



GODS, KINGS AND COURTESANS



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Presented by Rob Dean Art

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AN ILLUSTRATION TO THE SUNDAR SHRINGAR

Lord Ganeshha attended by his consorts Riddhi and Siddhi
Guler, India
Opaque pigment on paper heightened with gold
Image 14.4 x 23.6 cm. Folio 19.2 x 28.5 cm.
Circa 1780-1785

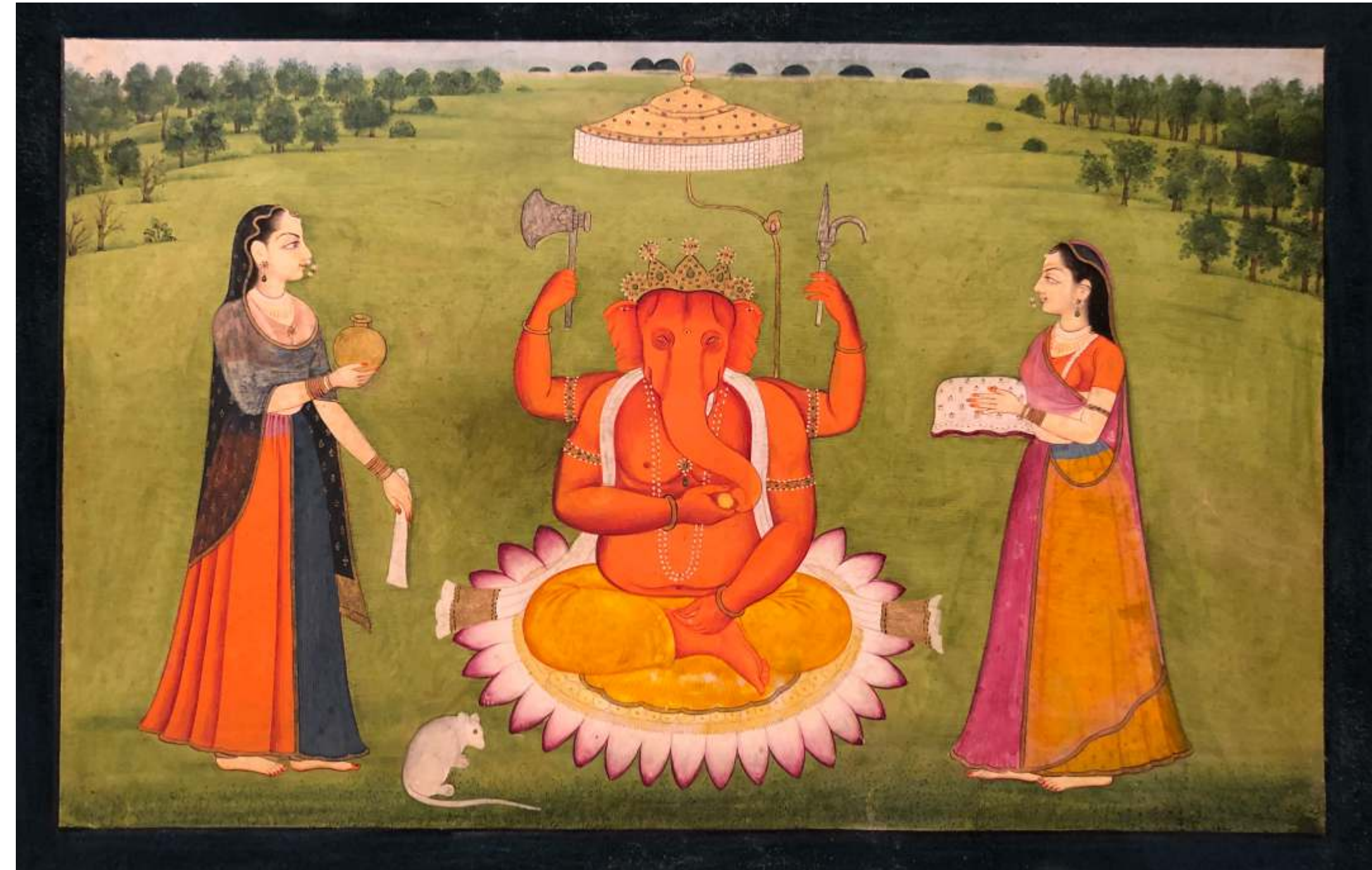
Provenance:
Private European Collection

Numbered 1 on the reverse, with Mandi stamp bearing number 545. Further inscribed in Takri 'sri Ganapati'. Lord Ganapati
Inscribed in Devanagari on the reverse 'sri ganpat ji. Patre 41 sam sundar sangara re likha vijay sene pahela patra.1.'
Lord Ganapati. First page of the forty-one pages of the Sundar Shringar kept by [Raja] Vijay Sen [of Mandi]

The current painting belongs to a series of illustrations based on the Sundar Shringar, a poem detailing the moods of love and the classification of literary heroes and heroines or nayaka-nayika bheda. The poem was composed by the poet Sundar Das in 1631. In the present series, the characters of Radha and Krishna are used to present idealized notions of courtship and romance between the hero and heroine, which are celebrated in the poem. Lord Ganeshha, as the god of beginnings and the remover of obstacles is traditionally presented at the opening of Hindu manuscripts, and the number one inscribed on the reverse of the current work confirms that this page was indeed used as an invocational frontispiece for the series. The second inscription further confirms that the manuscript had moved to the Mandi Court during the reign of Raja Vijay or Bijai Sen, the 16th Raja of Mandi who was born in 1846 and reigned from 1851-1902. All known pages from this series have come from the Mandi group and in it is tempting to surmise that the forty one pages listed represented the full series.

There is a striking similarity between the present series and the famous Tehri Garhwal Gita Govinda, which is rendered in the same exquisite palette and delicate style. The refinement of the present group suggests that the artist was at least aware of the other series and may have worked in that court atelier during the same period. Losty states 'the spirit of Nainsukh pervades paintings from the series in their formal perfection and tranquility.' (Losty, p.292.) He further suggests that the landscape format of the series may pay homage to the earlier Basohli or Nurpur Rasamanjari set which follows the same format.

For two pages from the same series see J. P. Losty, *A Mystical Realm of Love, Pahari paintings from the Eva and Konrad Seitz Collection*, cat. 81 and 82, p. 290-295. For other illustrations from the same series see Sotheby's New York, April 1, 2005, lots 110-113; September 20, 2005, lots 106-109; March 29, 2006, lots 149-152; September 19, 2006, lots 1-5, March 19, 2008, lots 205-208 and September 19, 2008, lots 201-204.



AN ILLUSTRATION TO THE SHANGRI RAMAYANA

Indrajit attacks Rama and Lakshmana
Style III, Book VI (Lanka Kanda)
Kulu or Mandi, India
Opaque pigment on paper
Circa 1700 – 1710

Provenance:
Private European Collection

The current painting is from an album of illustrations known as the 'Shangri' Ramayana after Shangri, the place of residence of a branch of the royal family of Kulu who were formerly in possession of the largest portion of these paintings. The Shangri Ramayana is widely considered to be one of the most important series of paintings from the Punjab Hills. The present illustration is from a section of the epic, which relates to the events leading up to the assault on Ravana's stronghold. The scene illustrates Rama and Lakshmana lying immobilized on the ground whilst the demon Indrajit appears from the clouds in a celestial chariot, and fires arrows down upon the heroes. This climactic scene is rendered against a deep blue background with a striking cloud line running along the top margin.

Indrajit was the eldest son of Ravana and according to the text of the Ramayana he played a central role in the war between Rama and Ravana. At a young age, Indrajit had trained under the guidance of Shukra and had obtained numerous magical weapons, he had also won a boon from Brahma of a celestial chariot that would make him invulnerable in war. Here we see Indrajit using his magical powers to attack Rama and Lakshmana, the monkey army look on in dismay as they attempt in vain to protect the heroes. An interesting artistic feature of the painting is that the artist has chosen to depict Indrajit and his uncle, Vibhishana in an almost identical manner. Indrajit appears in the sky whilst his uncle stands behind the gathered monkeys looking on in dismay. Both figures are dressed in red robes and both bear fangs, perhaps an artistic element intended to highlight their familial links.

W. G. Archer, who was one of the first scholars to examine the Shangri Ramayana, divided the paintings into different stylistic groups. For further discussion concerning the stylistic types see W. G. Archer, *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, London, 1973, vol. 1, p. 328. Style III of this dispersed series includes these wonderfully humanized portraits of the monkeys and are found mostly in the in the Book of Kishkindha, or as here the Book of Lanka, sometimes termed the Book of War. Pages in Style III are characterized by Archer as notable for 'the impish treatment of the monkeys, the rioting exuberance with which trees are depicted and the bold gusto which is everywhere apparent.' (Archer, 1973, p. 328). For further discussion as to the disputed origin of the series see amongst others Goswamy and Fischer, pp. 76-91 (who place styles I and II in Bahu); and Britschgi and Fischer 2008, pp. 12-14 (who attribute the entire series to Bahu).

Paintings from the Shangri Ramayana series are in the collections of the National Museum, New Delhi; Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benaras; British Museum and Victoria and Albert Museum amongst others. For other illustrations from the same series, see Sotheby's New York, April 1, 2005, lots 108 & 109; September 20, 2005, lots 125 & 126; March 29, 2006, lots 157 & 158 and September 19, 2006, lots 9 & 10.



AN ILLUSTRATION TO THE SHANGRI RAMAYANA

Lakshmana leaves Rama to visit Sugriva
Style III, Book IV (Kishkindha Kanda)
Kulu or Mandi, India
Opaque pigment on paper
Circa 1700 – 1710

Provenance:
Private European Collection

'Having promised (to search for Sita) after the rainy season, Sugriva is not aware that he has already spent the four months revelling. Sporting with the council of ministers surrounding him, resorting to drinking, he shows no compassion to us feeling wretched with grief. O mighty warrior O dear, go to Sugriva and make him aware of the virulence of my anger... On seeing Rama, the protector of the human race, wailing Lakshmana of terrific lustre hardened his stand against Sugriva and proceeded, charged with intense anger.'
Valmiki's Ramayana, verses 4.30.78 – 4.30.85

The current scene is taken from the book of Kishkindha when Rama's agony of separation from Sita, is accentuated by the beauty of the night sky that surrounds him. Prior to this scene, the monkey-king Sugriva had promised to help Rama find Sita, who had been abducted by Ravana, if Rama in turn helped him regain his empire, by killing his brother Vali. Rama has fulfilled his part of the deal by slaying Vali, but Sugriva has now forgotten his vow and instead remains engrossed in his kingly pleasures and pastimes. In contrast Rama, having spent the entire rainy season on the Prasravana mountain, tormented by his longing for Sita, now swoons at the beauty of the clear autumnal moon and laments the loss of his wife. Laxmana is infuriated that Rama has been left in such a sorry state, so sets out in anger to Sugriva's palace to remind him of his vow.

Set against a midnight blue background, Laxmana is seen leaving Rama seated on a rocky hilltop. In his anger and haste Laxmana breaks the trunks of fully-grown trees that block his path. Being one of the very few paintings of Shangri Ramayana set at night time, the artist has remained loyal to the text, and sets the scene accordingly. A clear, star-studded sky symbolises the end of the rainy season, whilst the deep blue horizon in the background creates a feeling of calm. The artist has neatly juxtaposed Laxmana's anger evident from the path of destruction that he leaves in his wake, against the otherwise calm scene.

For further discussion regarding paintings from the Shangri Ramayana series see the catalogue note to Indrajit attacks Rama and Lakshmana.



AN ILLUSTRATION TO THE SHANGRI RAMAYANA

Lakshmana gathers flower blossom to prepare a garland
Style III, Book IV (Kishkindha kanda)
Kulu or Mandi, India
Opaque pigment on paper
Circa 1700 – 1710

Provenance:
Private European Collection

*'O lord of monkeys while you are engaged in a duel, wear some identification mark by which I can recognise you.
O Lakshmana this Gajapushpi in bloom is auspicious. Pluck and fasten it on to great Sugriva's neck
Then Lakshmana went to the mountain slope, plucked the Gajapushpi blossoms and fastened it on the neck of Sugriva.'*
Valmiki's Ramayana, verses 4.12.38 - 4.12.40.

The current scene depicts the monkey Sugriva preparing to fight his brother Vali. According to the text Sugriva was the younger brother of Vali, the ruler of Kishkindha. Following a disagreement between the two brothers, Vali ostracized Sugriva from the kingdom. During his exile, Sugriva made an alliance with Rama and they formed an agreement, Rama would slay Vali and reinstate Sugriva as the ruler of Kishkindha, and in return, Sugriva would help Rama in his quest to find Sita. Prior to the current scene Rama's first attempt to slay Vali had ended in failure, as Rama could not distinguish between the two brothers when they were locked in combat. It was then that Rama suggested to Vali that he should adorn himself with a garland of Gajapushpi blossoms, so that Rama would be able to discern between the two brothers. In a linear composition, Rama can be seen addressing Sugriva while Hanuman sits in attendance. Lakshmana appears on the right portion of the painting plucking blossoms from the Gajapushpi tree. Hanuman's appearance here is in stark contrast to that of Sugriva who is seen wearing a crown and other regal apparel, whereas in other folios of the set, Hanuman can also be seen with a lotus-crown and patterned scarfs. The contrast in their depiction in this painting appears to be a device employed by the painter in order to highlight Sugriva's status as a royal personality.

For further discussion regarding paintings from the Shangri Ramayana series see the catalogue note to Indrajit attacks Rama and Lakshmana.



AN ILLUSTRATION TO A SHIVA PURANA SERIES

Lord Shiva kills Lord Kama for disturbing his meditation.
Kangra or Mandi, India
Opaque pigment on paper
Circa 1810 – 1820

Provenance:
Private European Collection

Numbered 6 on the reverse, with Mandi stamp bearing number 258

Further inscribed on the reverse in Sanskrit '*dheryasya vachanam drishta vichare tatpar shiva karnam kinchidutpannam nanyathedam bhavediti. Disho vilok yama saparitam shankara stada vambhage sthitam kamam dadarshvana karthhiranga tandrish krodha sanyukta santatasya kshanadapi ahoduhetu kamenan muktohandusha saha. Ityevam sa krudha shiva par makopina nritaya tasya netradeti sansaragni harchhakha bhasma sankrivanne namadanecha devahi yakachcham maruta vacha kshyama tanve prabho tavya bhavanti Chatata purvam hato somakaradhuja hatetasmī havi virye deva dukham mupagaja kshana matram ratistatra visanja hya bhavatada bhartaja nyacha dukham tuna gyatam rishi shatrama jataya cheva sangya yarati dukham samachicha vilalapata data travane aasi dasa dukhitam.*'

'On seeing the dissipation of His courage, Lord Shiva, thought to himself – "How is it that obstacles have cropped up while I am performing the great penance? Who can be that wicked person who has made my mind perturbed?" The great Yogi [Shiva] his suspicion aroused surveyed all around. His eyes fell on Kama, stationed on His left side with his bow fully drawn and ready to discharge the arrow. Seeing Kama in that attitude, instantaneously anger was aroused in Shiva, and a great flame of fire sprang up from the third eye of the infuriated Shiva. Even before the god had the time to ask for mercy, Kama was reduced to ashes. When the heroic Kama was thus slain, the gods began lamenting and cried aloud. Due to the misery on account of the death of her husband, Rati fell down unconscious, as if dead. When she regained consciousness after a while, Rati in her great agitation lamented and cried loudly.'

The current scene depicts Lord Shiva seated on a tiger skin, at the precise moment that he is awoken from his deep meditation by Lord Kama. Lord Kama can be seen standing holding his lotus blossom bow, entirely engulfed in flames which have sprung from Shiva's third eye. To the left of Kama, his wife Rati falls unconscious to the ground having witnessed the moment of his immolation. The scene accurately follows the text of the Purana that is inscribed on the reverse of the painting. The scene prior to the current painting from the same manuscript is a known work, and depicts Kama and Rati arriving at Shiva's place of penance. In that scene Lord Shiva is depicted with his head inclined and his eyes closed in meditation, Nandi his bull slumbers at his feet. The animals now seen fleeing from Lord Shiva's anger, are there seen in couples, some even copulating filled with lust by the power of Lord Kama's presence. The two images present a pivotal moment in the Purana. The scene has been elegantly handled by the artist and is full of lively details and lush foliage. Although the work is unsigned the composition reveals many elements that are stylistically related to the work of the Master artist Purkhu, and it is possible that further research may support this attribution.



AN ILLUSTRATION TO A SHIVA PURANA SERIES

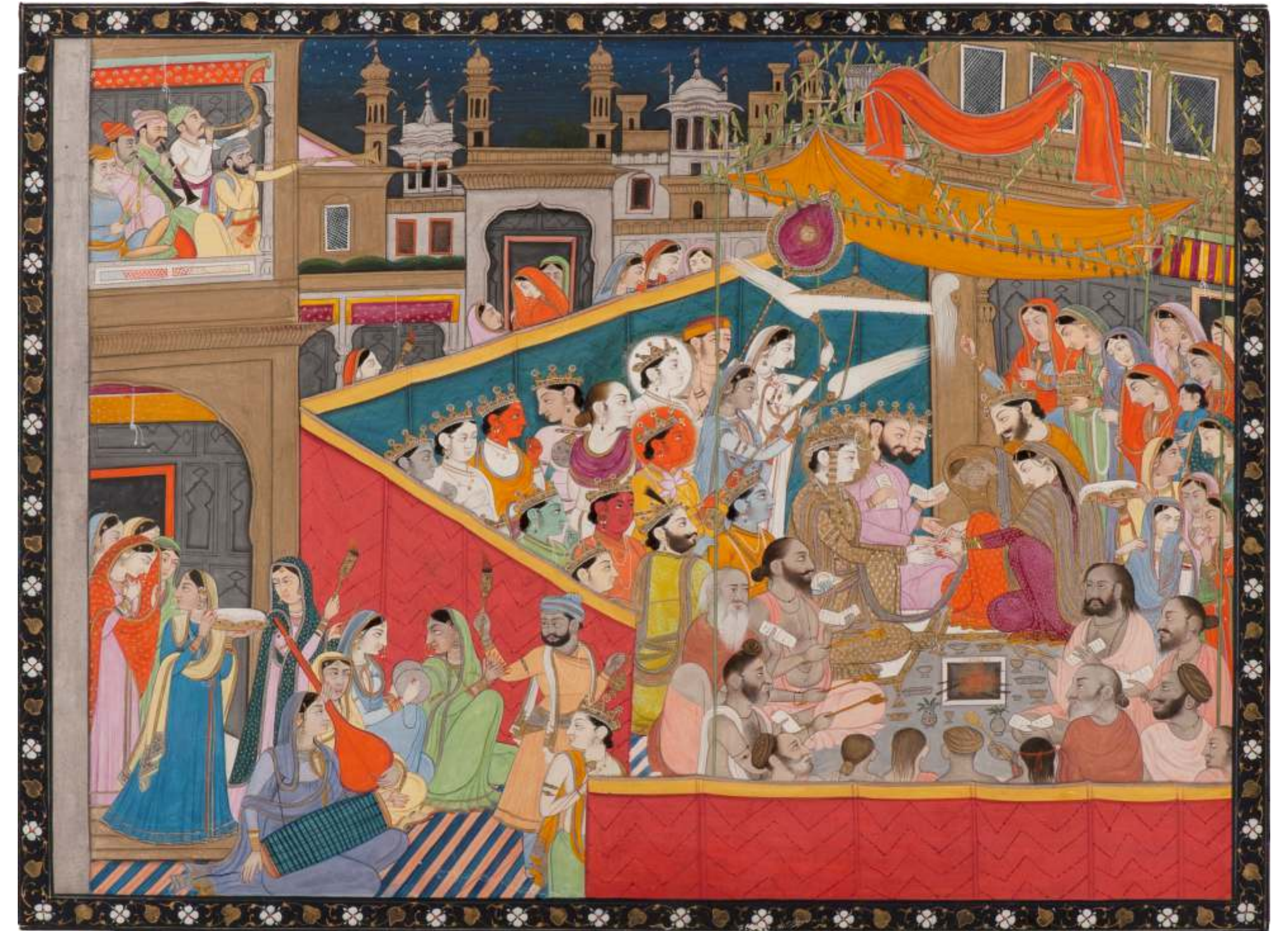
The marriage of Shiva and Parvati
Kangra or Mandi, India
Opaque pigment on paper, heightened with gold
Circa 1810 – 1820

Numbered 1228 on the reverse, with Mandi stamp bearing number 274

Further inscribed on reverse in Sanskrit '*punascha kusamasagha dampati tomudanvijo sanstha agnipuna statra vivaham karodvidhi akshata ropanatatra striyascha kustadagyaya.*'

'The priest conducted the bride and the bridegroom round the fire, with their eyes closed in mutual agreement. With their marriage ceremony thus performed by the family priest, versed in the ceremonial, the two became one.'

The painting is based on the narrative of Shiva's marriage to Parvati, a popular episode known in Indian scriptural tradition as '*Kalyanasundaram*' or the beautiful marriage. The couple can be seen performing the *Panigrahana* ritual, where the groom accepts the bride by taking her right hand in his. The couple depicted in the centre are surrounded by the major deities of the Hindu pantheon and other celestial beings. Parvati's parents Himavat and Mena perform the ritual of *Kanyadana*, or giving away the bride. Brahma sitting next to Shiva can be seen reciting the sacred vows. Brahmins occupy the lower-right corner performing *Yajna* while a band of musicians can be observed playing celebratory music outside the canopy. A few of the bridesmaids appear to be curiously peeping over the canopy to catch a glimpse of the handsome bridegroom Shiva, who, having given up his tiger-hide, is adorning a lavish gold *jama* with sumptuous jewellery in a striking accordance with the depiction of Rajput princes being married. His moon-white complexion is complemented by a gold halo. Parvati on the other hand has covered her face in accordance with Indian marriage traditions and shyly bows her head to her future husband. This composition does not bear a divine essence but rather exhibits a very human depiction of a holy nuptial conjugation. The artist has focused his attention towards the finer details of the Hindu wedding ritual, especially the mango leaves decorating the canopy of the Mandapa, which is considered as a blessing for the couple to have healthy children. The architectural details and intricacies are in accordance with other paintings belonging to this period, particularly paintings from the Kangra Rasikapriya and the Bihari Satsai.





RAJA SIDH SEN OF MANDI

A portrait of Raja Sidh Sen (r.1684-1727)
Mandi, India
Opaque pigment on paper
Circa 1760

Provenance:
Private European Collection

The portrait depicts Raja Sidh Sen of Mandi (r. 1684-1727) who is believed to have lived to one hundred years of age. He was a much loved ruler and warrior credited with supernatural powers. It was widely believed that he could crush a coconut in the palm of his left hand, or rub the inscription off a coin simply by pressing it between his forefinger and thumb. It was said that a magical amulet that he wore around his neck enabled him to fly to the source of the Ganges from Mandi each morning and to return in time to attend to affairs of state. Despite his legendary status the historical sources agree that Sidh Sen was both a man of giant stature, and a religious man, whose devotions to Shiva and the Goddess were exemplary.

In this portrait the Raja is dressed in a white *jama* with an elaborate pleated collar. He wears a green turban, ornamented with a gold, pearl and ruby *sarpech*, and an ornamental tassel. The ruler is seen seated on a vertically striped rug of pink and white, adorned with regular flower motifs, he is supported by a large bolster cushion at his back. The Raja's *tulwar* in a red scabbard rests across one thigh, a long string of *rudraksha* beads crosses his chest and he holds a further string of prayer beads in his right hand. He sports a long curling moustache with heavy stubble covering his chin. An attendant, dressed in plain white, stands behind him holding a peacock fan.

Striped durries and a white strip of sky, dotted with tiny birds are features of Mandi Royal portraits throughout the 18th century, so it is frequently difficult to ascertain if the portraits are contemporary to the ruler or posthumous. However, Archer has suggested that when the birds in the sky are reduced to dots the portrait may be of a slightly later period (c.1750-1800). Equally, the feature of the attendant figure standing on the rug rather than appearing to stand below the raised dais, behind the rug may further suggest a later date. Despite the possibility that the work may have been created later than the earliest known portraits of the Raja the quality of the painting remains refined. Of particular note is the detailed shading along the pleats of the *jama*, and the elaborate treatment of the collar not frequently seen in the later copies of earlier prototypes.

RAJA SURAJ SEN OF MANDI

A Posthumous portrait of Raja Suraj Sen (r.1637-1664)
Mandi, India
Opaque pigment on paper
Dated 1788

Provenance:
Private European Collection

Inscribed in upper border in Takri '*sri maharaja surya sen sam[vat] 1721 sha[ka] sam[vat] 40 svarga loka huye'*
'Maharaja Suraj Sen [who] reached his heavenly abode in samvat 1721' [C.E. 1664]

Further inscribed on the reverse in Takri '*sri raja suraj sen sam[vat] pravishte 31 likha sutaji.'*
'Raja Suraj Sen written in the year 1788 A.D.'

The current painting is a posthumous portrait of Raja Suraj Sen of Mandi (r. 1637-1664). The Raja is dressed in a red *jama* with an elaborate white green and gold sash tied around his waist. He wears an unusual red, blue and gold hat, a style typically worn by the Mandi rulers in the 17th century. His hat is ornamented with a gold, pearl and ruby *sarpech*, and an ornamental tassel. The ruler is seen seated on a diagonally striped rug of pink and red, adorned with regular flower motifs, at his back he is supported by a large bolster cushion. The Raja's *tulwar* in a green scabbard rests behind him, a tiger headed dagger is tucked into his sash and he rests his left hand on a circular black shield. He sports a long curling moustache which almost joins his long sideburns. An attendant, dressed in plain white, stands behind him holding a peacock *morchhal*.

As with the previous portrait of Raja Sidh Sen the artist has chosen to present the Raja in the standard manner of 18th century royal portraits at the court. He is seated on a striped rug beneath a blue and white sky dotted with birds, but unlike the previous portrait the attendant figure stands behind the rug in a manner that makes the ruler appear to be raised on a dais. Furthermore, the background is predominantly coloured in a pale green, both features that make reference to elements of early royal portrait styles. Despite the fact that this work is dated to 1788 the artist has chosen to remain true to the norms or portraiture befitting the period in which Raja Suraj Sen reigned.



A HIMALAYAN RAM

An Animal Study
Mandi, India
Opaque pigment on paper
Circa 1740-1750

Provenance:
Private European Collection

Numbered 14 on the reverse, with Mandi stamp bearing number 4298





AN ILLUSTRATION TO A NAYIKA SERIES

Khandita Nayika
Kangra, India
Opaque pigment on paper
Circa 1820

Provenance:
Private European Collection

Inscribed on the reverse in *Devanagari* 'atha khandita lakshanam. Avan kahi ave nahi, ave pritam prat. jake ghar so khandita kahe ju bahu bidhi bat. 1. Ankhani jo sujhat na kanani to suniyat, kesodas jaise tum lokani mein gaye ho. Bansa ki bisari sudhikak jyon chunat firo, juthe sithe sath itha ditha thaye ho. Duri duri karathu dori dori gaho payi jano na kuthoru thoru jani jiya paye ho. Kako ghar ghalibe ko base kahan ghansyam ghughu jyon ghusan prat mere griha aye ho.'

'You say that I am not able to see the reality of the world but I hear people slandering me. You have given up all shame and like a crow you have become a hardened scavenger eating left over food. I push you away, but yet you return and touch my feet. I am convinced that you have no self-respect. Where did you spend the night and whose honour did you steal? Now that it is dawn you have come into my home.'

Keshavadasa in his poetic treatise of *Rasikapriya* has classified heroines into eight categories according to their age, mood and station in love. The *Khandita Nayika*, or the one enraged with her lover, has been described by Keshavadasa as an enraged heroine whose partner promised to spend the night with her but instead visits her the next morning after having spent the night in another woman's company. Her depiction is of an offended and upset woman, who stops her husband at the door and rebukes him for his infidelity. Her husband, on the other hand, having spent a night of romantic passion elsewhere is often depicted with a loose turban, or bearing scratch marks, and redness in the eyes due to sleeplessness.

The scene is set at the time of dawn, as suggested by the sunrise. The Nayaka after having spent the night with another woman is being questioned by the Nayika about his absence. Her posture and gesture indicate that she is infuriated and dismayed. She puts one hand on her waist in a questioning manner and with the other holds a mirror to the Nayaka, pointing out his tired and sleepless appearance. Khandita, who is wronged, in her anger rebukes the Nayaka by comparing him to a crow who scavenges on leftover food – the other women. The painting appears to have been made by a Kangra artist active in the workshop of Purkhu.





A YOUNG PRINCE RIDING A STALLION

A portrait of Raja Bakht Singh's son
Chamba or Nurpur, India
Opaque pigment on paper
Circa 1750-1760

Provenance:
Private European Collection

Numbered 74 and 4619 on reverse

Inscribed in the upper border in *Farsi* 'pisr-i-raja Bakhat Singh'
'Son of Raja Bakht Singh'

The young prince, identified by inscription as the son of Raja Bakht Singh, is here depicted riding a fine white stallion. The prince wears a golden turban, and a deep orange *jama* flecked with gold, that is tied at the waist with a green sash. He holds a spear in his right hand and the reins of his horse in his left, a push dagger is tucked into his sash at his waist, and a full quiver of arrows hangs from his saddle. The horse is bedecked with a fine golden saddlecloth and a gold and purple ornamental tassel hangs from the stallion's neck. The painting is replete with the all the accoutrements expected of royalty and is clearly intended to reinforce the status of the young prince. The curve of the animal's neck off set against the deep brown of the background, is complemented by the abstract shape of the falling tassel that creates a quietly elegant composition. Although the region of production is likely to have been Chamba or Nurpur the elegant outline of the horse and the oversized tassel is reminiscent of horse portraiture in Kishangarh at a similar period.

THE MUGHAL EMPEROR JAHANGIR

A posthumous portrait of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir
Kangra, India
Opaque pigment on paper
Circa 1820

Provenance:
Private European Collection

Numbered 108 on the reverse, with Mandi stamp bearing number 1914

Inscribed in Devanagari on the reverse '*sri patsaha Jahangir*', 'Emperor Jahangir' and further inscribed in *Farsi* '*patshah Jahangir pisr-i-muhammad jalaluddin akbar*'. 'Emperor Jahangir, the son of Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar' and in *Takri* '*akbare da putar Jahangir*'. 'Jahangir the son of Akbar'

Nadir Shah's invasion and conquest of the Delhi in 1739, led to the migration of Mughal artists to the hills to escape the uncertainties of the plains. The migration of these artists brought fresh ideas and material to the court ateliers of the hills. By the mid 18th century, portraits of Mughal rulers based on Mughal prototypes, created in a Pahari style were not uncommon at the courts of Kangra and Guler. Here the Emperor Jahangir, identified by multiple inscriptions, is depicted standing on a terrace, with a white balustrade at its edge. He holds a large falcon, used for hunting in his gloved right hand and a small bird in his left. He wears a white transparent *jama* with bright orange trousers beneath. A *talwar* with a gem-encrusted handle hangs at his waist, and a jade hilted dagger is tucked into an ornate sash that is tied around his waist. He is adorned with a long pearl necklace that is interspersed with emeralds and rubies.

The depiction of the Mughal emperor Jahangir holding a bird of prey was a common subject in portrait painting at the Mughal court. In his memoirs Jahangir describes using falcons to hunt cranes: 'Certainly, of all good hunting amusements, this is the best...I praise the heart and courage of the falcon that can seize such strong-bodied animals [cranes] and with the strength of his talons can subdue them.' For an example of a portrait of Jahangir holding a falcon from the Mughal courts see the British Museum Collection, museum acquisition number 1955,1008,0.11.





AN ILLUSTRATION TO A NAYIKA SERIES

The Cat Thief
 Chamba, India
 Opaque pigment on paper
 Circa 1815-1820

Provenance:
 Private European Collection

In this unusual composition a princess in a pink dress and green shawl chases a cat across a terrace, which is making off with her pet parrot in its mouth. This scene remained popular in various centres of Indian painting during the mid 18th century. It makes an early appearance in a 1740 Mughal painting (V&A, IS.171-1955), and the subject-matter clearly soon caught the attention of Rajput patrons and painters, and was reinterpreted by artists in Bundi and Bikaner. By 1770, painters of Kangra had already created their own versions of this bizarre and distinctive scene (W.G. Archer, *Indian Painting from the Punjab Hills: A Survey and History of Pahari Miniature Painting*, p. 411, cat. no. 2). The current painting is another version of the same episode made by a Kangra painter possibly for the Chamba court. The subject was a popular one in the Pahari courts, and a similar scene from Kangra is published in Archer, *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, Vol. II, p. 224. Archer states that the parrot symbolises the lady's lover and the cat her rival.

On a warm and lazy afternoon, things have suddenly taken a dramatic turn when a cat has decided to make off with the heroine's pet parrot. The Nayika is chasing the cat with a stick in her hand as she struggles to keep her *odhni* from slipping off her head. The calmness on the face of the heroine suggests that the episode is a routine, rather an expected one, and she has become accustomed to it. Other interpretations of the scene usually show a pet cat, suggested by a collar around its neck, a characteristic which is not certain in this illustration. The composition is simple in nature and the artist has employed a palette of warm colours. Instead of a more traditional architectural setting, the artist has used a blue backdrop for open sky and a flowering tree standing in solitude, to contrast with the unfolding drama.

AN ILLUSTRATION TO A NAYIKA SERIES

A Princess with Chakor Partridges
 Kangra, India
 Opaque pigment on paper
 Circa 1810-1820

Provenance:
 Private European Collection

Numbered 14 on the reverse, with Mandi stamp bearing number 4298

The *chakor* partridges find reference in Indian scriptures dating back to the 2nd century AD. Within the tradition of Indian love poetry *chakors* are identified as symbols of intense and unreciprocated love. At times pugnacious and impulsive, *Chakors* are famous for their love for the moon and gaze at it constantly, at times for hours. The bird is also known for its monogamous nature and mates for life, and is believed to die next to its deceased mate. These beliefs explain their long association with love poetry.

In the painting, a lovesick Nayika can be seen in a garden, surrounded by a couple of *chakors* who gaze at her moonlit face. The subject-matter appears to be based on a couplet by the Braj poet Bihari, according to which *chakors* are gazing at the heroine's fair-complexioned face, confusing it for the moon. The Nayika coyly pulls a loose *odhni* over her head, as she turns her face away from the gaze of the beholder. The *chakors* appear to be transfixed on her face. The painting appears to be executed by Guler artists working for the Mandi Court, who had migrated from Kangra during the reign of Raja Ishwari Sen (r. 1788-1826). The Nayika is wearing a *peshwaz* with a slit-blouse design, a popular fashion in Kangra painting during the last phase of the 18th century. Her elongated eyes, sharp chin, slender and tender limbs, and a porcelain-like delicacy are the ideal characteristics for a beautiful damsel within the Pahari tradition.





With thanks to
JUSTIN PIPERGER
ARTI TANNA BAKHLE

Contact: Rob Dean
rob@robdeanart.com
+44 (0)7764942306



www.robdeanart.com