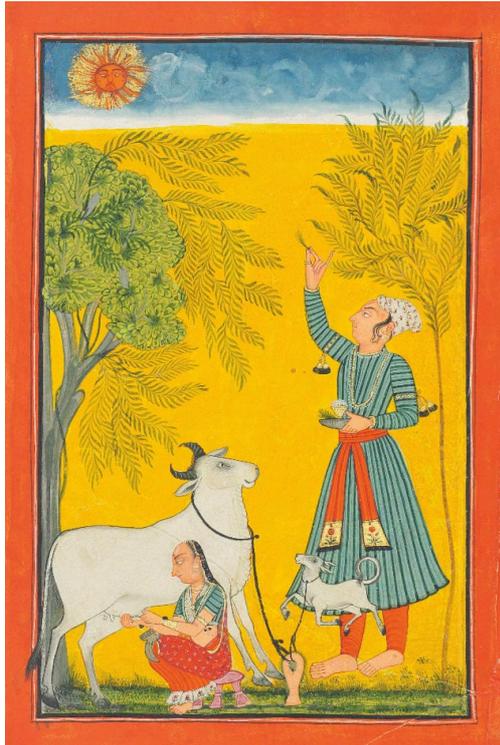


Fig. 5.131 Ragaputra Bhaskar,
c. 1690

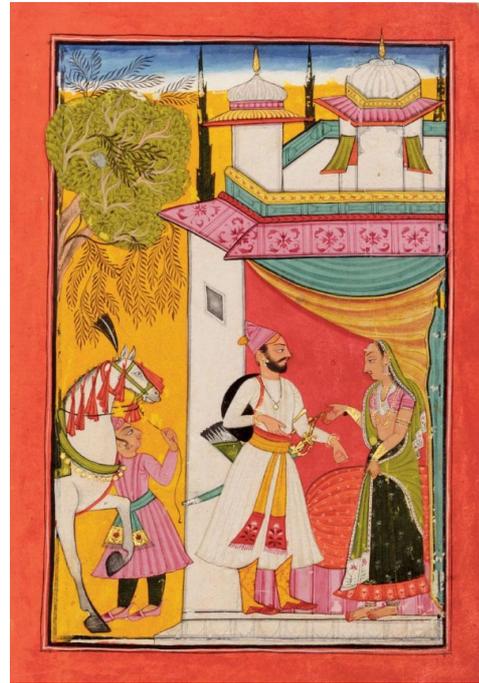


Fig. 5.132 Ragaputra Vardhana,
c. 1710-20

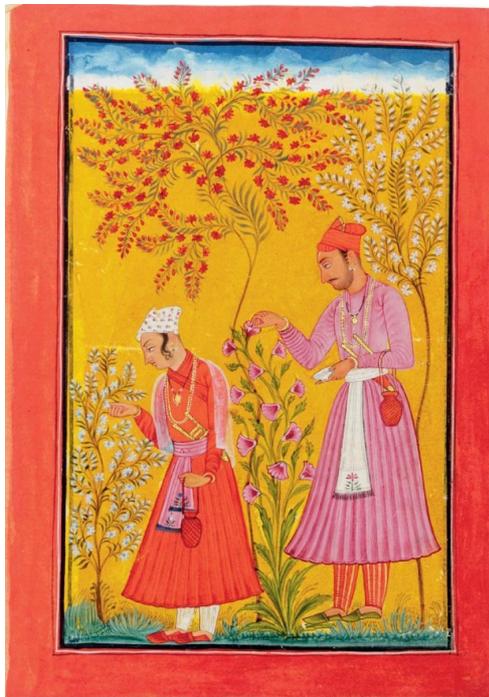


Fig. 5.133 Ragaputra Vasanta,
c. 1710-20

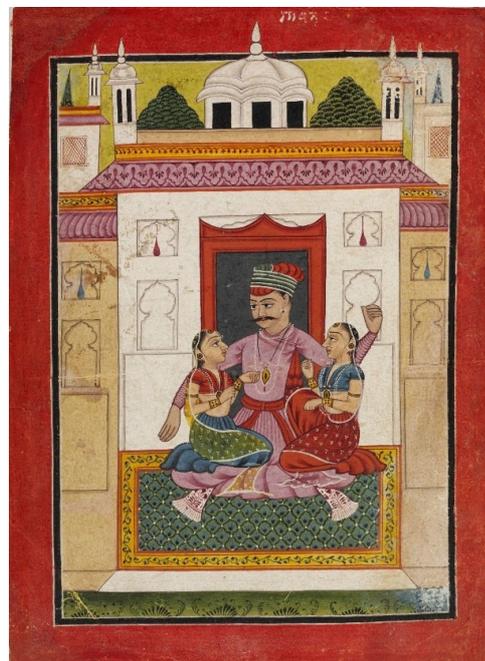


Fig. 5.134 Ragaputra Vinoda,
c. 1740-50

Table 5.7 Raga Dipaka and his Raginis

	Name	Personification	Sound Imagery	Iconography
Raga	Dipaka	Born of the sun, mounted on glorious white elephant,	Cuckoo	Indra riding Airavata with a <i>dipaka</i> on its trunk
Raginis				
1.	Kamodi ²⁷²	A beautiful woman adorned with jewels of precious gemstones	Wrist bangles	A lady fondles snakes on trees
2.	Patamanjari	A woman with loose hair, playing a Vina	Cat	A woman fondles a cat
3.	Todi	A woman with Vina and cymbals, anointed with sandalwood paste	Owl	A woman spinning yarn
4.	Gujari	A beautiful woman wearing pearl necklace	Deer	A woman plays Vina in wilderness
5.	Kacheli	A beautiful woman clad in red garments	Tortoise	A woman with rams

²⁷² Also known as Kamodini

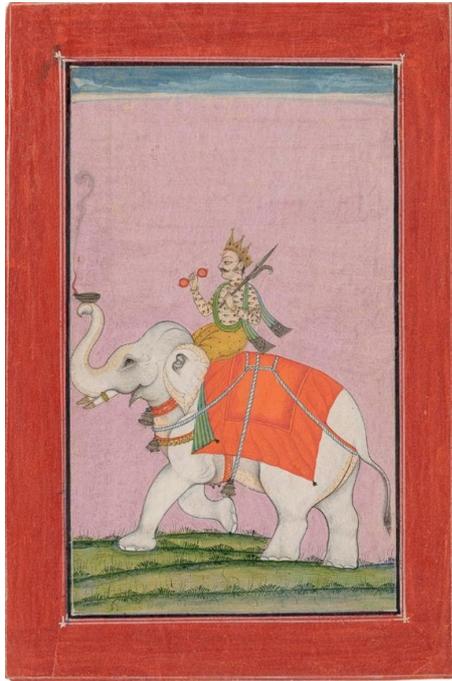


Fig. 5.135 Raga Dipaka,
c. 1720-30



Fig. 5.136 Ragini Kamodi,
c. 1700



Fig. 5.137 Ragini Patamanjari,
c. 1675-80



Fig. 5.138 Ragini Patamanjari,
c. 1720-30

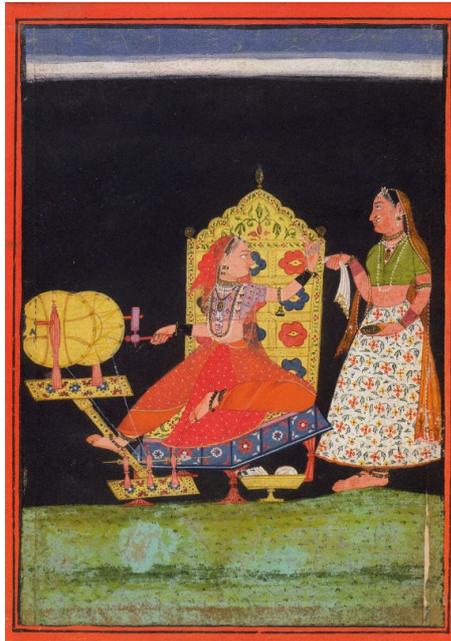


Fig. 5.139 Ragini Todi,
c. 1685-90

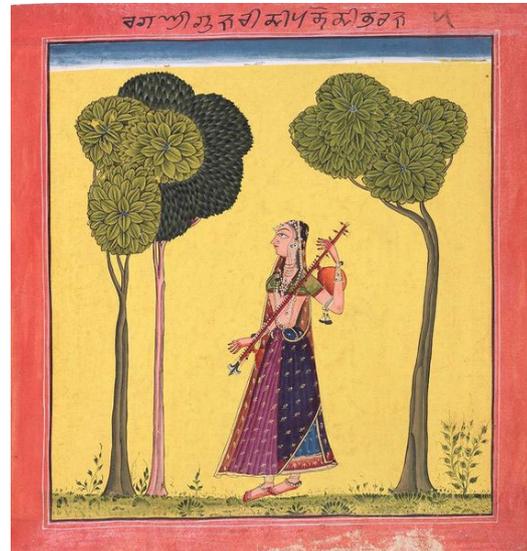


Fig. 5.140 Ragini Gujari,
c. 1700

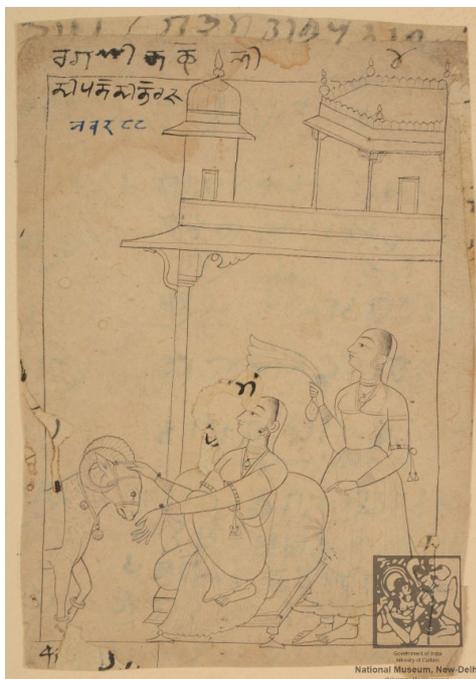


Fig. 5.141 Ragini Kacheli,
c. 1720-30

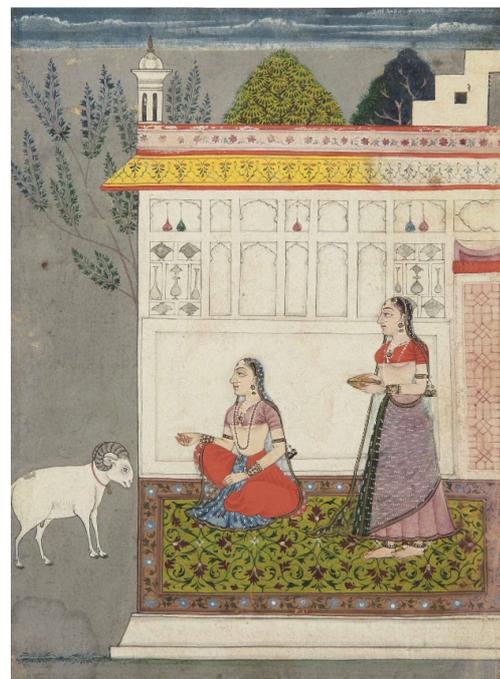


Fig. 5.142 Ragini Kacheli,
c. 1740

Table 5.8 Ragaputras of Dipaka

S. No.	Name	Personification	Sound Imagery	Iconography
1.	Kamala	Man in swarm of bees holding two lotuses	A little frog in water	A man holds two lotuses
2.	Kusuma	A fair skin lord sitting on lotus throne holding lotus	Moving anklets	A man shooting a woman with flower bow
3.	Rama	A man with bow and quiver seated with his wife	One-eyed crow	A noble watches a tree
4.	Kuntala	A fair skinned man clad in yellow garments	Pigeon with colourful neck	A man stands in front of a bird cage
5.	Surmananda ²⁷³	A man with white complexion wielding a sword and a dagger	Cuckoo	Two swordsmen duelling
6.	Lahula ²⁷⁴	A man who wears betel vines as jewellery	Himalayan Mouse	Krishna fluting
7.	Champaka	A man under trees with white and yellow garment	grinding sandalwood paste	A man receives oil massage
8.	Chamala ²⁷⁵	Not found in Kshemakarna's system	Not found in Kshemakarna's system	A couple plays Chaupada
9.	Hemala	A betel chewing man in company of friends	Fire and water mixing	An acetic sitting on a mountain attended by jackals

²⁷³ Kshemakarna terms him as Kalinga. No plausible evidence to support this inconsistent nomenclature.

²⁷⁴ Kshemakarna terms him as Bahula, which could be contributed to a misreading by the painter/scribe, which became convention with time.

²⁷⁵ In my view, the Ragaputra Chamala is a rare addition to the Chamba painter system, as I discovered only one painting depicting this mode, dateable to the late 17th century. However, it is a common feature of Basohli Ragamala, and it could be plausible that the painter of the mentioned Ragamala was working in the influence of a Basohli painter.

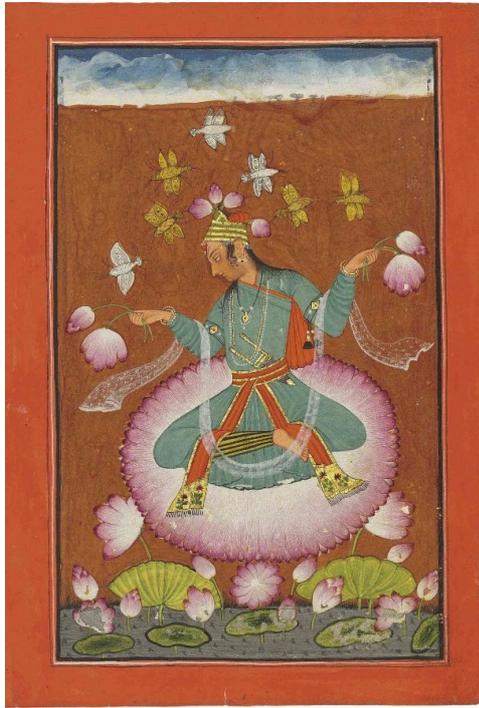


Fig. 5.143 Ragaputra Kamala,
c. 1710-20



Fig. 5.144 Ragaputra Kusuma,
c. 1680-90

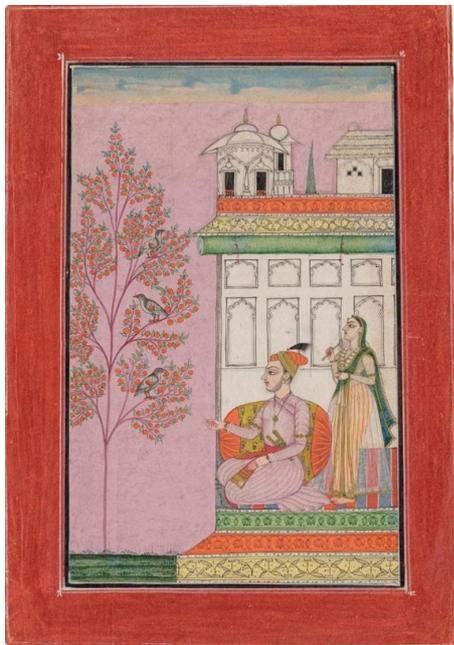


Fig. 5.145 Ragaputra Rama,
c. 1720-30



Fig. 5.146 Ragaputra Kuntala,
c. 1685-90

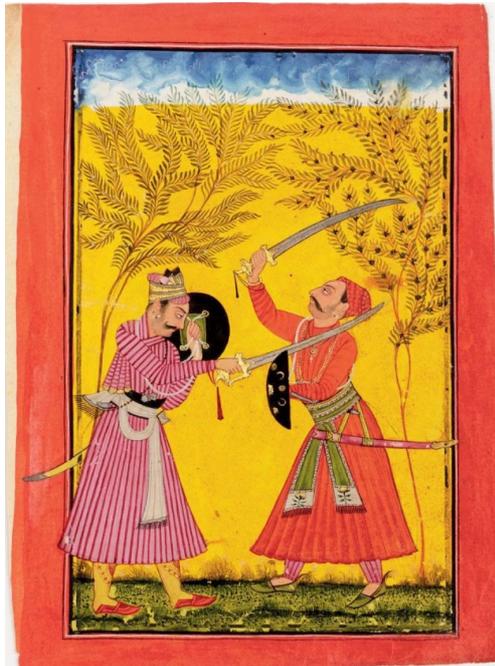


Fig. 5.147 Ragaputra Surmananda,
c. 1690

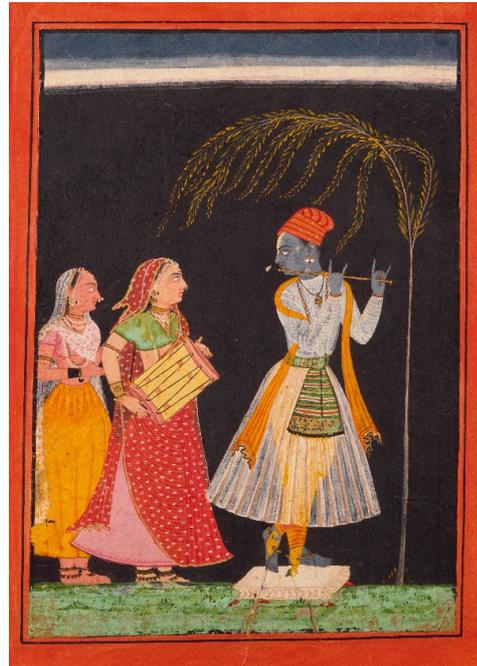


Fig. 5.148 Ragaputra Lahula,
c. 1685-90

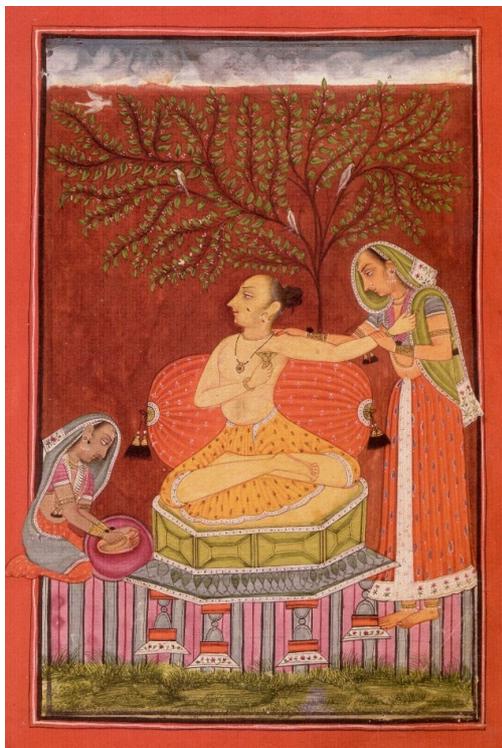


Fig. 5.149 Ragaputra Champaka,
c. 1690

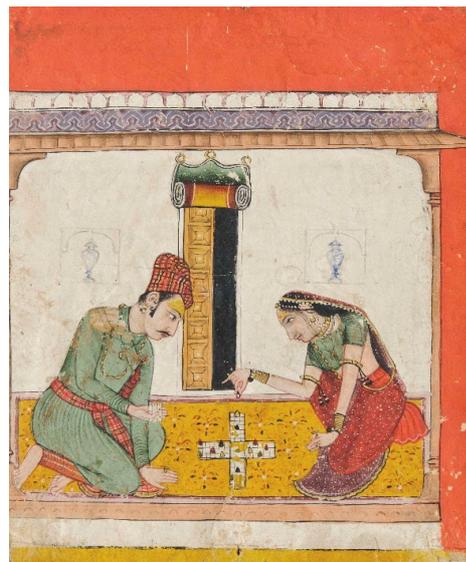


Fig. 5.150 Ragaputra Chamala,
c. 1690



Fig. 5.149 Ragaputra Hemala, c. 1720-30

Table 5.9 Raga Sri and his Raginis²⁷⁶

	Name	Personification	Sound Imagery	Iconography
Raga	Sri	In white garment and adorned with jewellery	Elephant	A Noble fondles an elephant
Raginis				
1.	Vairati	A noble woman fanned by attendants	Water buffalo	A woman fondles a buffalo
2.	Karnati	A beautiful woman dancing	Wind-torn garment	A woman playing veena
3.	Sanveri	A dark-skinned woman with lotus in hand	Dog	A noble woman with a dog
4.	Gaudi	A beautiful woman adorned in jewels of various kinds	Frog	A woman fondling a donkey
5.	Ramkali ²⁷⁷	A beautiful woman with a moonlit face, adorning precious jewels	Sound of passion	A man with two trees

²⁷⁶ In the Kshemakarna system, Sri Raga has been assigned six Raginis. In the Chamba system, the sixth Ragini, Saindhavi, has been omitted, and at time replaced by Asavari, the Ragini of Megha.

²⁷⁷ Mentioned by Kshemakarna as Ramgiri



Fig. 5.152 Raga Sri,
c. 1690

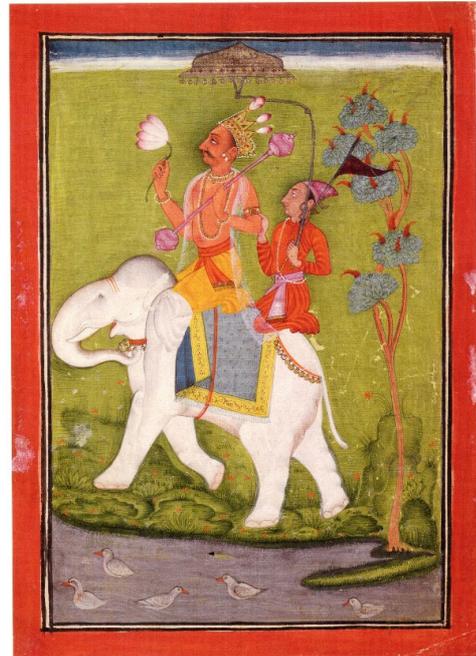


Fig. 5.153 A different rendition of
Raga Sri, c. 1740

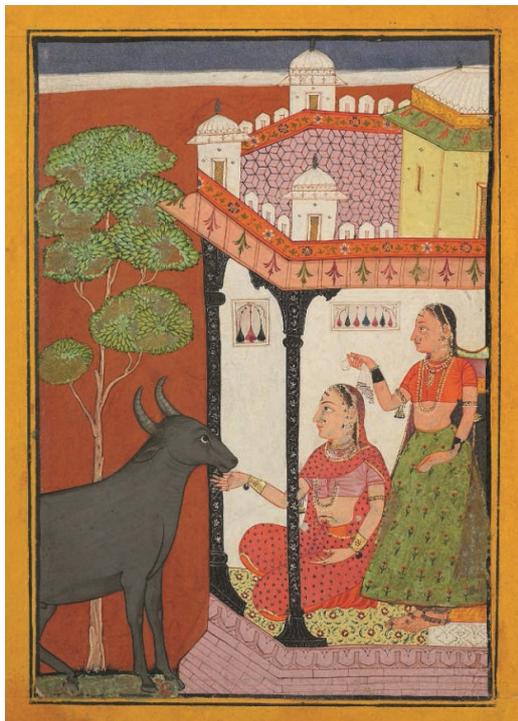


Fig. 5.154 Ragini Vairati,
c. 1685-90

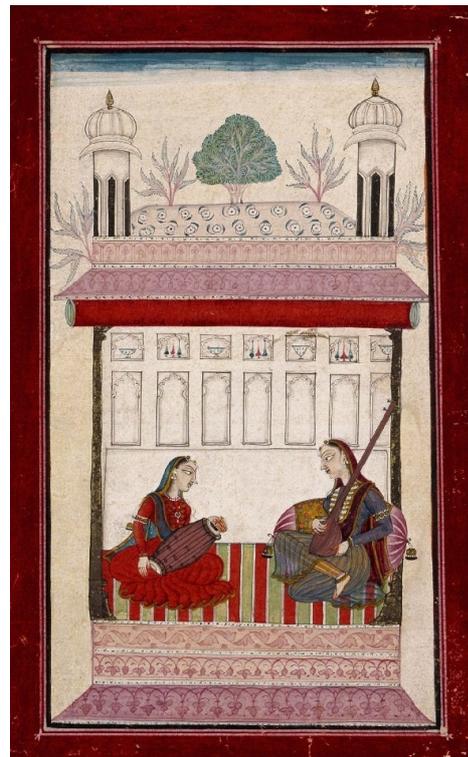


Fig. 5.155 Ragini Karnati,
c. 1740

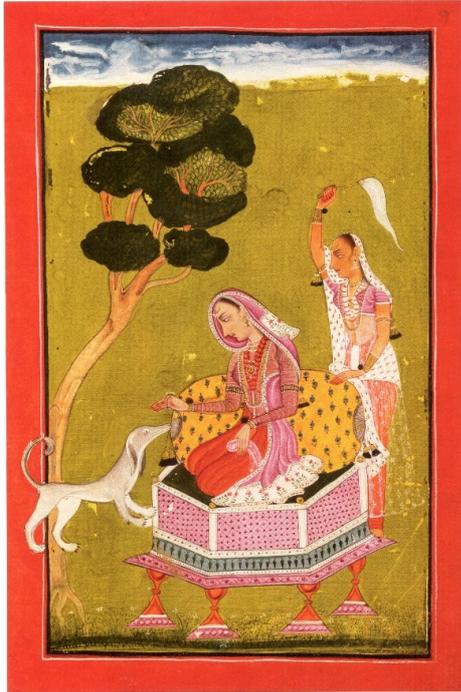


Fig. 5.156 Ragini Sanveri,
c. 1710-20



Fig. 5.157 Ragini Sanveri,
c. 1720-30



Fig. 5.158 Ragini Gaudi,
c. 1690

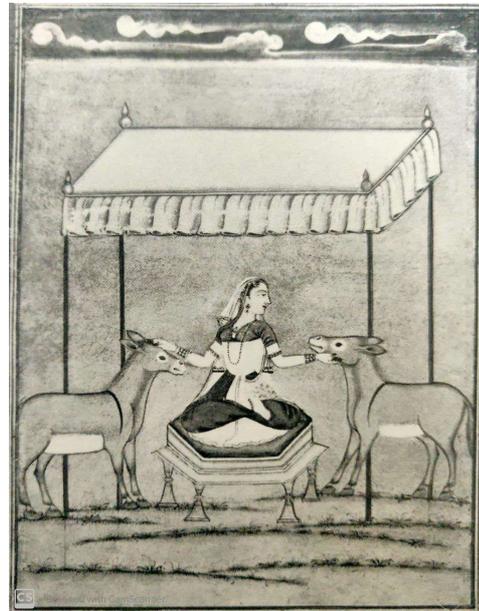


Fig. 5.159 Ragini Gaudi,
c. 1760

Table 5.10 Ragaputras of Sri

S. No.	Name	Personification	Sound Imagery	Iconography
1.	Saindhava ²⁷⁸	A warrior on horse	Horse	A man mounting a horse while the groom holds the reins
2.	Malawa	A man with eyes like lotus	Cooking food	Two wrestlers duelling
3.	Gauda	A worshipper of Vishnu	Royal bird	An acrobatic performance
4.	Gambhira	A man riding a crocodile	Crocodile	A boat with animal figureheads
5.	Sarang ²⁷⁹	Vishnu riding Garuda	Churning milk	A soldier requests a woman for buttermilk
6.	Kumbha	A man in a white garment and crown	Water pouring from a pitcher	A soldier requests a woman for water from a well
7.	Gunda ²⁸⁰	A man clad in bear hide, wears crown of red leaves and hunts in the forest	Sound of drongo bird (Bhringraj)	A tribal couple hunting deer
8.	Agada ²⁸¹	A lotus-eyed man, clad in white garments, speaks pleasant words to friends	Rat	A noble arrives home to his wife

²⁷⁸ Termed by Kshemakarna as Sindhu.

²⁷⁹ In the Kshemakarna system, Sarang is the third Ragaputra of Raga Megha. In the Chamba painting system, Sarang replaces Gunasagara, the fifth Ragaputra of Sri. Gunasagara Ragaputra is not depicted in Chamba Ragamala system.

²⁸⁰ In the Kshemakarna System, Gund is the Ragaputra of Megha.

²⁸¹ Also known as Angada

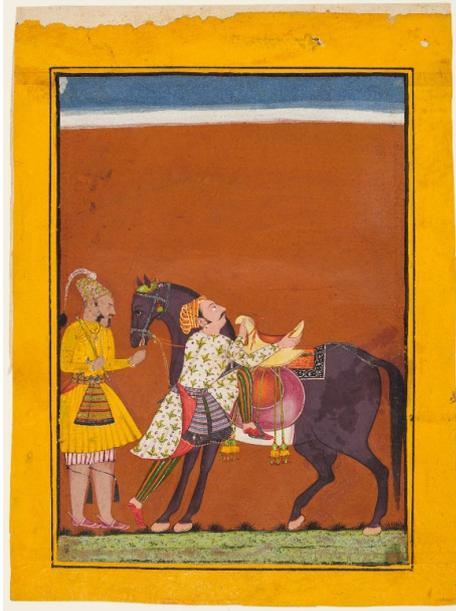


Fig. 5.160 Ragaputra Saindhava,
c. 1685-90

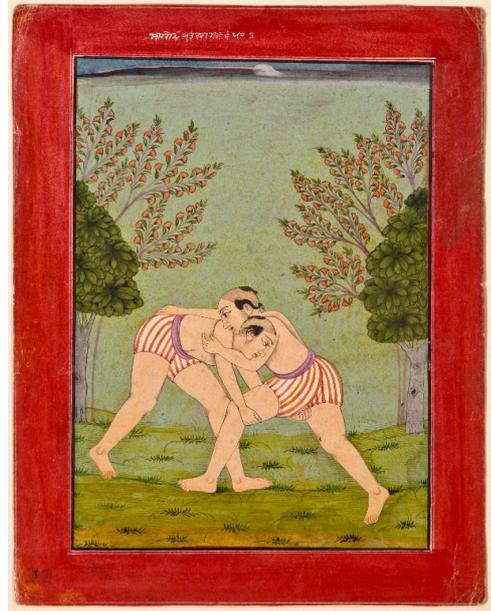


Fig. 5.161 Ragaputra Malawa,
c. 1740



Fig. 5.162 Ragaputra Gauda,
c. 1720-30

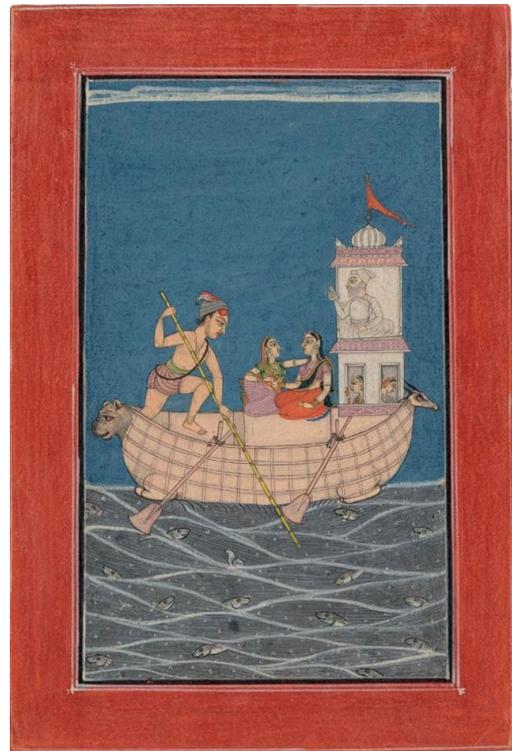


Fig. 5.163 Ragaputra Gambhira,
c. 1720-30

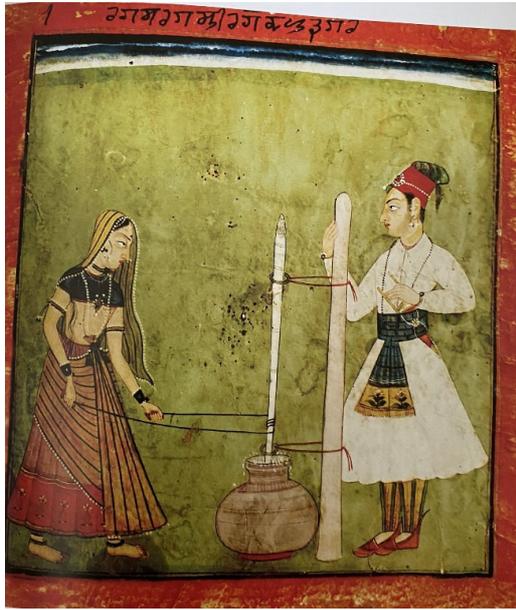


Fig. 5.164 Ragaputra Sarang,
c. 1700



Fig. 5.165 Ragaputra Kumbha,
c. 1685-90

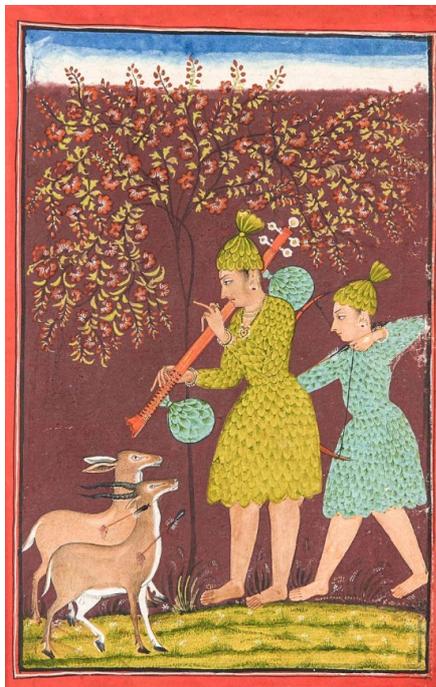


Fig. 5.166 Ragaputra Gunda,
c. 1690

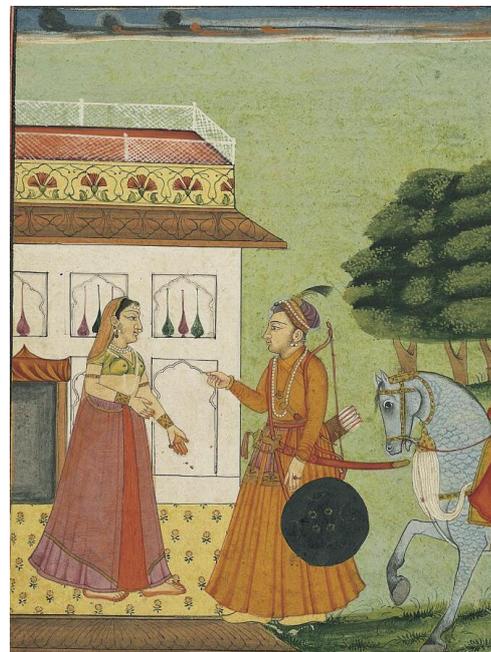


Fig. 5.167 Ragaputra Agadha,
c. 1750-60

Table 5.11 Raga Megha and his Raginis

	Name	Personification	Sound Imagery	Iconography
Raga	Megha	Dark skinned with lightening as garment	Peacock	Two warriors seated with swords in their hands
Raginis				
1.	Gaunda-Malhari	A beautiful woman dancing during rain and lightning	Skylark	A woman speaks to her confidant
2.	Sorathi	A fair complexioned woman	Flock of cranes	A lady fondles cranes
3.	Suhavi	A dark complexioned woman adorned in yellow clothes	Sweeping or scrubbing	A woman with parakeet fanned by attendant
4.	Asavari	Dark skinned woman with a mirror	Cuckoo	A pregnant woman tended by the wetnurse
5.	Konkani	A fair complexioned woman in a colourful garment	Glassware	Woman with confidant in a chamber



Fig. 5.168 Raga Megha,
c. 1740

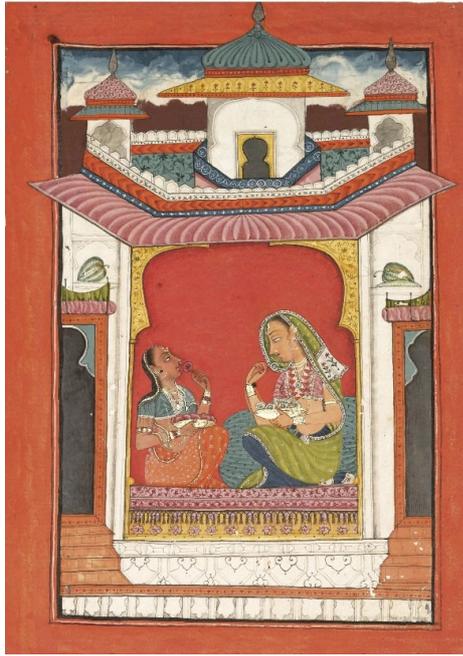


Fig. 5.169 Ragini Gaunda-Malhari,
c. 1730-40



Fig. 5.170 Ragini Sorathi,
c. 1760

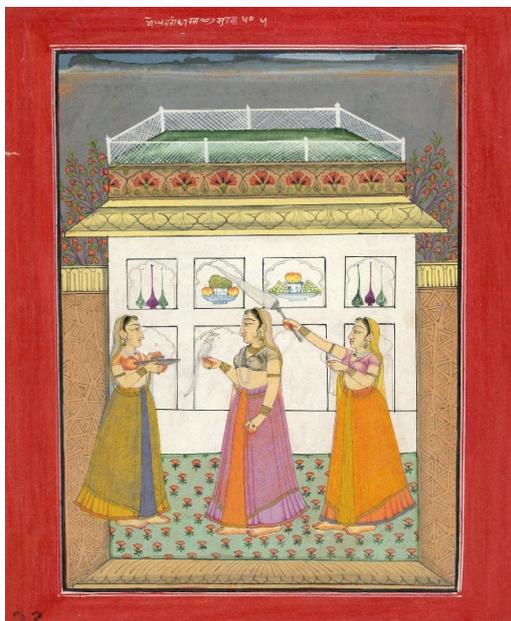


Fig. 5.171 Ragini Suhavi,
c. 1740

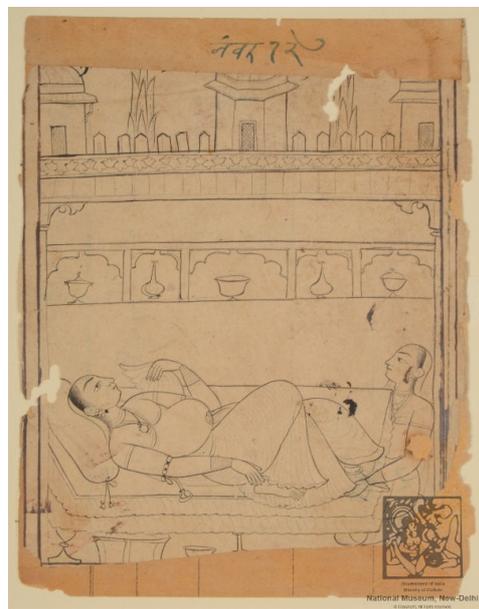


Fig. 5.172 Ragini Asavari,
c. 1720-30

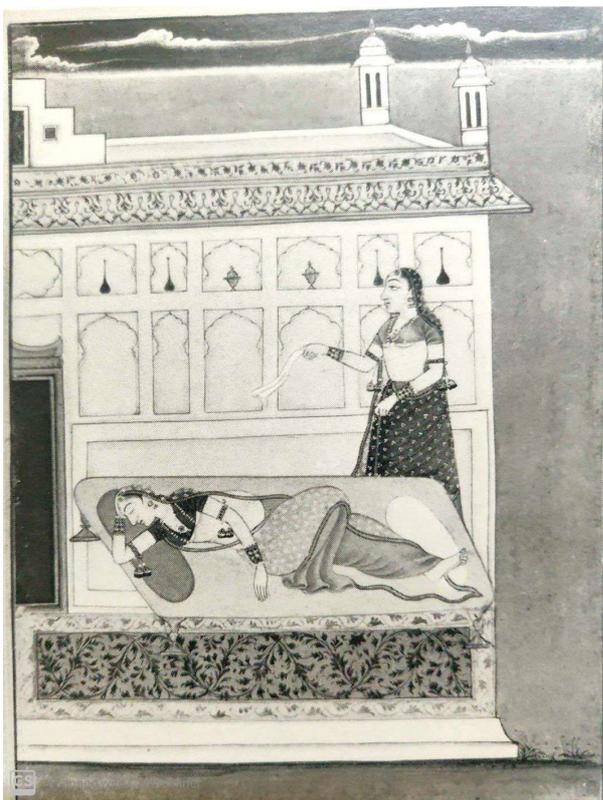


Fig. 5.173 Ragini Asavari, c. 1760



Fig. 5.174 Ragini Konkani, c. 1760

Table 5.12 Ragaputras of Megha²⁸²

S. No.	Name	Personification	Sound Imagery	Iconography
1.	Natanarayana	An equestrian warrior with sword	Grinding metal	Ardhanarishwara
2.	Kanada	A musician	Metal vessel	A man playing Vina
3.	Kedara	A strong man practicing yoga	Wheel	A man waits while woman cooks
4.	Jalandhara	Krishna lifting up mount Govardhana	Ferocious stream of water	A man drinks water from a sprout
5.	Shankarabharna ²⁸³	A royal ascetic with crown, armed with lotus	Laundering on a stone	A noble worships a Shivalinga
6.	Gajodhara	Not included in Kshemakarna's classification	Not included in Kshemakarna's classification	An archer and a spearman performing

²⁸² I have not come across a depiction of the eighth Ragaputra of Megha in my research.

²⁸³ Mentioned in Kshemakarna's system as Raga Shankara



Fig. 5.175 Ragaputra Natanarayana,
c. 1760

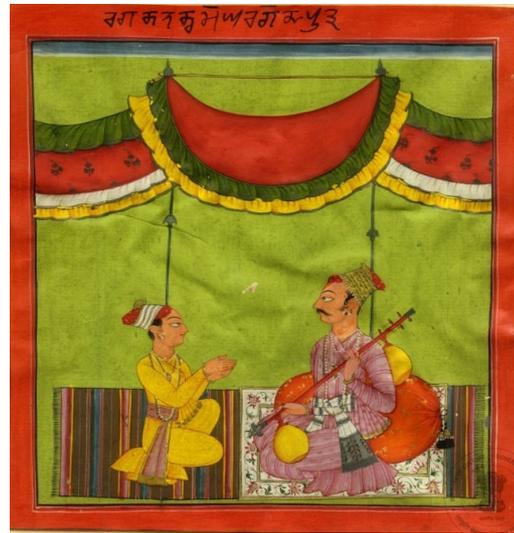


Fig. 5.176 Ragaputra Kanada,
c. 1700

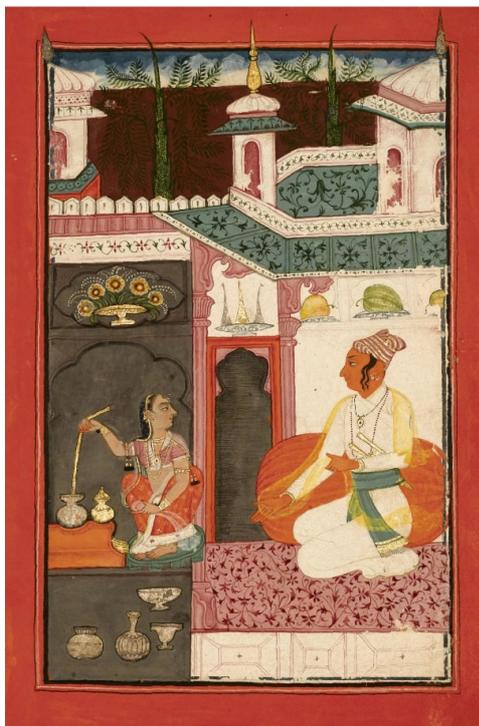


Fig. 5.177 Ragaputra Kedara,
c. 1710-20

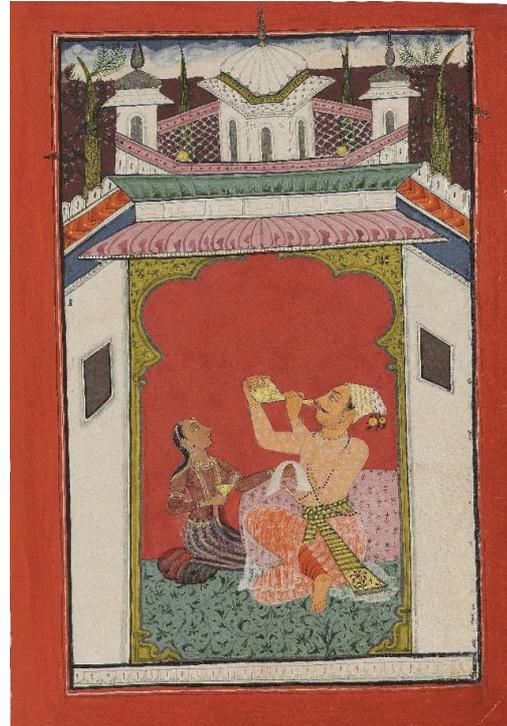


Fig. 5.178 Ragaputra Jaladhara,
c. 1690

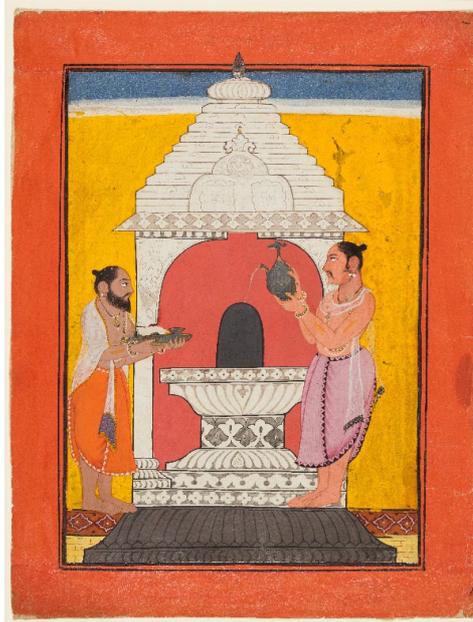


Fig. 5.179 Ragaputra Shankarabharna,
c. 1685-90



Fig. 5.180 Ragaputra Gajodhara,
c. 1720-30

Conclusion

An examination of popular subject matter at Chamba demonstrates that the choice of themes in Chamba painting was a mirror of the Rajas of Chamba, echoing their tastes, habits, affection for poetry, music, and religious leanings.

The paintings of Dasavatara and Bhagavata Purana are a testament to their religious supplication to Vishnu, rejuvenating in the form of devotion to Krishna, whereas the portraits provide a glimpse into the personalities of the Rajas, revealing their political allegiances, preference for particular fashions, fondness for hookahs, their drinking habits, and physical attributes.

The Ramayana paintings were likely commissioned by the Rajas to legitimise their own claim as descendants of the clan of Rama or to remind themselves of the ideal responsibilities of a king. On the other hand, the paintings of Durgasaptasati illustrate their devotion to Devi, the warrior goddess who empowered them on the battlefield.

Subjects such as Descent of Ganga and Ordeal by Liquor echo regional myths and legends, whilst *Dana-Lila* and Ragamala represent their preferences in poetry and music.

During his reign, Chattar Singh was the most generous benefactor of Chamba painting and deserves much of the credit for experimenting with subject matter. Subsequent kings followed in his footsteps by commissioning paintings with similar subjects. As a result, the tradition of an uninterrupted iconography became popular at Chamba for over a century from the painters' use of visual and compositional components from earlier works.

In addition to paintings, the painters drew inspiration from the local sculpting and woodcarving traditions, influencing them in turn, as will be explored in the subsequent chapter.