

Vision of an Enlightened King

A Centennial Bouquet of Himalayan Art
from the Bhuri Singh Museum Collection



Editor
Vijay Sharma



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By VIJAY SHARMA

with contributions by
S. M. Sethi,
Kamal Prashad Sharma,
Rajesh Sehgal, and
Verena Widorn



Bhuri Singh Museum
Centenary
1918-2018

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Frontispiece

Royal Devotee with a lamp
Chhatrari, Chamba *circa* 7th century
Coll: Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba

Front cover

Dana-lila: Taking of the toll
Chamba school, *circa* 1765-70

Back cover

Portrait of Raja Prithvi Singh of Chamba
Chamba school, *circa* mid 18th century
Coll: Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba

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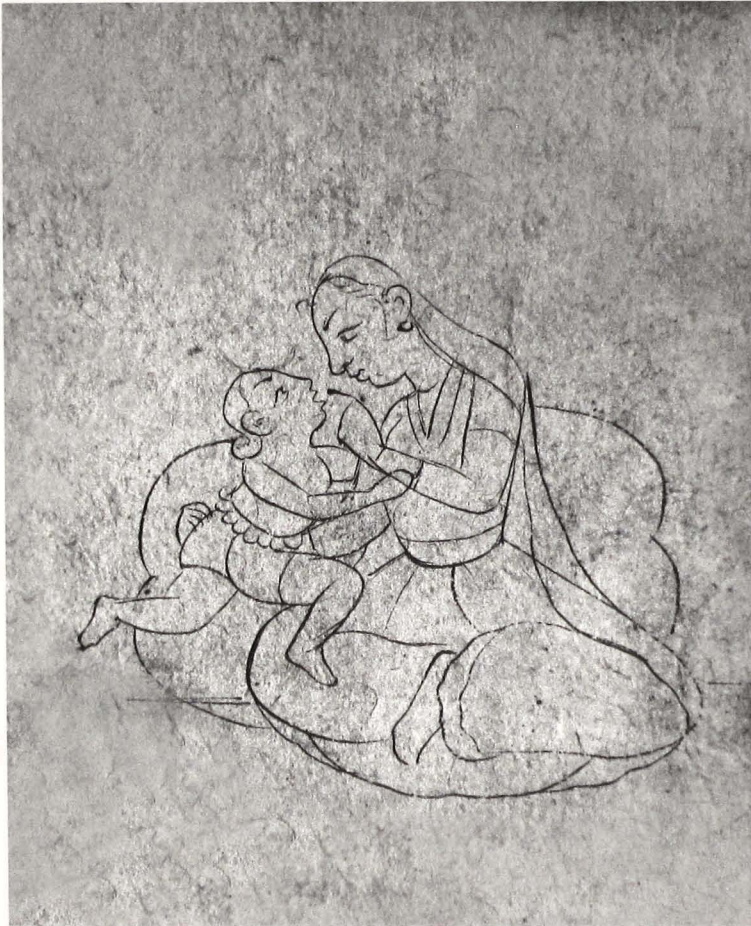
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Baby Krishna with Yashoda, drawing in Chamba style
circa mid 18th century

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Vijay Sharma

A treasure-house of the Himalayan arts, Bhuri Singh Museum of Chamba was founded in 1908 by Raja Sir Bhuri Singh, then ruling chief of the erstwhile Chamba State. This institution famous for its exquisite collection celebrates its centenary in September 2008 with pomp and festivities. On this very celebration of the Bhuri Singh Museum's centennial, this publication endeavours to present some of the masterpieces from Museum's rich collection.

In the early years of the twentieth century, it was Dr. Jean Philippe Vogel, an eminent scholar and archaeologist, who discovered epigraphical material of historical importance during the course of his explorations in Chamba, which is now preserved and displayed in the galleries of the Bhuri Singh Museum. In 1909, he also published a detailed catalogue of Museum's collection listing all the existing art objects. Exactly after the five decades of the Museum's opening, Dr. Vishwa Chander Ohri became involved with the Museum and not only shaped this institution but also enhanced its collection immensely.

Though, the Bhuri Singh Museum is small in size, its assets of antiquities and artefacts highlight the rich cultural heritage of the much larger area, chiefly of the Chamba region. Its collection of epigraphical material of exceptional historical importance (inscriptions recorded on stone, metal and papers) and of Pahari miniature painting is considered to be one of the few richest collections across the world. This richly illustrated monograph focuses on epigraphs, sculptures and Pahari miniatures, embroidered Chamba rumals, coins etc. besides other decorative artefacts describing each art object in detail including its iconography, dating and contextual significance.

My association with the Bhuri Singh Museum has been since my childhood, when I used to visit the painting gallery to see the miniatures for hours. The pictures of various Pahari schools displayed there greatly inspired me and touched me in many different ways. This was my first ever experience of the beauty and brilliance of miniature paintings. This laid my way to follow the footsteps of the masters of the bygone era. Later, working in the museum as artist, it was an enlightening experience for me while working with Dr. V.C. Ohri, an eminent scholar, who in the real sense is the '*pitamah*' of the art and museum movement in Himachal Pradesh. In 1983, I was part of the seminar 'History and Culture of Chamba State' organised by Dr. V. C. Ohri at the Bhuri Singh Museum, where I could meet a galaxy of renowned scholars like Sarvasri Karl Kandalavaka, B.N. Goswamy, Jagdish Mittal and Anand Krishna and others.

This publication, on the eve of the Bhuri Singh Museum's centennial, is envisaged as an introduction to the masterpieces from the Museum collection. I would like to express my deep gratitude to Shri B. K. Agrawal, Secretary, Language and Culture department, H.P. for accepting my proposal of bringing out the publications featuring the treasure trove preserved in this century old institution. Dr. V. C. Ohri, an eminent art historian, has been a source of inspiration throughout the planning and production of this volume. I am greatly indebted to him for number of valuable suggestions.

I am indebted to the contributors Shri Kamal Prashad Sharma, a renowned writer of Chamba, who not only contributed by writing entries about Chamba rumals and decorative arts, but also spent hours together during the various stages of its production, Shri S. M. Sethi, former Curator of the State Museum, Shimla for writing entries of sculptures and fountain slabs, Dr. Verena Widorn for writing on wooden image of Buddha and Shri Rajesh Sehgal for providing important visuals and text for ancient coins gets my gratitude as well.

I wish to record my sincere thanks to Sarvasri Mirza Asghar Beg, Rajinder Kumar Mahajan, Rajesh Singh Charak, Manoj Kumar Vaid, Pankaj Chowfla, Yog Raj Sehgal, Rajesh Sehgal and Parikshit Sharma for generously lending me rare photographs from their personal collections.

I am also thankful to several thoughtful friends for their unstinted support and help. Of special mention are: Dr. Harsha V. Dehejia (Ottawa, Canada) who went through the entire text and made several useful suggestions; Prof. Ludwig Habighorst (Germany) for giving me advice on certain matters. I would like to thank Tikka Sahib Gulab Singh, the grandee of Chamba royal family and Mrs. Malvika Pathania for providing me important information related to the royal house of Chamba. My deepest thanks go to Raja Prem Singh of Chamba in appreciation of his disposition for the art and culture of Chamba.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to Shri Gurmeet Nagpal of Chamba, who took a sincere interest in photographing art objects and designing the entire book in a splendid manner. I am grateful to Shri Nitin Sharma for his keen interest in typing the manuscript.

Lastly, I am also thankful to the Director, Department of Language and Culture, Himachal Pradesh and the Curator, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba and his staff for their cooperation in preparing this publication and for its timely realisation.

FOREWORD

B. K. Agrawal

Secretary,

Department of Language & Culture,

Himachal Pradesh

Chamba is one of the culturally rich districts of Himachal Pradesh. Its songs, dances and music, archaeology, paintings, *rumals*, epigraphy, coins and postage stamps, because of its postal convention with British India since 1887, have bearings of their own on the annals. Its remarkable tradition of metal and stone sculpturing, temple architecture, miniature painting, wood carving, textile embroidering, decorative handicrafts and special cuisines has not only continuity but also traditionalism and originality that have smoothly passed on from the ancient to the modern. Karl Khandalavala once compared the lament of Sir Walter Scott 'old times had changed, old manners gone; a stranger held the Stuart's throne' with the changelessness of Chamba saying 'Chamba is still beautiful and may she remain beautiful for ever.'

It dawned upon the British in the beginning of the 20th century to preserve the cultural heritage of India. Several local and site museums were built in different parts of India. It was in early 1900s that Raja Bhuri Singh, then ruling chief of the Chamba State, gave all support to the eminent archaeologist Dr. J. Ph. Vogel to establish a museum in Chamba. Vogel writes in 'The Antiquities of Chamba' "His Highness has further shown his interest in the antiquities and past records of his State by founding a local museum, which was opened on the 14th September, 1908, and has been rightly named after him."

The museum that was set up in an old wooden structure -the Clubhouse- was shifted to a new building in the heart of the town in 1985 and has more than 8500 antiquities today. Its hilly, mainly Himalayan artefacts, predominantly represent Chamba region, but have such value that most of these have been studied and analysed by scholars like Cunningham, Kielhorn, Vogel, Goetz, Chhabra and others. The globe-trotting scholars make it a point to visit Chamba in order to see the antiquities themselves about which they had read in journals and books. The Bhuri Singh Museum completes its century this year. The staff of the Language and Culture Department including the Curator of the Museum and his colleagues at Chamba has risen to the occasion to keep the celebrations somber yet graceful; solemn yet elegant; earnest yet cheerful.

The State Department of Language and Culture is bringing out a book highlighting a few of the masterpieces from the Bhuri Singh Museum collection. If the readers find it useful in better understanding of the arts of Himachal Pradesh, especially of the Chamba region, the purpose for which it has been brought out would be met.

I acknowledge in all sincerity the contribution and efforts made by Shri Vijay Sharma, artist-cum-scholar, towards editing and production of this publication.



Raja Sham Singh with his younger brother Mian Sahib Bhuri Singh (sitting)
Photo Courtesy: Mirza Asghar Beg

Raja Sham Singh: The Architect of Twentieth Century Chamba (r.1873-1904)

One of the oldest princely states, Chamba is situated in the bosom of north-western Himalaya on the bank of river Ravi. Protected by its high and difficult mountain ranges, its cultural wealth remained undisturbed from the incursions of Muslim invaders. The kingdom of Chamba presided by the Dhauladhar range of mountains spread over an area of about 15,000 square kilometers was very fertile and remained intact until the beginning of nineteenth century. During the reign of Raja Charat Singh (1808-1844), Vigne a European traveller visited Chamba, who gave a brief account about Chamba in his travelogue. It was Sir Alexander Cunningham, the pioneer of archaeology in India, who visited Chamba in 1839¹ and drew the attention of hitherto unnoticed ancient monuments, antiquities and epigraphs by publishing his reports of the rich cultural wealth of Chamba.

Charat Singh was succeeded by his son Sri Singh (1844-70)² who was not only a man of letters but ran the state efficiently. Since Raja Sri Singh's son died in infancy, his younger brother Gopal Singh³ succeeded him, who ruled for a short period of three years from 1870 to 73 and eventually abdicated in 1873 in favour of his elder son Sham Singh who was a child of seven years.³ During the reign of Sham Singh the powers of Raja were vested in the superintendent and wazir. Both the brothers, Sham Singh and Bhuri Singh were placed under the care of a European tutor. Raja Sham Singh attended the Imperial Durbar held in Delhi in 1875 and again visited Lahore next year to greet the Prince of Wales. Among the dignitaries assembled there, he was the youngest ruling prince at that time. In the year 1884, when Raja Sham Singh came of age, he was invested with full powers as a ruling chief. At



Raja Sham Singh flanked by Diwan Govind Chand
and Mian Sahib Bhuri Singh (right)

Photo courtesy: Rajesh Sehgal

the same time Diwan Govind Chand advanced to the office of wazir.

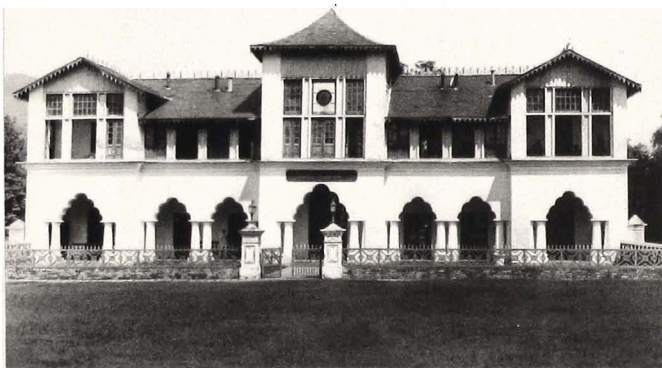
The second half of the 19th century proved as a stellar period in the history of Chamba as it was during this period that the conservation of our sadly neglected heritage was undertaken. For this we should be grateful to the British who instilled in us the respect and love for antiquity. During this period, the Archaeological Survey of India not only systematically excavated and explored old sites and conserved the historic monuments, but ensured that the artefacts were properly displayed. Three important museums were set up by British in the year 1887. These were Albert Hall in Jaipur, the Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda and a museum in Singapore.

In Punjab, the Central Museum had already been established at Lahore in 1894 on the lines of London's Victoria and Albert Museum and soon, in 1898, another institution was set up in Srinagar after the name of Maharaja Sri Pratap Singh of Kashmir.

The British led education movement in India and the use of English language brought a different kind of awareness and aesthetic sensibility to urban Indians. The establishments of universities in cities like Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Lahore and Allahabad stand as a testament to the educational policies of the British. It was the clear indication of this 'Linguistic and Culture Empire'. Even Chamba was also not lagging behind where educational activities were started during the regime of Raja Sham Singh (r. 1873-1905). The Church of Scotland Mission, founded in Chamba in 1863 by William Ferguson, played a pivotal role in educational and medical missionary work.⁴ Raja Sham Singh built a small but beautiful church for the Mission at his own expenses.⁵ In 1864, the Mission opened a primary school for boys and girls and a middle school for boys was opened in 1876. Female missionaries also ran two lower primary schools for girls. In 1888, at the southern end of the town, a hospital was opened in Chamba by Raja Sham Singh himself, which was named after him.⁶ The Sham Singh hospital was well equipped and played an important part in the health and welfare of the residents of Chamba. The Bible was translated into *Chambiali* dialect entitled "Mangal-



Young Raja Sham Singh and Mian Sahib Bhuri Singh
with their European tutor
Photo courtesy: Rajesh Schgal



Old photograph of Sham Singh Hospital, Chamba

Samachar” and was printed in the *Takri* script at Ludhiana in 1881. This was the first book ever printed in *Takri* script. Dr. J. Hutchison (locally known as ‘*Hari-chichan*’) served the Mission for more than three decades and was well regarded by the people of Chamba for his generosity.¹ He was well acquainted with the local history and tradition and this enabled him to document the history and culture in the ‘*Gazetteer of the Chamba State*’ which was published in the year 1904.

Raja Sham Singh encouraged and emphasised education and offered scholarships for higher education at Amritsar and Lahore. Besides educational activities, the Mission was also engaged in performing musical operas based on the legends associated with the history of Chamba. I was fortunate in being able to see one such document ‘*The Rani’s Sacrifice*’ with Dr. Kenneth Robbins of Washington D.C.

Raja Sham Singh was a connoisseur of the arts, and was a man of vision who envisaged embellishing his state capital the Chamba town. For this, he initiated extensive building activities. Besides a large part of the main bazaar, the other main buildings were Court, Post Office, Kotwali and Jail. For the beautification of the town, he laid a garden below his palace overlooking the chaugan ground. This spacious green ground (chaugan), which is considered as a pride of the town, was broadened by the Raja. For this, not only he shifted the haphazardly built houses of locales from the chaugan but he also transplanted a temple once existing near the Residency (now known as Circuit House). Besides, a ring road around it and an open air pavilion overlooking the river Ravi was also built near chaugan.

Raja Sham Singh was also responsible for constructing the symmetrical shops arrayed in a row. These shops were made in such a manner that an open veranda was provided before every shop so that people coming from different villages could rest there at night time.² Apart from the construction of the buildings in the town, Raja Sham Singh also built the suspension bridge over Ravi river replacing the old one, which had been damaged by heavy floods in 1894. For all this, Raja Sham Singh became very popular and was venerated with the

ਚਾਮ ਪੁਸਤਕ ਖਿੱਚ

ਮੰਗਲ ਕਾਵਿ

ਜੋ ਪੁੱਜੇ ਗੁਰੂਕੇ ਸੇ ਚੋਰੇ ਸੇ ।

ਪੰਜੇ ਫ਼ੀਲਿ ਗੀਰਦਟੇ ਸੇ ਤਿਠਾ ।

(FOR PANJAB BIBLE SOCIETY)

ਲੁਧਿਆਣੇ ਸੇ ਗਿਰਾ ਮੁੱਖ ਕੋ

ਫ਼ੀਲਿ ਖ਼ਾਮਾਕ ਗੀਰਾਕ ਸੇ ਪੜਾ ਚੜ੍ਹੇ ਖ਼ੰਪਦੇ ਗੰਦੇ ਸੇ ॥

ਗੋਬੀ ਗੰਢ ਗਠੋਠ ॥

The title page of the book in *Takri* script ‘*Mangal-Samachar*’
Courtesy: Kamal Prashad Sharma

Church of England Zenana Missionary Society.

A MISSIONARY CANTATA.

THE RANI’S SACRIFICE :

A Legend of Chamba, N. India. (Words only.)

I. Prologue.

(Sunrise at Chamba.)

Recitation—

O’ER eastern hills the monarch of the day
Ascending darts his all-transforming ray;
A rosy blush o’erspreads the snowy height
Half hid mid veiling clouds, all virgin white.
Now steals the sunlight down the mountain side,
Where rugged crags o’erhang and glaciers glide;
Now pierces dusky nooks, where cedar trees
Whisper responses to the sighing breeze.
Now on the peasant’s hut the radiance falls,
Now on the prince’s stately palace walls,

II. Songs, Dialogue and Narrative.

(Enter: A PARTY OF PANJABI CHRISTIAN MAIDENS.)

Song. *Chorus of Christian Maidens*—
Arise, arise, celestial Light,
Send forth thine all-subduing might,
And chase away the age-long night
That overhangs this place.
Bid sleep-bound souls awake to see
God’s love displayed in rock and tree,
And flowing through eternity
The river of His grace.

(Enter: A PARTY OF CHAMBA HINDU MAIDENS, CARRYING GARLANDS, AND WEARING JEWELS AND BRIGHT CLOTHING.)

Recitation. *Christian Maiden*—

The text of the missionary cantata, ‘*The Rani’s Sacrifice*’, published by the Church of England Zenana Mission Society
Courtesy: Kenneth X. Robbins, Washington D.C. (USA)



Raja Sham Singh with his younger brother Mian Sahib Bhuri Singh as his *wazir*
Photo courtesy: Rajesh Sehgal

term 'The Architect of Chamba'.⁹ The credit for Raja's success also goes to his able wazir (Prime Minister) Lala Govind Chand, who diligently carried out all the plans of the Raja. Raja Sham Singh was pressurized by the British government to retire his wazir and in January, 1898, and the latter was retired on pension. A letter written by Raja himself addressed to his worthy wazir apparently reveals Raja's feelings and regards.¹⁰

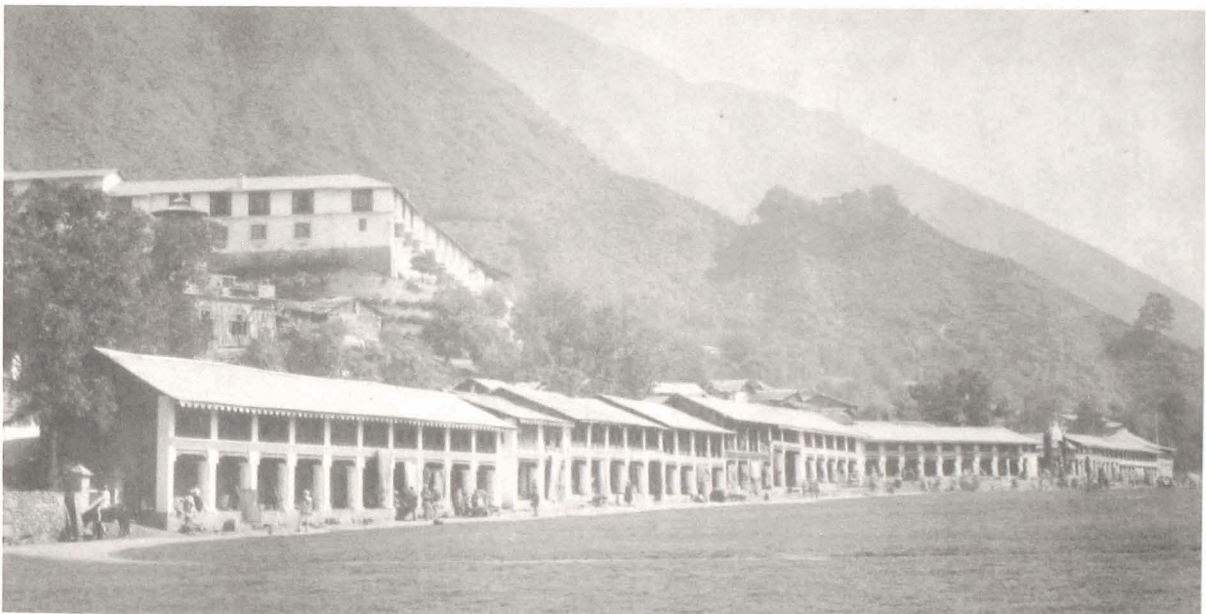
In the year 1897, Raja's younger brother Mian Sahib Bhuri Singh, whose acumen had proved a long time ago was appointed as wazir and the latter also acted as the private secretary to the Raja. Raja Sham Singh's love for music is seen with one incident when the daughter of Mian Sahib Bhuri Singh was married to Yuvraj Hari Singh, the son and successor of Maharaja Pratap Singh of Kashmir. Shaila Datar records the event:

"...It was in the year 1899 on the eve of Ganesh Chaturthi Pandit Bhaskarbuwa visited Chamba Valley (now in Himachal Pradesh). The occasion was the wedding of Yuvraj Hari Singh, son of Maharaja Pratap Singh of Kashmir. It is recorded that Pandit Bhaskarbuwa travelled to Chamba from Lahore via Pathankot and Dalhousie. It took him two and half days to reach Chamba. From Jammu, about 300 people came to attend the wedding."



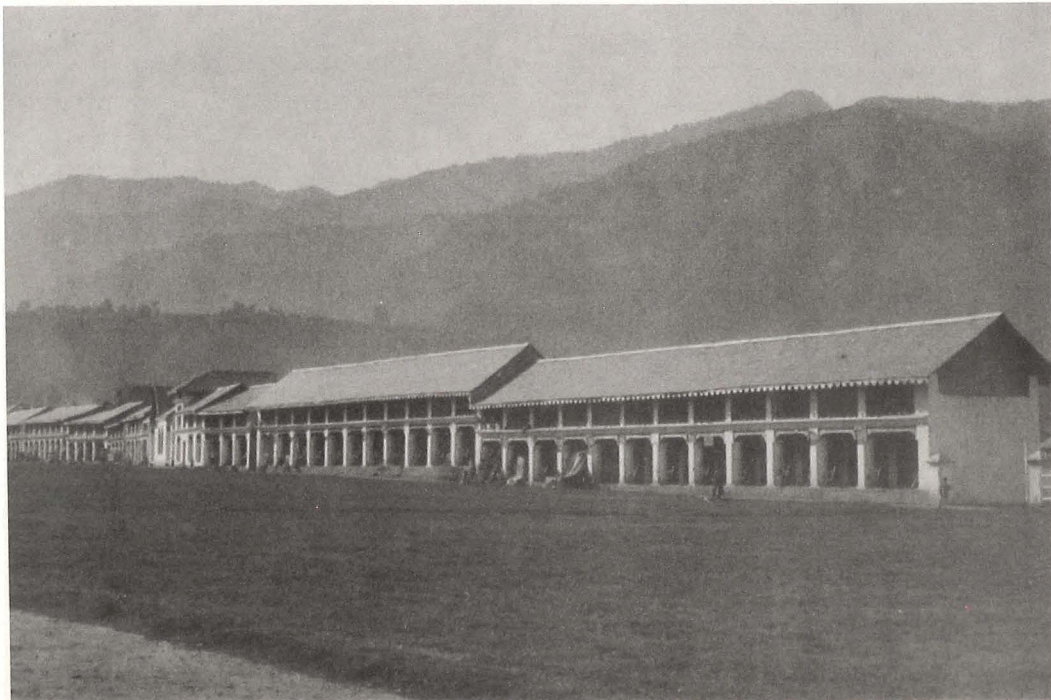
Raja Sham Singh of Chamba
Photo courtesy: Rajesh Sehgal

A view of old Chamba town





The building of State Post Office



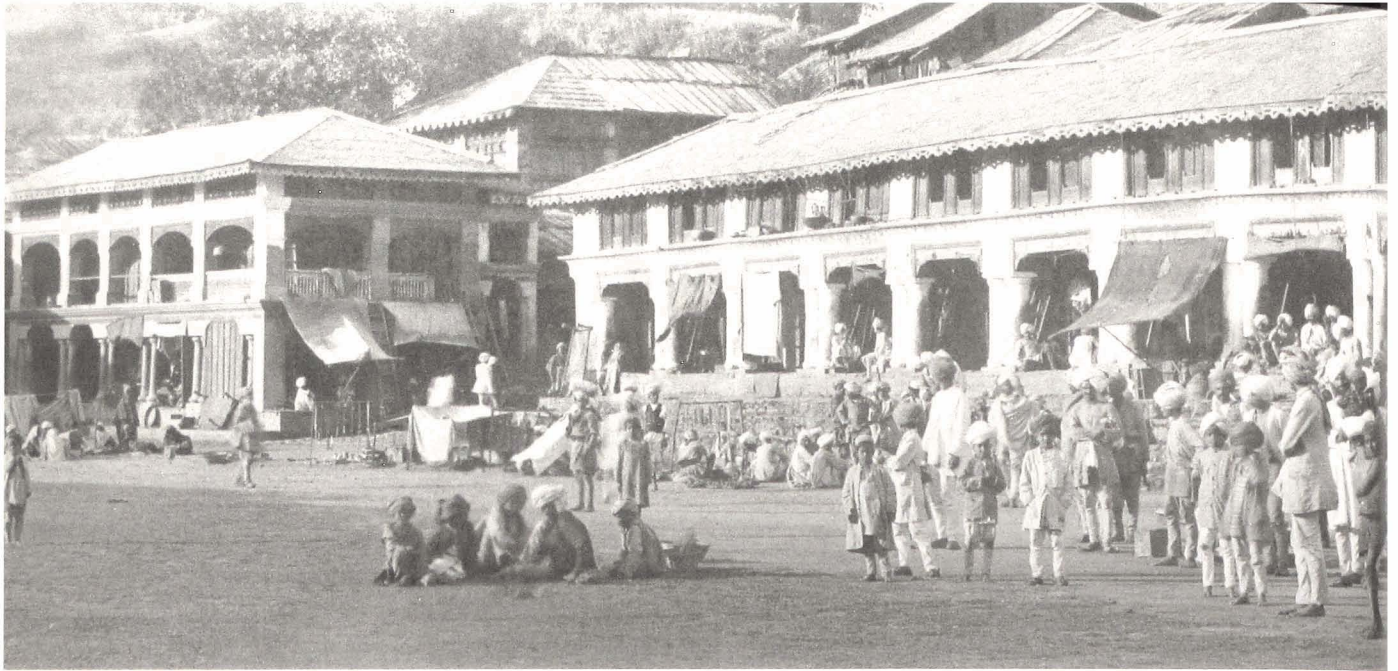
A view of the old Police lines



Photograph showing old bridge Chamba on river Ravi near Sitla temple



New Bridge of Chamba on river Ravi near Sitla temple

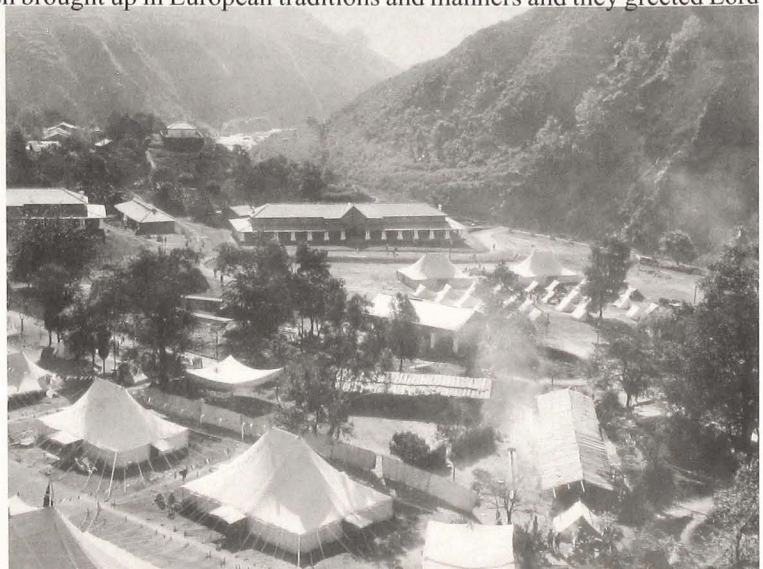


A view of old Bazaar of Chamba
Photo courtesy: Kamal Prashad Sharma

She further writes:

“...Pandit Bhaskarbuwa Bakhle stayed at Chamba for ten days. During the wedding ceremony there was a musical soiree at the palace which went on for two days. The maestros who attended the musical soiree were Ustad Abdulla Khan, Ustad Vilayat Hussain Khan of Agra, Ustad Kale Khan of Lahore, Ustad Moijudin Khan of Calcutta and Ustad Alibaksh (Jarnail) of Patiala Gharana, also Ustad Allahbande Khan of Jaipur was also present. After hearing Pandit Bhaskarbuwa Bakhle's rendition of Darbari Kanhra they all shouted “ khayal gayaki is still alive in the form of Ustad Bakhle”. Such was his impact on the people of Chamba.”¹¹

With the appointment of Lord Nathaniel Curzon as Governor-General of India in 1899 a number of reforms were instituted. Soon after his appointment, he planned a visit to Chamba state.¹² Both the brothers, Raja Sham Singh and Mian Sahib Bhuri Singh had been brought up in European traditions and manners and they greeted Lord Curzon with due regard.



Photograph showing tents for camping guests at Nalhora for the wedding party



A group photograph showing Lord Curzon and Lady Curzon. Raja Sham Singh (sitting second from left) and Mian Sahib Bhuri Singh Wazir (sitting extreme right)

Photo courtesy: Mirza Asghar Beg

Chamba, at that time was well known among Europeans for two reasons: a good hunting site and a treasure trove for archaeological remains. However, Dalhousie was the ideal place for them as per weather conditioning. It was the same year when Prof. Jean Philippe Vogel (1871-1958), a Dutch Sanskritist and Indologist educated in Europe, was invited to enter the Archaeological Survey of India as the Superintendent for the Punjab, Baluchistan and Ajmer circle. Having his headquarter at Lahore,¹³ Vogel extensively toured the regions within his jurisdictions. It was, perhaps, the golden period of Indian archaeology when the enlightened personalities like then Governor-General Lord Curzon and John Marshall, then Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India were the main inspirations for the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Indian sub-continent.

Inspired by Cunningham's reports, Vogel made a visit to the Punjab Himalaya as early as the summer of 1901. This was his first ever visit to Chamba, which fascinated him immensely. During Vogel's numerous visits to Chamba, mostly in the summer of every year, he became an intimate friend of Raja's brother and wazir Mian Sahib Bhuri Singh. In due course, this friendship became deeper and intimate, which continued even when Mian Sahib ascended to the throne of Chamba State as Raja. Raja Bhuri Singh provided every possible help and support to Vogel during his journeys in the far-flung and not easily accessible regions, especially Pangi and Bharmaur. In her 'A Vision of Splendour', Gerda Theuns-de Boer writes:



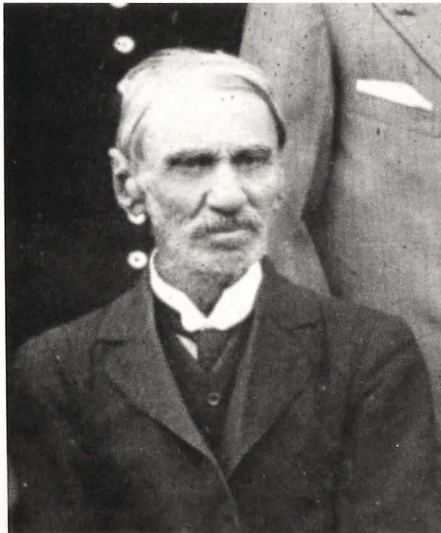


Prof. J. Ph. Vogel
at his Benmore office, Shimla
Photo courtesy: Gerda Theuns-de Boer

"Vogel's great archaeological passion was the former Princely State of Chamba, in present Himachal Pradesh. It was a relatively unexplored region, which due to its location far away from the former trade routes and dissected by three mountain chains had retained its traditions. The region had to be explored on foot and by pony; after a day's march a traveller was still received by "an official whose title and presumably whose duties also have remained unchanged through the lapse of ages." Chamba was not chosen by chance. Vogel had made an earlier visit to Punjab between May and October 1901, during which he had explored the princely states of Mandi and Chamba and the Hill states of Kangra and Kullu for their archaeological potential. From 1902 onwards, he had more or less focused on Chamba and made his approaches to raja Sham Singh (r. 1873-1904)."

About Vogel's various activities during that very period (1902-1911), Gerda further writes:

"...Vogel developed a sort of annual cycle: he wrote his reports, continued his supervision, visited the headquarters of the Survey in Simla, catalogued museum collections (Mathura, Lucknow, Calcutta, Chamba), and fought for museum extensions or new museums. Besides Vogel was a mountaineer! Every summer, when the heat of the plains around Lahore became unbearable, Vogel was to be found somewhere in the Himalayas exploring the more isolated areas: Mandi, Kulu, Kangra, and above all Chamba State. There he studied material in situ and collected pieces of art and inscriptions. And when the Antiquities of Chamba State, Parts I and II, was published in 1911, Vogel had reason to feel proud. Finally he could demonstrate his knowledge of both the epigraphical Sanskrit and the Indian iconography. The Chamba approach came close to Vogel's ideal: involve the local people (villagers and Raja) in the excavation. It is their history and cultural heritage! The response was overwhelming. Every summer when Vogel arrived the locals had spotted new treasures for him and Raja Bhuri Singh spontaneously decided to build a museum in order to safeguard the heritage (1908)."¹⁴



Dr. John Hutchison
Photo courtesy: Mirza Asghar Beg

Sir John Marshall became the Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1902 and during his tenure, Dr. Vogel rose from an apprentice to his confidant. His vast knowledge in Sanskrit and epigraphy firmly established his findings, especially in the context of the history of Chamba State. During his numerous visits to Chamba, Brahmor and Pangi, he travelled extensively throughout the State, together with his assistants, and explored a large number of monuments and material of exceptional historical

importance.

Dr. J. Hutchison had devoted his life's leisure to the study of the Hill States and their history. The information gathered and compiled by him on various subjects was published in 1904 by Panjab Historical society as "Gazetteer of Chamba State". A great deal of information about temples and places of historical interest were also included in it. Later, as a result of the joint endeavours of Hutchison and Vogel, both compiled the "History of Panjab Hill States", which is still considered as an authentic work.

Hutchison, as a medical missionary of the Church of Scotland remained active in Chamba and Dalhousie. In 1912, he went back to England but felt nostalgic and soon returned to India and passed away at Dalhousie on 26th July, 1936. According to his wishes his body was buried at the Chamba cemetery, which apparently shows his love for Chamba.

In the year 1904, two important events occurred: a massive earthquake rocked the neighbouring state of Kangra and it caused much destruction and its impact was also felt in Chamba. Prof. Vogel visited Chamba after this massive earthquake and documented the damage occurred to the monuments of Chamba. To the dismay of people of Chamba, the other upheaval of political nature caused much distress and pain, when the British Raj forced Raja Sham Singh to abdicate in favour of his younger brother Mian Sahib Bhuri Singh. Raja Sham Singh gladly stepped down without any protest. His happiness reflects from the following passage found in the diary of Late Mian Sohan Singh Charak of Chamba:

*"...Installation (Coronation) Durbar held on the same day and Mian Sahib Bhuri Singh. It was cleared as Raja with full powers by Sir Charles Rewaz, Lt. Governor of the Punjab. The last entertainment was given by his highness Raja Sham Singh to the party at "Sea-Voice" as his younger being a Raja."*¹⁵ (VS)



An old photograph of the Chamba Town

Photo courtesy: Mirza Asghar Beg



Raja Sir Bhuri Singh, K.C.S.I., C.I.E.
then ruling Chief of the Chamba State

Raja Sir Bhuri Singh: A Visionary Prince (r.1904-1919)

The well-endowed and marked scholarly bent of mind, Mian Sahib Bhuri Singh succeeded his brother, Raja Sham Singh, on 23rd of January, 1904 and was installed as Raja of the Chamba State with due ceremony.

A new era of reforms and development began in Chamba during his dynamic and prolific rule. Raja Bhuri Singh was a well-read, learned and an enlightened ruler, which he had proved himself in his capacity as wazir of the State. About him Hutchison and Vogel write thus:

*“Highly cultured and of matured judgement, with wide administrative experience and of intimate knowledge of the State and its needs, Raja Bhuri Singh entered on a career of great promise as a ruling Chief, with every happy augury of prosperity and success.”*¹⁶

Besides other public works, Raja Bhuri Singh took special interest in widening of the roads and improved the main lines of communications in Chamba town and other parts of the State. Raja Bhuri Singh was invited to meet his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales at Lahore in November 1905. He was decorated with C.I.E. and K.C.S.I. in 1906. In the same year, a new Dak-Bungalow was built in the Chamba town and the 'Chamba Club' was also established by the Raja. The opening of a public reading room and library, containing the leading newspapers in English and the vernaculars, with a large selection of standard books on various subjects, apparently indicate the bibliophile Raja's love for learning. The only middle school was raised to a high school in 1905.¹⁷ Among the teachers of various subjects, a female craft teacher was also appointed to teach '*kasida*' to the girl students.¹⁸



Building of the State Club, Chamba
Photo courtesy: Manoj Kumar Vaid



Raja Bhuri Singh leaving Kingsway station during Coronation Durbar, Delhi (1911)

Photo courtesy: Shri Rajinder Kumar Mahajan (from the private collection of Dewan Bahadur Madho Ram)

During Raja Bhuri Singh's regime, the revenue of the State substantially increased. His accession to the throne was, thus, an event of deep significance. In January 1907, the Raja was present at the 'Viceregal Darbar' to attend the Chapter of Indian Order held at Agra where he also met with His Majesty the Amir of Afghanistan.

Raja Bhuri Singh did yeoman efforts to revive the tradition of the 'Chamba Rumal'. For producing a large number of embroidered textiles (rumals) he arranged to engage several women. The rumals prepared by these women artisans were taken by Raja to Delhi on the occasion of 'Imperial Durbar' held in the years 1907 and 1911. These rumals must have been displayed there and were distributed amongst the nobility, especially those from Britain.¹⁹

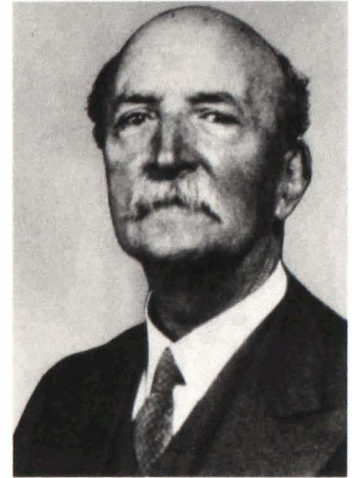
Lord Curzon's clear views and his speeches apparently highlight his school of thought. In one of his speeches, he asserted that conservation should be one of the primary obligations of the government, "a duty to our forerunners, as well as to our contemporaries and to our descendants." Since he was aware of India's situation different from that of Britain, he admitted:



Detail of a Chamba rumal embroidery

*"...with the visible records of vanished dynasties, of forgotten monarchs, of persecuted and sometimes dishonoured creeds,"*²⁰

At that time in February 1902, John Marshall embarked as the new Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India. Marshall was an academically trained archaeologist and his appointment as the new Director General was the finishing touch to Curzon's archaeological efforts. Vogel already had been in the Archaeology Survey, having his headquarter at Lahore. With regard to his interest in his explorations in Chamba State, Vogel in the preface of his 'Antiquities of Chamba State', 1911, made it clear without any hesitation:



Prof. J. Ph. Vogel (1871-1957)

*"...in the spring of 1902 my friend Mr. T.W. Arnold, then professor of the Government College at Lahore, first drew my attention to Chamba as a possible field of antiquarian research."*²¹

During his exploration work conducted in the Chamba State, he extensively visited the various areas of the archaeological interest. Somehow, Vogel's love and focus on Chamba, as apparently revealed in his diaries, made Lieutenant Governor Mr. Charles Rewas unhappy and he wanted to know why Vogel did not focus on the Punjab proper.²²

Vogel applied his knowledge of Sanskrit and epigraphy and firmly established his findings in the context of history and art history of the Chamba State. In the village Luddu (near Chamba town) however, a set of nine real in situ fountain stones were transferred to the new museum, making this decision questionable. It witnesses the tension between a well-founded fear of destruction or deterioration and the wish to preserve remains in the safe domain of a museum. During his exploration work at Chamba, Vogel regularly maintained his diary. One of the letters, that Vogel addressed to his father, he writes eloquently about his involvement in the making of a museum. He writes:

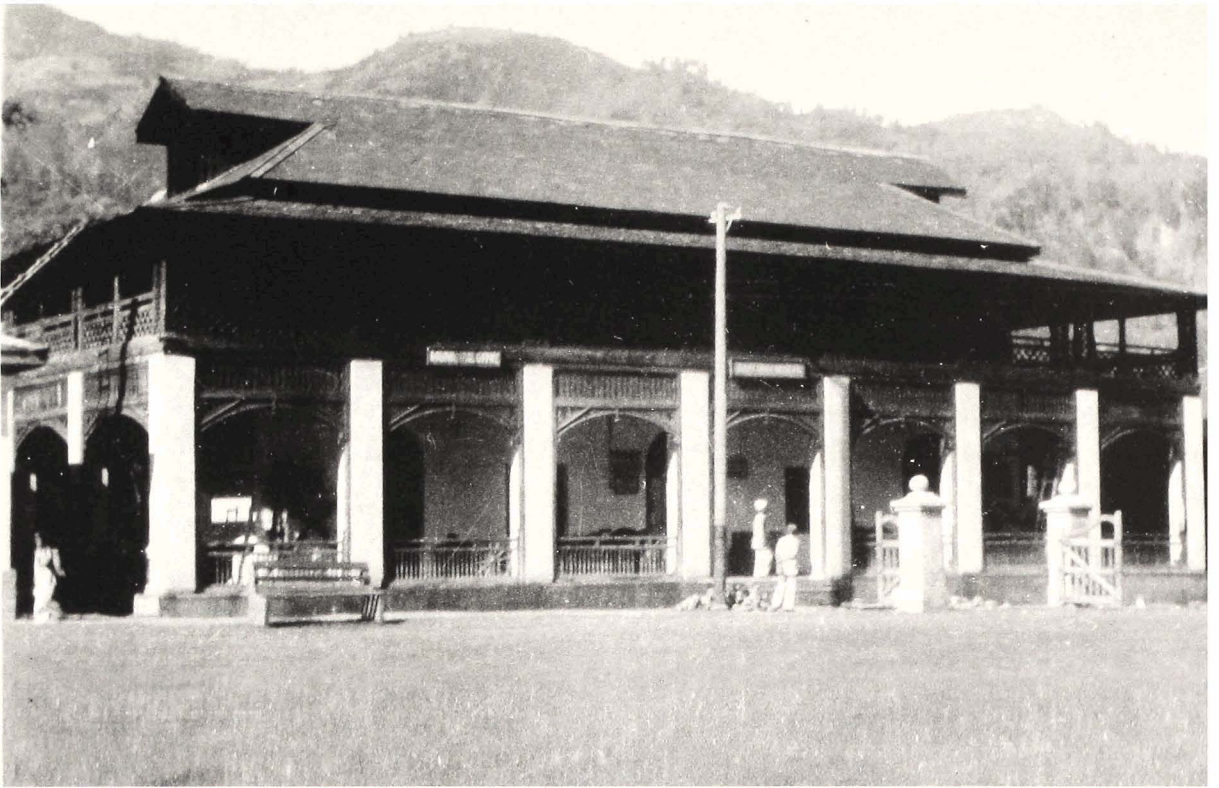
Chamba, 24. 5. 1908

My dear Papa,

"I am at Chamba again my beloved summer residence. The temperature is very pleasant and from time to time we are refreshed by a rain shower. I am predominantly occupied with the settlement of a new museum which will contain mainly antiquities. The Raja has supplied us with a building and is presently interested in the matter.

Setting a museum is a pleasant job in itself; besides there is a personal satisfaction included in this matter as all the inscriptions etc. were collected by myself during my mountain trips and cost me many a bead of sweat. It is a great pleasure to see the stones, which I often carried over several days journeys, safely placed in the museum. It will be a permanent monument of my work here in Chamba.

*Besides the raja has donated a collection of more than 150 gouaches to the museum, the subjects are mainly mythological. Before they were in the palace and have suffered a lot because of the insects. I hope they will be taken better care of in future time."*²³



Old building of the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba

During Vogel's numerous expeditions, he assembled scores of epigraphical material on both stone and metal. Besides, the toshakhana at the Chamba palace also yielded several documents (in Persian and Takri) of historical documents. Moreover, a museum was the perfect destination for its preservation into posterity. Eventually, Raja Bhuri Singh very generously agreed with Vogel to set up a museum to preserve the artistic heritage of the state. Gerda Thuns de Boer quotes following entry from Vogel's diary:



Rajguru Pandit Thakur Das

"...his [Sham Singh's] younger brother and the later raja, Mian Sahi Bhuri Singh (1869-1919, r. 1904-119), with whom Vogel had an inspiring relationship. This ultimately resulted in a joint wish to establish a heritage museum—which opened as the Bhuri Singh Museum on 14 September 1908. Vogel's museum catalogue was published in 1909."

The realisation of Chamba's Bhuri Singh Museum and its festive opening ceremony on 14th September 1908 had, therefore, been all the more satisfying. Vogel enjoyed the beautiful halls that housed the pictures and portraits, armours and inscribed copper plates and fountain stones: "Everything comes off very nicely," he concluded. Vogel opined that *Ajail ghar*, literally meaning "Wonder-house," is the name in India for a museum in colloquial language, however, also meaning a curiosity show or peep show.²⁴ Both Raja Bhuri Singh and Vogel spoke, and Mr. Young Husband, the commissioner opened the door with a silver key. Captain Sri Kanth Barot was entrusted the charge of Curator of this institution.

When Mian Sahib Bhuri Singh was installed as Raja of the Chamba State, he never forgot his friends like Dr. J. Ph. Vogel. During the latter's visits to Chamba, the Raja made sure that he was well looked after.²⁵ The learned Pandit Thakur Das (Rajguru) was of great help in reading the Sanskrit and *chambiali* texts and deciphering *Sharda* and *Takri* scripts.²⁶ His vast knowledge regarding rituals and local customs of Chamba proved quite helpful to Dr. Vogel in deciphering the copper-plate charters which Vogel duly credited in his 'Antiquities of Chamba State', Part I' (published, 1911). Vogel had been able to combine his knowledge of Sanskrit, epigraphy and Indian archaeology to great advantage. No less than 130 inscriptions were traced between 1902 and 1908, all dating from before 1700. Of this set, Vogel published the 50 oldest inscriptions in 1911 as Antiquities of the Chamba State, Part I. This monumental work, which he dedicated to Raja,²⁷ is still considered as a standard work especially valued for its epigraphical data.²⁸ In 1912, Curzon immediately praised the work, written from the cool of Bhuri Singh's palace and his shooting bungalow in Khajjiar, as a "most excellent publication".

The State capital the Chamba town- was illuminated during his regime in the year 1910, when Raja Bhuri Singh constructed a hydroelectric powerhouse on the bed of Sal river on the out skirt of Chamba town. Perhaps, it was the first ever Hydel Power House in the entire northern region and was second Power House in the India after Calcutta. It was the time when people of Punjab and Delhi were deprived of electricity. This 'Bhuri Singh Power House' catered the need of the electricity to the palace and the important buildings like Hospital, Museum, Chamba Club etc. besides illuminating the streets of the town and chaugan as well.



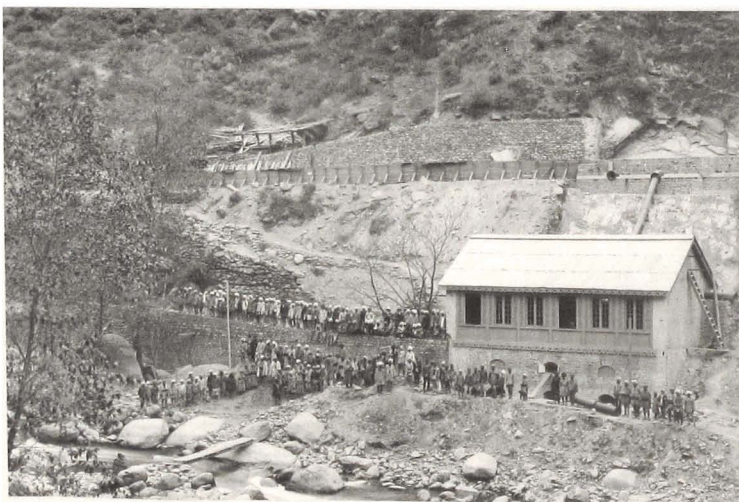
Group Photograph taken on the occasion of opening ceremony of the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba. (14th September, 1908)
The British Commissioner Young Husband is seen in the centre flanked by Raja Bhuri Singh and Prof. J. Ph. Vogel.

Photo courtesy: Vijay Sharma

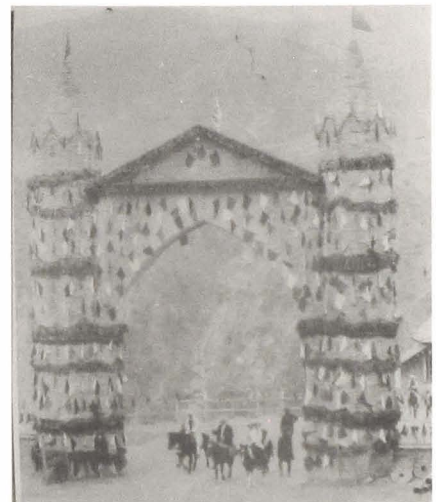


Engineer constructing the Hydro-electric Power House in Chamba
 Photo courtesy: Shri Pankaj Chowla

Raja Bhuri Singh attended the 'Imperial Coronation Durbar' held at Delhi in 1911.²⁹ It was a very special occasion celebrated at grand level with regal pomp and grandeur. Most of the ruling Chiefs of the leading Indian States were assembled to participate in this Durbar. Raja Bhuri Singh of Chamba was also greeted there with due regards. A special exhibition of Arts and Antiquities was organised to mark this occasion. Most of the artefacts were given by the ruling Chiefs of India on loan basis. Raja of Chamba, also contributed on this event which was duly acknowledged in the publication: 'Loan Exhibition of Antiquities; Coronation Durbar 1911', published by the Archaeological Survey of India. On this very occasion Raja got prepared enormous embroidered textiles from the local female craftspersons to be given as gift to the dignitaries. To commemorate the event of 'Coronation Durbar', Raja also erected a huge gateway (Dilli darwaza) in 1911-12 at the entrance to the Chamba town near Harirai temple.



Opening ceremony of the Bhuri Singh Power House
 Photo courtesy: Shri Pankaj Chowla



'Dilli-Gate'- the gateway of Chamba

On the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, Raja Bhuri Singh offered his own personal services and the resources of the State. He contributed liberally to the War-Fund and assisted in the other ways, especially in recruiting^m and made the following generous offers and contributions:

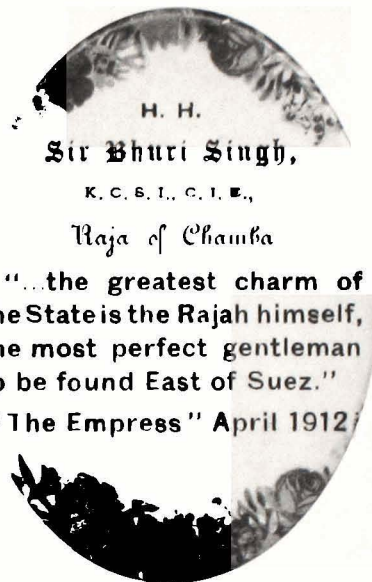
War Fund	50,000 (Rupees)
Punjab Aeroplane Fund	30,000 (Rupees)
Imperial Indian Relief Fund	5000 (Rupees)
Prince of Wales' Fund	100 (Pounds)
Waler Horses	18 (numbers)

The services provided by Raja Bhuri Singh were duly recognised in 1918 by the King Emperor, who bestowed upon him the distinction of a "Knighthood" in the most Exalted order of the Indian Empire. The following remarks expressed by the Empress herself for the Raja deserve mention:

"...the greatest charm of the State is the Rajah himself, the most perfect gentleman to be found East of Suez."

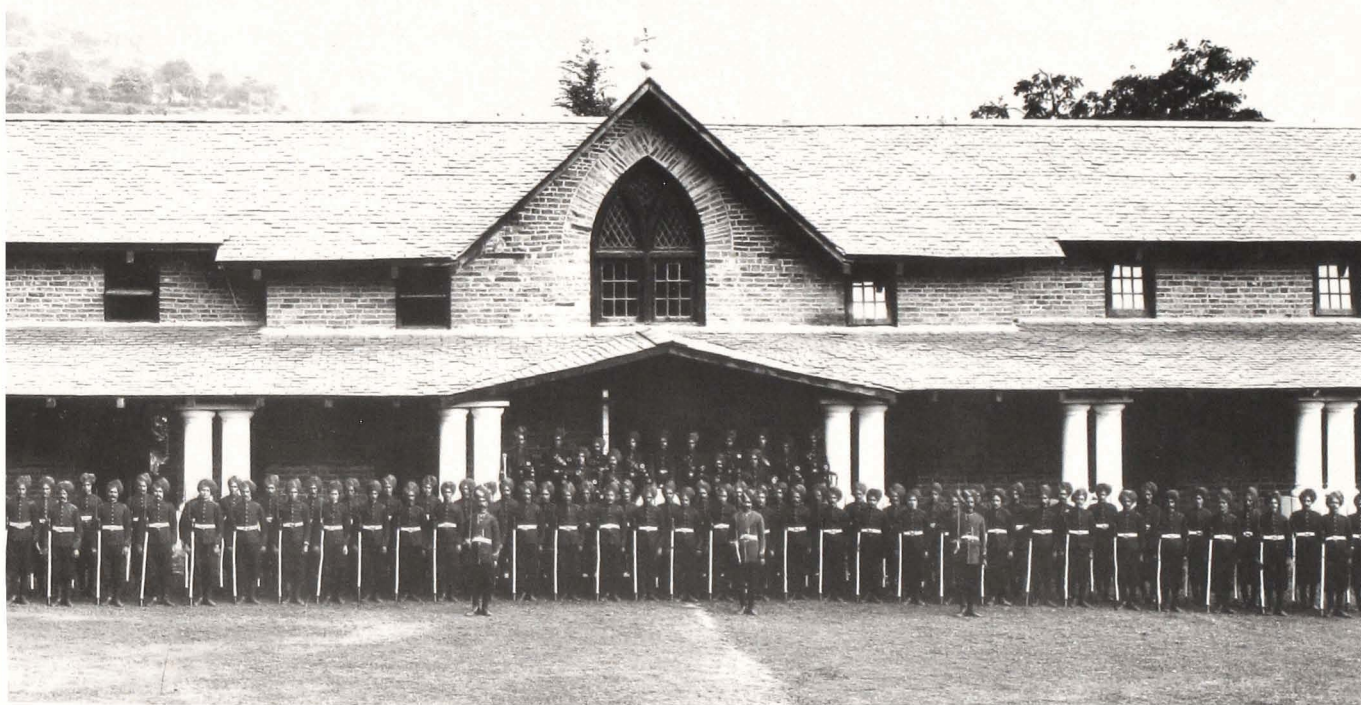
The Empress, April 1912.

(VS)



Plaque bearing remarks of the Empress in praise of Raja Bhuri Singh

Photo courtesy: Shri Rajinder Kumar Mahajan
 (from the private collection of Dewan Bahadur Madho Ram)



Chamba forces at the barracks at Nalhora

Photo courtesy: Shri Pankaj Chowfla



Raja Ram Singh of Chamba

Photo courtesy: Shri Rajinder Kumar Mahajan

Raja Ram Singh: Inheritor of Magnificent Legacy (r. 1919-1935)

Tikka Ram Singh (born 1890) succeeded his father Bhuri Singh. At the 'Installation Durbar' held by the Lieutenant Governor at Chamba on the 24th April, 1920. A public announcement was made that His Imperial Majesty, the King Emperor had recognised Tikka Ram Singh's succession to his father. Dewan Bahadur Madho Ram, who had been already in State services as a school teacher since 1902, appointed as secretary to Raja Bhuri Singh and at a later date to the office of the Chief Secretary. Mian Sahib Kesari Singh, the younger brother of Raja Ram Singh was appointed the *wazir* of the State.

Chamba State had been so carefully and systematically organized by the late Raja Bhuri Singh, that no changes were done. Raja Ram Singh continued the development work in the town and water supply was installed. A big tank (water reservoir) was constructed in the town, which was named after the Raja himself and still functions and cater the need of the people of Chamba. Besides, all the streets were fitted with electric lights.¹¹ In order to improve the sanitation in the town, a proper drainage system was provided. The state revenue had reached by now a total sum of rupees Nine Lakh per annum. The Raja of Chamba ranked fourteenth in the order of precedence the ruling chiefs of Chamba. He enjoyed a salute of eleven guns and was entitled to be received by the Viceroy.

Raja Ram Singh, at the prime of his youth died all of sudden at Lahore on 17th December, 1935; he was merely forty five of age and his only son Lakshman Singh, a boy of eleven years, succeeded the deceased Raja.

After Prof. J. Ph. Vogel, it was Dr. Hermann Goetz, a German scholar who further made researches pertaining to the history, art and culture of the Chamba region. Besides several research papers, his book entitled 'Early Wooden Temples of Chamba' (Leiden, 1955) is considered as one of the important works. Dr. Bahadur Chand Chhabra, a worthy student of Prof. Vogel, further carried out the study of epigraphical material (copper plates of the Muslim period) from the Chamba Museum collection. Following his Guru's (Vogel's) footsteps, Dr. B. Ch. Chhabra deciphered several copper plate charters, which he reproduced in his 'Antiquities of Chamba State, Part II (1958) with their translations and contextual significance. He retired as Director General of Archaeological Survey of India.

The Museum that Raja Bhuri Singh had established with great zeal and interest also suffered neglect and languished in its infancy. This is confirmed



Raja Ram Singh in the Dress of Gaddi Tribe
Photo courtesy: Shri Parikshit Sharma

by the report published in 1936 by two experts S. F. Markham, Empire Secretary of the museum association and H. Hargreaves, ex-Director General, Archaeological Survey of India. Both had already visited Chamba museum in 1930 and after visiting all the museums of India, they commented:

*“The museum movement in India not only lacks inherent vitality, but is at present failing to receive any impulse which might revive activity...But the future of the museums in India does not depend entirely upon the govt. and much could be done by the existing curators and committees to improve museums of every kind and standing.”*³²

In 1936, Markham and Hargreaves remarked about the state of Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba:

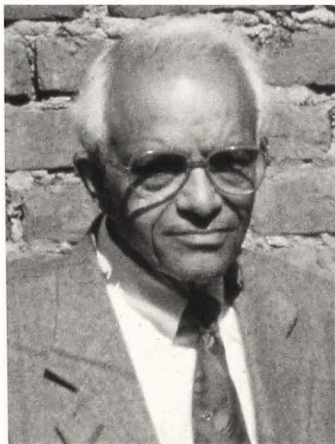
*“The catalogue of the Chamba museum is exceptionally good though the museum itself is in the last stages of decay.”*³³



Pandit Jaiwant Ram, Head Master
State High School, Chamba

Bhuri Singh Museum since its opening in 1908 was being looked after by the watch and ward staff under a non technical officer who acted as its honorary Curator in addition to his own full time job. The painstaking labour and hard work that was done by Prof. J. Ph. Vogel (who never visited Chamba after 1911) had ceased to exist long ago and the patron like Raja Bhuri Singh, who was really interested in the development of the museum, had passed away in 1919.

In 1947, after the Indian independence, the Chamba State merged into the Republic of India. The State offices and institutions directly came under the control of Indian Government. Pandit Jaiwant Ram, a man of integrity and the Headmaster of the State High School was made the honorary Curator of the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba. Vishwa Chander Ohri, who was already working in the education department occasionally used to come for looking after the administrative affairs of the museum.



Dr. Vishwa Chander Ohri
First long-time Curator of the
Bhuri Singh Museum

On 2nd August, 1954 Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India paid a visit to the Bhuri Singh Museum. He showed his interest in several art objects, especially in coinage and miniature paintings. He asked about a *Takri* inscription incised on a canon. It was V.C. Ohri who replied immediately. Also Pandit Nehru showed his interest in the paintings depicting the childhood deeds of Krishna and asked a question related to its period which Ohri could not. However, the Deputy Commissioner encouraged Ohri to go ahead with his endeavours and interest for the art objects of the Museum. The functioning of the Museum and its maintenance thus came to the notice of the Lieutenant Governor of Himachal Pradesh, who was accompanying the Prime Minister. He asked Deputy Commissioner to look into the matter for ensuring a better upkeep of this Museum. Ohri, who already attached with Museum's affairs, was deputed for some technical training in 1956 and 1957 and eventually in 1958 he was appointed as technical assistant at the Chamba Museum.



Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India
visits Bhuri Singh Museum

Soon after joining as Technical Assistant, Ohri gradually came to know of the deteriorating state of several objects. Especially, documents on paper and miniature painting were receiving threat. Handling them was very delicate and difficult work requiring complete attention and care. The loose manuscripts were tied together in cloth bundles (*basta*) and were arranged in order. Some paintings were taken to the Conservation Laboratory of the National Museum, New Delhi for their chemical treatment and preservation. The documentation of the Museum's art objects was a major work which was done by Dr. Ohri on scientific lines. He also got prepared small wooden boxes for keeping the reserve collection in safe custody.

The collection of the Bhuri Singh Museum contains more than 8500 antiquities consisting of miniature paintings, copper plate charters, stone and metal sculptures, wood carvings, embroidered textiles, folk musical instruments, historical document on paper both in Persian and *Takri*, manuscript etc. Dr. V.C. Ohri for the first time started collecting ancient coins as they throw valuable light on the history of this region. Old drawings and Pahari paintings and several kinds of other decorative objects including the embroidered textiles were also acquired by him. When Dr. Ohri joined Chamba Museum, there was no line drawing in its collection but in due course he acquired more than two hundred line drawings. He also collected rare photographs of the old Chamba town from various sources. With his painstaking efforts, he added to the collection, besides other art objects, the Surya image from Gum (7th century) and the metal sculpture believed to be of the sculptor Gugga from Shakti Devi temple, Chhatrari. Dr. Ohri built up a collection of coins in Bhuri Singh Museum Chamba. These include punch-marked coins of the Nanda and Maurya (4th century). In 1970, a hoard heaving quite a large number of silver Indo-Greek hemi drachms kept in a pot was found near the village Lachori, in Churah area of Chamba. Only fifteen coins from this hoard could be recovered by Dr. Ohri which is now kept safely in the Chamba Museum.

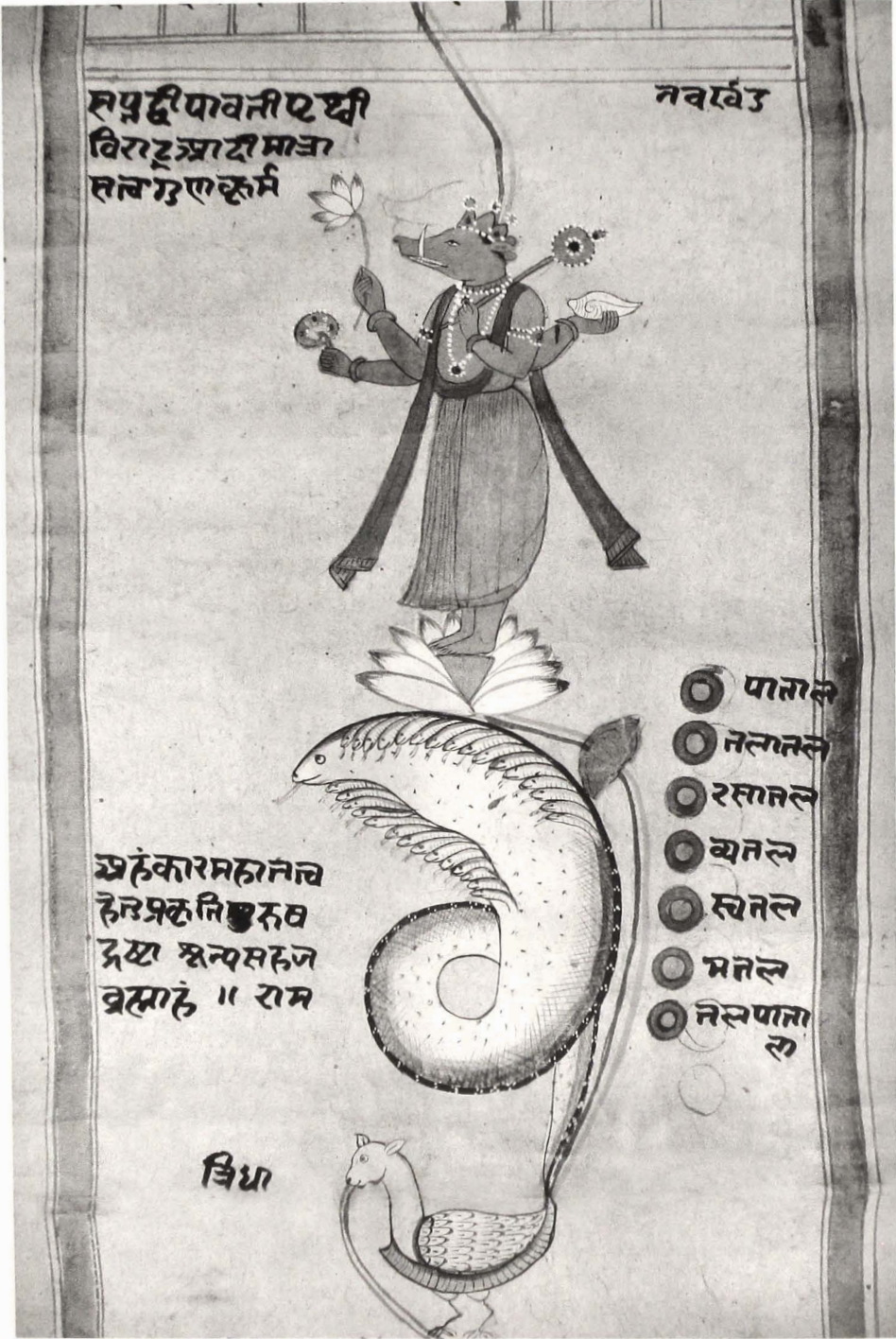


Suryamandal
Gum, Chamba, sixth century

The old building of Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba was not only small but being built largely of wood was unsafe. A new building for this museum was proposed and the senior Architect of the state PWD prepared the design for a suitable building with spacious galleries. This was arranged besides the old building. The construction work was started in early 1970s. Dr. V.C. Ohri was transferred to Shimla for establishing a new Museum there. In August 1976, the charge of the Chamba Museum was also entrusted to him in addition to his duties in the Shimla Museum though his headquarter was at Shimla. He was now no longer posted at Chamba. The Bhuri Singh Museum's new building was completed and inaugurated in September 1985. A seminar on History and Culture of Chamba was planned and organized in the new building to celebrate the re-opening of the Chamba Museum. The papers presented at this seminar were published in '*History and Culture of Chamba State*' (eds. V.C. Ohri and A.N. Khanna), New Delhi, 1989. Besides, a publication '*Bhuri Singh Museum Chamba: An Introduction*' by Dr. Ohri was brought out to mark the occasion. (VS)

Notes

- 1 It was the year 1839, when Raja Charhat Singh (r.1808-44) of Chamba was blessed with a son.
- 2 Raja Sri Singh was the last ruler of Chamba who issued the last copper-plate in his reign i.e. 1844-70.
- 3 The Indian section of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London contains a large-sized Chamba Rumal representing the great battle of Mahabharata. It was presented by Raja Gopal Singh of Chamba (r. 1870-73 AD).
- 4 The Mission was already established in Dalhousie in 1854 AD and several British officials were living there. Dalhousie was also a hill station for the refreshment of British army.
- 5 Even Raja Sham Singh bought a small piece of land and gifted that to build a mosque for the Muslim community inhabited in Kashmiri Mohalla of Chamba town.
- 6 A branch dispensary was also opened at Tissa (Churah area), which proved a great boon to the people of that region. The Leper's asylum was also opened near Chamba in 1876 AD.
- 7 The people of Chamba still cherish Dr. Hutchison's legends that he used to wander in the streets of Chamba town holding the lantern asking the people in local dialect, "*tusi raji hin*" (Are you alright?)
- 8 The walls of upper storeys of the shops were decorated with ornate paintings done on the lime plaster.
- 9 It was Raja Sham Singh who also renovated the 'Akhand Chandi' palace, which is an example of a hybrid Indo-colonial style of architecture.
- 10 The text of letter runs thus: "...for some years past it has been clear that your health has suffered from your hard work and duties connected with the state and the time has now come when I consider it advisable that you should retire from the service. You have served now for over 35 years are well over 60 years of age. I beg to tender you my best thanks for all your work and I trust that you will live many years to enjoy the quite of retirement, although it is not the custom in the state to grant pension. I feel that after all the service you have rendered that it is right I should give one, I have therefore decided to allow you rupees 250/- per men sum." This was the first ever pension case in Chamba.
- 11 See, Shaila Datar, 'Dev-Gandharva', Rajhans Prakashan, Pune, 2002. I am grateful to Shri Arijit Das Gupta, a musician friend from Kolkata, who supplied this information to me. (Personal communication, May, 2008).
- 12 To mark a permanent imprint of Lord Curzon's visit, Raja Sham Singh constructed a road (Curzon Road) leading from Sitla Bridge to the Chamba town.
- 13 All three young boys (Tikka Ram Singh, Mian Sahib Kesari Singh and Mian Nihal Singh) belonging to the royal family, frequently used to visit Vogel at Lahore addressing him as 'Uncle'.
- 14 See, Gerda Theuns de-Boer, 'A Vision of Splendor', (2008)
- 15 I am grateful to Shri Rajesh Charak for accessing me to the unpublished diaries of his grandfather Late Mian Sohan Singh Charak.
- 16 See, J. Hutchison and J. Ph. Vogel, History of Punjab Hill State, Part I, 1933, page 337.
- 17 The correspondence between Raja Bhuri Singh and the Inspector of Schools (Amritsar) apparently indicates his keen interest in pursuit of the education in Chamba State High School. Raja was very serious and particular in the selection of the worthy teachers. Even sometimes, he himself used interview the teachers. (Personal communication, Dr. Ohri, 2008).
- 18 Earlier, Raja Sham Singh had already introduced the craft of Chamba rumal embroidery as one of the subjects in the State Girl's school. The archival material lying with Mirza Asghar Beg of Chamba apparently confirm this fact.
- 19 16 See, "Some Notes on Chamba Rumal", published in 'A Western Himalayan Kingdom: History and Culture of the Chamba State'. Eds. Vishwa Chander Ohri and Amar Nath Khanna, Delhi 1989, Page, 222-223.
- 20 See, Gerda Theuns de-Boer, 'A Vision of Splendor', (2008)
- 21 See, J. Ph. Vogel, Antiquities of Chamba State, Part-I, Calcutta 1911, page i.
- 22 Vogel's diaries do attest to growing annoyance with Rewas: "I curse him" turned into I curse him daily." Doubtlessly, Vogel's preference for working in the independent atmosphere expressed in his words, "I cannot stand having someone over me," may have contributed to this disliking against Charles Rewas.
- 23 I am indebted to Dr. Gerda Theuns-de Boer for providing me the unpublished pages from the diary of Vogel. I am grateful to her for the translation of text from Dutch to English.
- 24 Vogel's "Note on Free Admittance to Museums in India," read at the Shimla Museum Conference in 1911.
- 25 Raja Bhuri Singh had attached a group of people to the disposal of Prof. Vogel during his numerous tours in Chamba region. The group was consisting of three *jawans*, a cook, and even a sweeper. (Personal communication: Dr. V. C. Ohri, 2008)
- 26 Vogel speaks high of Pandit Thakur Das Rajaguru (royal preceptor): "...I have much pleasure in recording the great help which has been rendered to me by Pandit Thakur Das of Chamba whose services His Highness has kindly placed at my disposal whenever I visited him. The Pandit's local knowledge, modesty and love for his native hills made him ever interesting and pleasant companion of my tours," Antiquities of the Chamba State. Calcutta 1911, page iv.
- 27 Vogel, op cit (1911) writes thus: "This edition of the early records of his house and State is respectfully inscribed as a token of friendship and gratitude."
- 28 While the 80 medieval and later inscriptions were published in Antiquities of Chamba State, Part II (Delhi, 1957) by B.C. Chhabra, who did his Ph. D. research in Leiden under the supervision of Vogel.
- 29 A special exhibition of antiquities was organized in which Raja Bhuri Singh also lent some old daggers (*katara*) which were suitably displayed there. See, Loan Exhibition of Antiquities: Coronation Durbar, Delhi, 1911.
- 30 Chamba folk song apparently recalls this event: "*German lagi ladaiyan, fauzan chambe di sadaiyen.*"
- 31 For this work, a sum of rupees 76,000 was spent, so that each house get the pipe water and electricity at nominal rate.
- 30 Markham and Hargreaves, Museums of India, Delhi 1936.
- 31 *ibid*



The painted scroll depicting figures and *chakras* of Kundalini, Kangra, circa 1850

The Chamba Museum and its Collections

Nestled in the Himalayas the Bhuri Singh Museum of Chamba is a well endowed institution with spectacular and extremely rare antiquities. Raja Bhuri Singh, a charismatic icon to many, laid the foundation of this museum in 1908. The Museum grew out of the effort and imagination of two legendary personalities; of a visionary king Sir Bhuri Singh and eminent scholar and archaeologist Prof. Jean Philippe Vogel.

The Chamba Museum is one of the oldest museums of India and has earned respect on a global scale. It showcases several priceless art objects which bear testimony to the richness, especially of the Chamba State. The collection of antiquities and artefacts housed in the Bhuri Singh Museum is a treasure trove of about one hundred years of continuous acquisition. Most of the coveted art objects were received as a 'royal bequest' and was personally acquired from the palace by Raja Sir Bhuri Singh, then ruling Chief of the Chamba State. Largely being the personal collection of the Raja, the museum collection span across centuries as well as diverse art forms.



The devotee with lamp
Chhatrari, circa 7th century



Vishnu Vaikuntha
Swaim, Chamba, circa 10th century

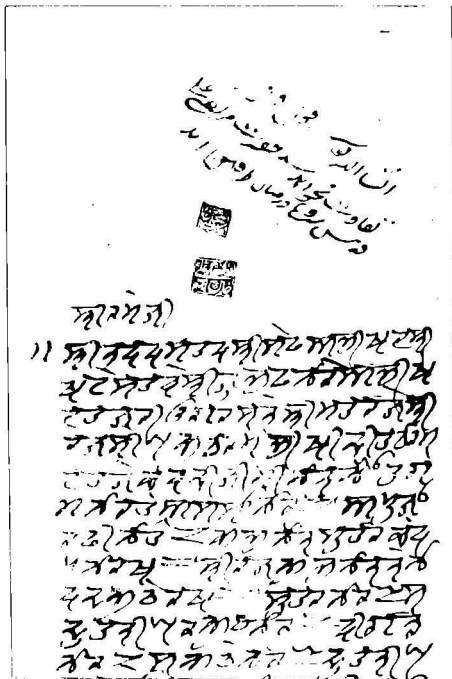


A fountain slab from Chamba town
circa 10th century

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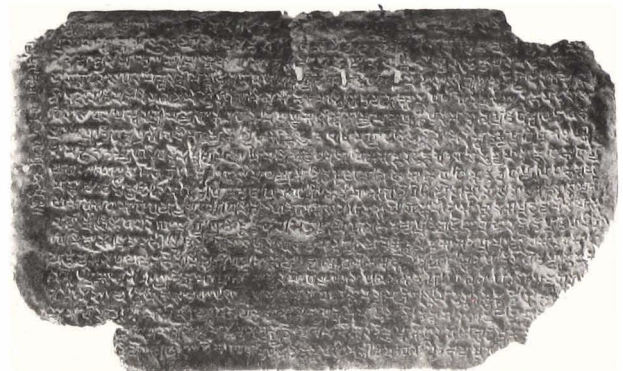
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The earliest example of the archaeological section of the museum includes a stone sculpture of 'Suryamandal'. Hailing from Gum (7th century), it represents the Sun god sitting in the Kushana fashion and wearing Indo-Sasanian locks and costumes. Another sculpture of note is an image of Vishnu Vaikuntha bearing strong affinities with the sculptural style of Kashmir. Other images of interest are of Mahishasuramardini, Kurma, Matsya, Varaha, Parshurama, Balarama and Rama, Buddha and a Yogi. The Museum has in its collection a copper statue of 'devotee with a lamp' (7th century) is also a rare piece of antiquity and is presented in the gallery.



A document in Takri script
circa late 18th century

The Museum possesses a fairly large number of fountain stone slabs collected from various parts of the Chamba State. The carved fountain slabs erected at the fountains (*panihara*) are natural source of water in Chamba. These fountains are usually decorated with large



A copper plate charter in Sharda script
circa 10th century



Matsya avatara, Chamba, circa mid 18th century

carved slabs with a square opening through which a water spout is passed. In these fountain slabs, we invariably find the depiction of *Shesha-shayi* Vishnu with Lakshmi in the centre and the figures of *navagrahas* and *dasavatara* of Vishnu. The figures of donors in the act of worshipping are shown in the lower rows. The inscribed slabs also bring out details of local history.

The Bhuri Singh Museum is especially noted for its outstanding collection of epigraphical material. The Museum houses epigraphical material of exceptional archaeological importance, which reflects the ancient history and culture of the Chamba State. These include inscriptions on stones and copper plates and most of them are in Sharda script. The earliest copper plate is from the reign of Raja Yugakar Varman (10th century) and was issued from Chamba and relates to the land grant for the maintenance of the Narasimha temple at Brahmaur. Only one copper plate charter, incised in *Takri*, has come to light, which records a treaty between Raja Raj Singh of Chamba and Raja Sansar Chand Katoch of Kangra. Most of the copper plates are bilingual, composed both in Sanskrit and in local dialect as well.

The Museum also contains a small but historically important collection of documents in *Takri* and Persian scripts acquired from the *toshakhana* of Chamba. These documents throw considerable light on the relations between the Chamba rulers and their overlords Mughals and Durranis.



A folio from book of dreams
Kangra, circa 1800



The painted playing card (*ganjifa*)
Kangra, circa 1800

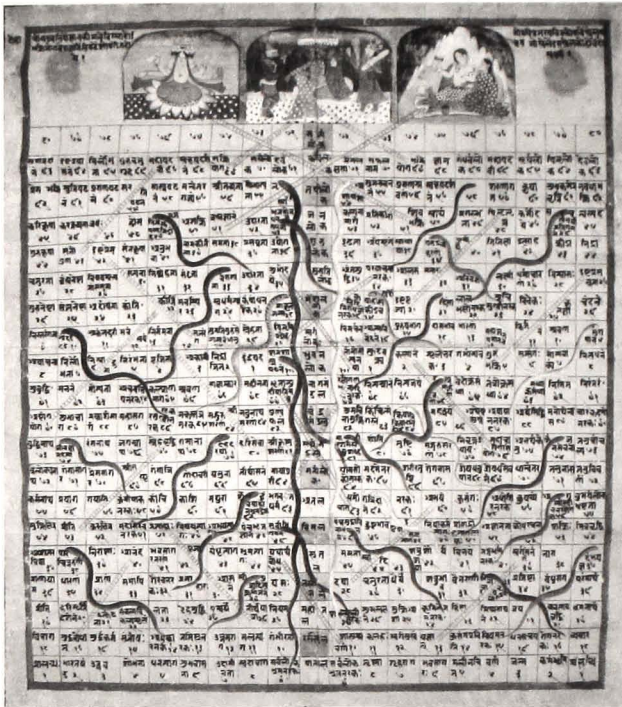
The Bhuri Singh Museum feels proud of having a rich collection of Pahari painting covering the period from the 17th to 19th centuries. The painting section is justly famous for its large and unique collection of miniature paintings of various Pahari schools. Most of the hill states maintained ateliers of painters and developed a school of painting. Basohli, Nurpur, Chamba, Guler, Kangra, Mandi are some such states which evolved a style and contributed unique local idioms. The collection of the Chamba and Guler school is particularly remarkable for its varied subject matter and indigenous styles. These include portraiture, mythological pictures, Krishna legend, *Nayika-bhed*, *Baramasa*, *Ragamala*, *Ramayana*, *Bhagvata Purana* and the story of Sudama, Rukmini-Mangal and the romance of Usha-Anirudha in which the spirit of beauty and romantic appeal is represented very subtly and delicately. The *Bhagvata* series, painted by Laharu in 1754 for his patron Mian Shamsher Singh, is done in a robust style and shows the judicious application of primary colours. Other notable series of pictures, both in Chamba and Guler style, include *Ramayana*, *Bhagvata Puran*, *Hamir Hath*, and *Chandi-path* (Devi Mahatyam) subjects.



Carved wooden door from Brahmaur
circa mid 17th century

Illustrated manuscripts on paper, especially a 'treatise on horse' disease' and a series of 'svapanadarshan' (a book of dreams) deserve special mention. Some illustrated manuscripts from Kashmir and Rajasthan are also in the Museum's collection. The illustrated set of '*Ganjifa*' (painted playing cards) are superbly painted in Kangra style, which are fascinating from the iconographic point of view as well as for the delicate execution within the small area of ivory plates. A large sized 'Kali-Yantra' bearing a tantric diagram with numerous figures of various Hindu gods is remarkable for its contents and draughtsmanship. Another interesting painted game board '*Gyan-chaupar*' is of unusual nature for its contents. Some specimens of wall paintings removed from the Rangmahal in Chamba are kept in the Bhuri Singh Museum. Apart from the indigenous art of painting, some life size portraits of Rajas of Chamba in oil are also exhibited in the Museum. A painted scroll bearing *chakras of kundalini* deserves special mention.

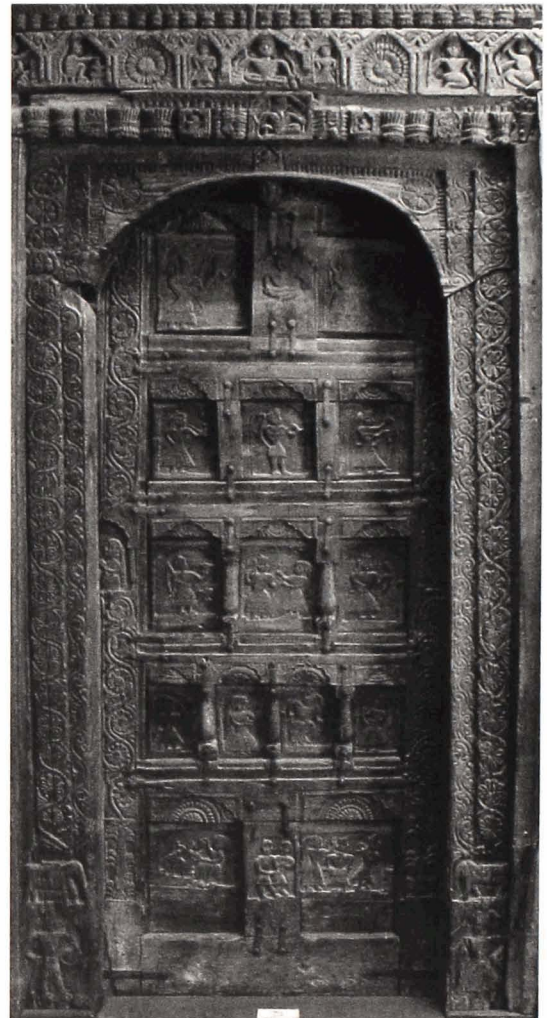
Chamba, particularly the tribal regions of Brahmaur and Chhatrari, is noted for its art of wood carving covering secular as well as domestic architecture from as early as the 7th century. The richness of the wood craft can be seen in many of the later carving in various temple, castles and houses. The carved doors, eaves, pillars, window frames, facades, panels, brackets and the balconies



of the houses brought from the State Kothi of Brahmaur are all reminiscent of the rich tradition of the craft of this particular area. This Kothi of Brahmaur was once embellished with the decorative carved panels and brackets. The State Kothi was built by Raja Prithvi Singh (r. 1641-64) and one of the door panels shows this Raja being honoured by Prince Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Mughal Emperor Shahjahan. This Kothi of Brahmaur was extensively damaged in the earthquake of April, 1905. Most of the carved reliefs were taken to Chamba by Dr. V. C. Ohri in 1978 and now preserved in the Bhuri Singh Museum.

The Museum has also in its collection a massive doorway from the village Swai, which is interesting for its size and carved panels displaying figurative compositions of the tribal people of Brahmaur region. The village Ranuh-Kothi, near the village Chhatrari is famous for the wooden utensils. These splendidly carved utensils, used for kneading the flour and storage of grains and butter, speak of the continuity of the tradition of wood carving.

The name 'Chamba Rumal' conjures up a picture done



Carved wooden door from Swai, Brahmaur



Embroidered textile Chamba rumal
circa mid 19th century



Wooden masks from Chhatrari
circa 19th century



on a textile with silken threads. The embroidery done by the household women is done by a double satin stitch popularly known as dorukha. The figural and floral motifs inspired from the Pahari painting can be seen in these embroidered textiles. Some exquisite pieces of rumal, datable to 18th to early 20th century share the part of Museum's rich treasure.

The collection of coins is an important section of the Museum providing information in respect of political, economic and social aspects of different periods. The earliest are the Indo-Greek coins, which date back to the 2nd century B.C. The coins issued by the Kunindas and Kashmir rulers are also on display. The local coins of the Charhat Singh period (1808-1844) known as chakli are also preserved.

The Museum has in its collection a variety of decorative artefacts, most of which are related to the objects of daily use and skilfully worked out. The collection of jewellery in the Museum is especially notable with objects assembled from the various parts of the Chamba district. There is also a comprehensive collection of folk musical instruments.



The Indo-Greek coins found at Lachodi, Churah
circa 2nd century, B.C.



Traditional silver jewellery displayed in the Museum



Armours displayed in a showcase

The old photographs of Chamba town and its surroundings put light on the past of this region. The pomp and grandeur of the Chamba State apparently have been reflected through these rare old photographs.

The Chamba Museum also contains a representative collection of elaborately ornamented arms and armoury. This includes bows, arrows, spears, mace, battle-axe, swords, daggers, pistols and protective armours such as shields, helmets and a warrior's dress (*jirah-bakhtar*). Another attraction of the museum includes the muzzle-loaded cannons bearing *takri* inscriptions of Raja Charhat Singh (1808-44) of Chamba. (VS)



The royal insignia of the Chamba State

Sculptures & Fountain Stone Slabs



Sculptures of Chamba

S.M. Sethi

The sculptural activity of Chamba can be classified into two different groups :

(I) Stone sculpture and (ii) fountain slabs.

The post Gupta period which is known as Rajput period (8th to 12th century AD) is the classical period of sculptural art in Chamba as well as Himachal Pradesh. It was the period of Gurjara Pratihara when this art attained the height and host of divinities, their incarnations and attendant figures were introduced and a good number of them find expression in the galleries of the Bhuri Singh Museum. Raja Sahil Varman the founder of Chamba town (10th century) seem to have reason as a general of Gurjara-Pratihara and the artistic activities introduced by him show the Gurjara-Pratihara traits, though provincial in character but mitigating the effect of Kashmiri style pervading hither to. The existence of a fragment of a brick temple (6th century AD) with decorative mouldings unearthed from the Lakshmi Narayan temple complex (now preserved in the Chamba Museum) indicate the existence of a civilisation flourishing in this region even before 10th century. This is further corroborated by the Surya image dating back to 7th century AD wearing Indo-Sassanian locks and hair and seated in Kushana fashion. The image was recovered from the area of Gum located halfway between Brahmaur and Chamba and is now preserved in the Chamba Museum. The stone sculptures pertaining to the medieval period and exhibited in the museum cover a wide range of subjects and sects like vaishnavite, shaivaite, saur, Buddhist and Jain. The Chamba Museum also displays some sculptures from different parts of Himachal Pradesh, especially of Sirmaur area which because of its close contacts with the Ganga-Yamuna valley shows strong Gurjara-Pratihara traits blended with the post Gupta canon. In order to afford to the visitor a fair comparison with the sculpture activity of the various parts of India

and to make it comprehensive in outlook the sculptures from the different parts of India especially the Mathura period which was a centre of the artist activity in the Kushana period are on display.

Fountain Stone Slabs of Chamba

The fountain stone slabs of Chamba presents a strange and a unique chapter in the history of Indian art. For nowhere else, they are found in such large number near the fountains and springs and nowhere else they are decorated with such motifs as drawn from early Buddhist art as well as classical and medieval arts of India. Erected by the living for the sake of the dead or even for one's own self, they seem to mark the holy site of the water. Historically, the fountain stone slabs may commemorate the dead but geographically they point at the holy site of the water. The marking of the site with fountain stone slab indicate that it is dedicated to a higher presence. The surface of the large number of fountain stone slabs are decorated with such motifs such as lotuses, elephants, *hamsas*, meandering creepers, interlacing snakes al belonging to the realm of the water. Located at the mouth-end of the spring, they are often endangered by the deposits of loose earth, which tend to swell during the rains, thus dislodging them, hurling them on the ground, and breaking them into many pieces. Hence, the urgent need for their preservation. The inscriptions on a good number of them from the Churah area provide information on the donor's perspective, stressing the beneficial effects of the meritorious deeds for both, the donor and the deceased, wife or husband. No historical event is remembered in them.

1. Bodhisattva

Gandhara Style, circa 2nd century B.C.
Stone, 62 x 35cm, Acc. No. 66.32

The present sculpture of Baddhisattva represents the Gandhara school of art which had begun to take shape in the areas of Gandhara comprising of Kabul river, north-west frontier Swat, Buner of Afghanistan, after Alexander had left India and the Greek colonies established by his generals had begun to disintegrate in the 2nd century AD. The Gandhara art had reached its zenith in the reign of the great Kushana King especially Kanishka and the Gandhara became a prolific centre of the production of the Buddha cult images.

Robed in a thick garment arrayed with heavy folds in the fashion of a Roman toga in stead of Buddhist mantle or *sanghati*, the hair arranged in wavy curls gathered in a tuft in place of *ushnisha*, the Gandhara artist had turned Buddha into a handsome god Apollo. He is conceived as a tall beardless young man with no moustaches as seen in this image. He is depicted with lavish jewellery including several necklaces, one of them perhaps going across the chest. The frontal orientation of Buddha with fragmentary left arm suggests that it was meant for gathering the folds of *sanghati* and possibly raised in abhaya-mudra, the right arm may have been held down. The superbly carved and powerfully moulded torso of Buddha with fine proportion visible through pleated rob represents the intellectualized concept of the enlightened one hardly suitable for the qualities of the inner strength and spiritual power for which he stood for and were brought out so beautifully in the Gupta period sculptures. The Buddha face shows perfect proportion with its deeply carved elongated eyes, bridgeless nose, high cheek bones, well defined chin representing the well mature



and well developed phase of Gandhara sculpture.
(SMS)

2. Suryamandala

Gum, Upper Ravi Valley, Chamba
circa sixth century
63 x 51 cm, Acc. No. 78.31

Though the literary evidence speaks of the antiquities of Chamba, the earliest sculpture which has come to light is of Surya, the Sun-god, dating back to sixth century AD. "It was recovered from the village hamlet of Gum, a place of archaeological interest, located halfway between Brahmaur and Chamba. In terms of quality of style and iconographic value, it is a major piece of *Chambiali* art unequalled even beyond this Himalayan region not only by the quality of the sculpture but also by its unusual iconographic details." This is reflected in the Sun-god wearing Sassanian costumes and locks though cast in pure Gupta style and technique. The sun-god is represented seated accompanied by his regalia of attendants (*parichara*) and family (*parivara*), depicted in a single row in front of the chariot forming a Suryamandala soaring in the sky. Forever on the move, the Sun chariot is said to be in Sanskrit texts to be *ekchakra*. This wheel is represented on the Gum stele between the hind legs of the leading horse. In the text, the Sun god gives an explanation of his non participation due to his being *ekchakram*, he has to be always on the move having no time to fight. The charioteer

Aruna is seated cross-legged in the centre in front of the balustrade holding the reins of the seven horses in his hands. Aruna appointed to go before the Sun and a Vedic divinity in his own right is reduced here to insignificance, a mere lump of flesh because of the consuming power of the Sun. the seven prancing horses rearing on their hind legs suggests the rapid speed of the chariot and out flanking the two demons of darkness running away on their approach give the dynamic effect to the composition.

Here, the Sun-god sits in frontal position wearing a tight Zoroastrian woollen belt, adorning a three pointed tiara headdress which is decorated at the fringes with pearl. *Vishnu-dharmottara purana* (1, 79). The Sassanian kings had a special liking for pearls set in the dresses and as seen in this image as well. Bana also refers to the fashion of pearl spangled tunics worn by the kings such as Harsha (*taramukta phalopacya mana varabana*) This one of the statue bearing close sassanion influence lead us to infer that intercourse between India and Persia in the Gupta Sassanian epoch was much more intimate then is often suggested. SMS



3. A Devotee with a Lamp

Chhatrahri, upper Ravi valley, Chamba
Copper, circa Seventh century, post Gupta period
Ht. 30.5cm Acc. No. 71.35

A royal personage or a noble is holding a big *dipa* in his hands in an attitude of worship. Though for the ritual of worship, as is the custom, he is unclad save for the knee-length *dhoti* but the dagger tucked in his waist apparently indicates his exalted status and his warrior class. He wears an *ekavali*, a *hara* (garland) of single variety with a *nayak mani* (pendant) in the centre, which was a common feature in the Gupta period. The head is seen covered with tiny spiral locks of hairs with *ushnisha* (top-knot) at the top. The ears are large adorning *ratna-kundala* and the elongated lobes denote nobility and the eyes are half closed as if focusing at the

tip of the nose. His hands are extended as behoves the *mahapurusha*. The actual proportions of the body are finer and more smoothly curved; the face is serene and benevolent with that spiritual experience which became the characteristic of all Buddha images.

According to Dr.V. C. Ohri, the sculpture of the devotee does not appear to be far removed in time from the inscribed statue of Buddha. Rather, he regards the devotee as Gugga, the master craftsman, who lived in 7th-8th century AD and was responsible for casting the life-size brazen idols at Chhatrahri and Brahmaur. (SMS)





4. Buddha Śākyamuni

Johling (Keylong) Lahaul and Spiti, Himachal Pradesh

Circa 10th- 11th century

Height 68 cm Acc. No. 69.68

The wooden stele of Buddha Śākyamuni is 68 cm high and depicts Siddharta Gautama under the bodhi tree surrounded by the evil forces of Māra. The main figure is seated in *padmāsana*; his right arm, which originally stretched out in *bhūmisparśamudrā*, has been lost today. The Buddha is dressed in a *samghati* that covers only his left shoulder and shows signs of red paint. Two female figures, Māra's daughters, are portrayed in a seductive poses, dancing on either side of him. The kneeling and lying figures at the base are nearly lost and therefore difficult to identify.

The statue derives from an ancient Buddhist shrine in Johling just opposite of Kyelong on the left bank of the Bhaga River. Johling can actually be associated with one of twenty-one minor foundations mentioned in the biography of the Great Translator Rin-chen bzang-po. An image taken by H.L. Shuttleworth in 1923 shows the sculpture standing next to a wooden Buddha Amitābha, which is now exhibited in the British Museum. While the Amitābha was bought and sent to England by a Moravian Missionare in the 1930s, the Buddha Śākyamuni had been taken out of the ruined temple in Johling and offered to the Chamba museum by M.S. Mukharjee, then Deputy Commissioner of Lahaul and Spiti district, in the 1960s.

The Buddha Śākyamuni combines diverse elements deriving from different areas and periods and displaying two modes of representation. The typology and composition of the wooden stele, like the stylised leaves of the bodhi tree canopying the main image and the closely packed crowd of figures displaying a great

variety of gestures and figures, follow the arrangement of Kashmiri ivories dated to the 8th century CE. This can be also noted in the certain formal features like the depiction of the monk dress that follows the archaic type with the small, narrow drapery popular mostly limited to the area of Kashmir. Also the body style of the central, primary Buddha figure - with its tapering torso with broad shoulders and elongated limbs, the long, oval face with almond shaped eyes, the small mouth with full lips and long ears with square lobes - is inspired by Kashmiri art from the 10th to 11th century CE. The Buddha is depicted in a heretic mode frontally presented with a lack of movement, whereas the attendant secondary figures represent a local style. The jewellery and dresses of Māra's daughters are typical for the region of Lahaul and Chamba and require profound knowledge of the local artistic traditions. The high quality of the wooden sculpture from Johling reveals an autochthonous workshop that has enriched its local repertoire of traditional forms and styles by elements and motifs from the art of Kashmir.

The two sculptures from Johling are probably the oldest remaining testimonials of the second Diffusion of the Buddhism in Lahaul. Both Buddhas might belong to the original decoration and programme of the Buddhist temple in Johling and the time of Rin-chen bzangs-po. (Verena Widorn)



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5. Vaikunthamurti

Village Swaim, Pargana Hingiri, Chamba

Stone, circa 8th century

59.5 x 40 cm Acc. No. 08. 35

The concept of Vishnu as Vaikuntha with additional heads, formulated according to Vishnu Dharmottara Purana; originating from Kashmir became popular in the adjoining region of Chamba as evidenced from the numberless Vaikuntha images found in this area. This image type held sway not only in Chamba but its echoes could be heard far and wide so that it was hailed as 'Kashmiri Vishnu' in one of the inscription in the Lakshman temple, Khajuraho. The area of Hingiri Swaim located at the threshold of Chamba was a gateway to the travellers from Kashmir crossing over to Chamba from the high Padhri pass. The area has yielded numerous Vaishnavite and Shaivite images of eighth-ninth centuries bearing strong Kashmiri influence.

The present image represents a three faced Vaikuntha (Vishnu) authoritatively sitting on the shoulders of his avian vehicle Garuda, who supports his feet on his upstretched hands. His other two faces

that of Narasimha and Varaha as per his iconography, are apparently visible. Vishnu wears crescent-shaped *trikantaka* crown of Kashmiri type, corkscrew curls (*churanakuntala*), earrings *trivali* mark on the neck, *yajnopavita* and double set of beaded necklace. A garment of doti worn by him is suggested by its folds. Garuda sports judge's wig-like hair, which is frequently noticed in the Gupta period sculpture. His rounded eyes are like that of an eagle and pointed nose of a parrot. With slightly protruding stomach (*kinchit lambodara*) Garuda stands firmly on his stumpy legs with claws of the bird. He is further adorned with a round floral garland. The four armed Vishnu holds *shankha* (conch) and *padma* (lotus flower) in his frontal hands, while he rests his other two hands on *ayudhapurasha*, the personified figures of Chakrapurusha and Gadadevi resting on the extended wings of Garuda on his either side. In the Kashmiri type of images, much care and attention is lavished on Garuda by the *shilpins* than on Vishnu as seen in this image too. (SMS)





6. Fountain Stone Slab from Sarahan

Sarahan (Saho) near Chamba, *circa* tenth century
Stone, 122 x 65.5 cms, Acc. No. 59.32

The fountain stone slab from Sarahan is probably one of the earliest and was recovered from the vast fields of Sarahan, near village Saho by Dr. V.C. Ohri and deposited in Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba. The present slab acquires importance for it shows in the uppermost damaged panel in all likelihood Rana Satyaki worshipping a Shiva-lingam. Rana Satyaki was contemporary of Raja Sahilla Varman (920 A.D.) the founder king of the Chamba town.

Rana Satyaki was an affluent and aesthete personality, which is suggested by the number of antiquities yielded in this area, besides the magnificent shrine of 'Chandrashekhar Mahadev' at Saho, attributed to him.

This fountain stone slab failed to get due attention as the study of the memorial stone was still in its infancy at the time of its discovery. The fountain stone slab divided into several panels, big and small, is provided with a square opening below (damaged) for fixing the water channel (*jalayana*) for the outflow of the water (*dhara-samana-vittam*). The upper portion of these slabs is reserved for the faith to which the dead



hero adhered to in his lifetime. Though, the upper portion of the slab is in much damaged condition yet it is not difficult to make out the royal personage which is presumably Rana Satyaki as is the case with the portraiture of this period he presents three fourth of the face (much mutilated) and his legs are loosely interlocked in *svastikasana*.

The lower panel, which is in the centre, shows the combat between the lion and the elephant. This fight is shown in the ancient classical literature as the fight well matched and between the two equals (*tulya-bala*). The princess in the medieval period used elephants for tiger and lion hunt because they stood at advantage because of their high position on the elephant and the elephants took part in the fight as they were trained to do so. They could hold the lion in their trunks, throw them on the ground and crushed them. The elephant here in this slab is rendered in his real form (*pratikriti*) is domesticated and has riders on it. The lion in the Sarahan slab partakes the nature of *simha-varala* with an elaborate mane, lean waist, tuft tail end, legs and the hoofs of the short horse as seen in the reliefs of Bharhut and Sanchi. The riders on the elephant have their hair tied in the form of a bun as behoves a hunter.

For the lion and elephant fight, C. Sivaramamurti quotes 'Raghuvamsa' the epic by Sanskrit poet Kalidasa:

“...the king fighting the lion and thereby absolving himself of his debt of gratitude to the elephants forming such an important limb of his army giving their very best in the numerous fight. It is a



common convention that the lion delights in attacking the elephant and tearing apart his temple and scattering the pearls contained in them. The elephant is also lured by the lion because it thinks that the pearls are contained in the claws of the lion.”

The panel below shows a pair of celestial geese facing each other (*sanmukhi-kritah*) and holding a common lotus stalk in their beaks. The motif finds reference in Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsa* “I worship that

pair of *hamsas* who are 'so' and 'ham' and subsist on the blooming lotus of knowledge. The *hamsas* occurs in a variety of ways in the fountain stone slabs of Chamba. At times, they look back on. As in classical art, the *hamsas* in the fountain stone slabs of Chamba are shown without wings. The motif also occurs in the last panel of this slab where a row of *hamsas* (*pangati-panava*) are seen flying in the order of *pradakshina* carrying in their beaks a string of pearls (*mukta-lobhi-rajahamsa*).S.M.S

7. Mahishasuramardini

Chamba town, *circa* eleventh century
Size, 64 x 43 cms. Acc. No. 49.9

Mahishasuramardini remains the official war goddess of the Gurjar-Patihara rulers of Rajasthan as well as the Rajput rulers of north-western Himalayan states. The origin of the cult is shrouded in the past but can be traced to the Huna invaders who were buffalo nomads, who had fallen upon the crumbling Gupta Empire and Durga helping the Indians in this terrible struggle was conceived as the killer of the buffalo nomads. The hurling of the buffalo in the river Ravi at the fag end of the *Minjar* fair indicates its association with the cult and the suppression of demonical forces. The family deity of the Rajas of Chamba Champavati is worshipped in the form of Mahishasuramardini.

Among the four-armed images of the Devi, the brazen idol of Lakshna Devi (7th century) remains the specimen par excellence and one of the finest examples of Indian metal art. Dr. Goetz traces the Mahishasuramardini remains the official war goddess of the Gurjar-Patihara rulers of Rajasthan as well as the Rajput rulers of north-western Himalayan states. The origin of the cult is shrouded in the past but can be traced to the Huna invaders who were buffalo nomads, who had fallen upon the crumbling Gupta Empire and Durga helping the Indians in this terrible struggle was conceived as the killer of the buffalo nomads. The hurling of the buffalo in the river Ravi at the fag end of

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Among the four-armed images of the Devi, the brazen idol of Lakshna Devi (7th century) remains the specimen par excellence and one of the finest examples of Indian metal art. Dr. Goetz traces the iconography of this image to the Udaigiri cave near Bhilasa and in the Gupta temple of Bhumara. However, change in the political scenario and the shifting of the capital from Brahmaur to Chamba changed the type of Mahisuramardini and now she appears eight-armed standing in the warrior like posture of *pratyalida* and killing the demon by jabbing the trident at his back as seen in this image. The attributes held in Devi's hands remain consistent throughout the Mahishasuramardini images of Chamba. The images seem to be the product one cultural epoch (10-12th century) bearing the same style, ornaments, physiognomy and iconographical traits, so that it is very difficult to distinguish one from the other. The period of 13-14th century being the dark period of Chamba because of the Muslim stress, the Durga emerging thereafter appears as *Simhavahini*- the rider of the lion. (SMS)



8. Fountain Stone Slab of Ranautra Phahi

Village Sei, Churah area Chamba, *circa* 12th century

Stone, 105 x 135 cms, Acc. No.

The fountain stone slab shows in the lower panel a royal personage worshipping Shiva-lingam accompanying by the women of his household. The inscription above, which is in the Sharda script of late 12th century, records the erection of fountain stone slab by illustrious Rajapala for the sake of Ranautra Phahi, a Rana and in all likelihood a chieftain in the area. Thus, it is obvious that it is Ranautra Phahi who's effigy is portrayed on the stone, which finds further confirmation from the small inscription engraved just above his head labeling him as Ranautra Phahi. In all likelihood he died sonless (*rana+autra*) as no other male is depicted in the slab and thus probably arose the need for commissioning this slab for his future bliss. Facing him and on the other side of the square opening, holding a *chauri* in all probability is his young daughter who stands on a raised pedestal to make up for her height and for further support catches hold of the scarf of her wet nurse Dai Nagih standing by her side. The inclusion of Dai Nagih (as inscribed above) indicates her respectable position in the household. Her one hand is held down in *varda mudra*, while the other is raised up to the shoulder level to hold a lotus. The presentation of the three quarter face is also observed in the portrait of king Ananta of Kashmir proceeding for worshipping with his queens to Anantaswami temple.

Rana Phahi sits on a circular cushion with his legs loosely interlocked in swastika asana, he adorns a trimmed beard, probably is mustached and his hair are sort of combed back and tied in a bun. Standing by Rana Phahi's side is his wife holding lotuses. The ladies stand in their best ceremonial dresses comprising of two piece

heavy skirt still in vogue in the area of Churah. Beneath them occurs the effigy of a fish and tortoise meant to transform into Ganga and Yamuna. Goetz remarks:

“ Since *circa* 5/6th century, the river goddesses were again ousted by donor figures or the female donors were at least were represented in guise of Ganga and Jamuna.”

While the fish is carved in its true form, (*pratikriti*), the tortoise appears to be a cross between a tortoise and a winged Tibetan dragon. The rendering of the tortoise in this quaint manner indicates the unfamiliarity of the artist with this creature.

Of the row of five figures seated cross-legged, in the above panels (*pancharama*) the central panel is reserved for Varuna, the tutelary deity of fountain spring. The deity to the right is probably Shiva apparently identified by the presence of a trident in his hand as the inscription above is indistinct. The figure at the proper right end has its name Bodha marked on the corner pilaster at his side and probably he is holding his hand in *dharam-chakra-parivartana mudra*. The depiction of Buddha is usually last in the row in the *dasavatara* scene in the fountain slabs of Chamba, he being the ninth in incarnation. The figure to the left of Varuna is in all likelihood is Brahma, though he has not the four faces and the attributes held by him are indistinct. The last figure of the row is represented as Shiva identified by the inscription over his head 'Dhyani-Maheshvara'. He is seated cross-legged, the hands placed in the lap *anka-madhye* in *dhyana* and with the ends of *uttriya* fluttering in the air. The entire



slab is enclosed by a double band of interlacing snakes, the motif so dear to the Gurjara-Pratihara rulers of northern India. The plait-work band ornament of the Gupta period was often transformed into inter-twining snakes as seen in the doorjambs of Teli-ka-mandir, Gwalior, on the façade of the doorways of Osian and in the fountain slabs of Chamba. (SMS)

9. Fountain Stone Slab from Behnota

Behnota, Churah region, Chamba Circa 13th century
Stone, 78 x 88 cms, Acc. No. 08. 28

The fountain stone slab from the area of Churah village Behnota is a classical specimen of the stone slab hailing from that area. The slab is enclosed by a double band of interlacing snakes, a common Gurjara-Pratihara motif. The ancient texts speak of them as the serpent of the site (*nagapasa*) who moves around a building or a temple protecting it from any harm. The topmost panel of the slab is filled in with a lotus rosette. At times, the lotus is filled in with a human figure (*padmapurusha*) as seen in the early Buddhist art of Bharhut and Sanchi. Hermann Goetz calls them 'the last echo of the Sunga art still vibrating in the remote hills of Chamba.' The lower compartment of the slab is divided into three panels. A horse rider is seated in the first panel, is preceded by his woman in the third panel holding in her hands, a water pot and a bread basket which the hero may acquire during his journey to the next world. A two armed Varuna, the lord of the water cosmology is seen seated in Kushan fashion on a low bench (*bhadrapiṭha*) in the central panel. The motif of horse-rider led by an attendant women with a pot in her hand occurs also on some Bayana hoard of Ujjain where according to Sivaramamurti it signifies "the generosity of the *dhramavijai* emperor, who is free

from greed and gives lavishly with the attendant holding water vessels and pouring water on the devotee's palm to solemnized every gift made with the libiation of the water,"

The horse occurs frequently in the fountain stone slabs of Churah area, bordering on the territory of Jammu, Basohli and Chamba. The area remained a theatre of war for centuries portraying endless numbers of Ranas and Thakurs seated on horseback in the fountain slab. The horse with a rider on it remained a motif belonging to the cult of dead. The horse served as a unit which was taken into account for measuring the distances between several *lokas*. According to Hindu mythology (*bhramanas*), the *swargaloka* is situated at a distance approachable by a horse running very fast for one thousand days.

The middle panel shows a pair of *hamsas* looking away from each other (*viprita-mukhi*) indicating separation and loneliness. Their heads are tied to a common pole and the luxurious scroll work issues from their tails. (SMS)



10. Yogi

Chamba town, circa 16th century

Stone, size 42 x 28.5 cms, Acc. No. 00.915

In one of the ancient Indian treatises, it is mentioned that “an emaciated image brings famine, a short image spells sickness for all while one that is well proportioned without displaying any bones or muscles or veins will always enhance one's prosperity.”

These regulations resulted in the creations of a very conventional bodily form which was commonly used in idols. But characters which were neither gods nor goddesses were exempted from requisites of religious codes. The artists were free to design them accordingly to their own ideas. This was especially true of the demigods the *vyantra devatas* like ascetics, *munis*, *pitrs* and the manes, *ganas* and the *gandharvas*, *vidyadharas*, *apsaras* etc. Our present sculpture of Yogi seems to fall in this category. Carved in the round but calculated to be viewed from the front, the yogi was not meant to be installed as an *avarn-devata* in the architectural programmed of the temple. The yogi is characterised by a flowing beard, sunken cheeks and a

ribbed chest (*atari katang*) and is seated on a circular lotus pedestal. He is two handed. In one of his hands he hold a manuscript (*pothi*) and the other is held in the posture of exposition with two fingers raised and facing the viewer that he is an exponent of 'Advaita-vad' school of thought. A banner (*dhvaja*) is planked behind where he sits. The formation of the *dhvaja* by a cloth is an insignia of Shankaracharya and his spiritual sovereignty. The high crown of the matted locks is seen shading a low forehead encircled by curls and the smooth outline of the face terminated by the point of beard, gives the impressiveness of a mask which indicate *tapas* and mortification which the yogi has undertaken. The eyes are without sockets lending to the entire face an expression which is benevolent and irascible, withdrawn and mysterious. It is the haunting image of an ascetic who overcomes the limitations imposed on him by his human form to attain higher spiritual values.(SMS)



11. Matsya: The Fish Incarnation of Vishnu

Chamba, stone, *circa* 17th century
41 x 32 cms Acc. No. 49.6

Matsyavatara of Vishnu in the iconography of Chamba presents itself in the likeness of a true fish (*pratikriti*) and is held diagonally on a pedestal as if striding towards the surface of the sea from the depths of the deep oceans. There are minor divinities shown in the slab each provided with a lotus of his own. A particularly interesting feature is the central column representing the axis mundi of the world on which is seated possibly Brahma. According to H. Hartel this is a cosmic pillar linking the waters to the sun. Hartel is of the opinion that the survival of the pure form of fish in Chamba suggests the association of Vishnu as a god of

primeval water. In one of the fountain stone slabs Four Vedas personified as humans are seen perching on its back besides four headed Brahma seated in the centre. Three detached stone sculptures of pure form of fish have come to light from this region. Two of them are preserved in Bhuri Singh Museum, while the third one is let into the rock of Banlingeshwar temple located down town Chamba all dating back to 11th-12th century A.D. The fountain stone slabs of Chamba present the same iconography in the depiction of Matsya in their *dasavatara* scenes. (SMS)



12. A Tantric Yogi

Bronze, Chamba, circa 18th century

Acc. No. 68.43

A man in nude sits cross-legged, his legs interlocked in the difficult position of *vjraparyaga asana*. A woman whose only legs are visible sits on his left thigh in *vama-lalita-asana*, reminiscent of *alingana murtis*. The yogi raises his left hand in front of his chest in *dhyana* while the left arm, which is not visible, was employed to embrace his consort. The upper portion of the consort is completely mutilated and missing but her right hand which is somewhat intact is employed in *mushtihasta* posture with the thumb raised in inactive *linga-mudra*. The image possibly is based on tantric concept. The male is characterised by a round shaven head, flaring nostrils, small rounded but protruding

chin and almond shaped eyes with the gaze transfixed indicative of his determination and undisturbed state in spite of the closeness of his consort. Dr. Ohri speaks of a stone sculpture located in Purani Mandi, which was identified by him as Yogi on the basis of *Rudraksh mala* and a necklace of small *nad*. According to him, the present image represents a *sidhha* seated with his feminine power, i.e. Shakti. In Tantric concept sex was employed as a means to attain the state of super consciousness. Possibly, this image was inspired by the famous Yab-Yum image of the Buddhist iconography. (SMS)



13. A Bronze in Folk Style

Kurahan, near Chamba town
Circa mid 20th century Acc. No. 71.38

The icon represents an established and standardized folkish type of bronze to be seen in the shrines of hill type temples of Chamba. The image is characterized by accessibly slim and elongated body with a head tilted skywards. At first glance, the image seems to be the work of modern art or 'reminiscent of Aegean marble idol with protruding eyes, a pointed chin and a low forehead', as suggested by M. Postel. The barrel shaped body is clearly marked with a naval

button while the breasts are shown high above indicating it to be a Devi image. The artist by imparting the image extraordinary long limbs has added to the height and dignity of the statue which otherwise would have been a small folk bronze. The deity stands on a stationary lion standing on all fours glaring at the viewer with a flattened out snout. It is a product from the workshop of local artisan known as '*rehada*'. (SMS)



14. Sarahan Prashasti: A Sanskrit Poem Incised on Stone Tablet

Sarahan, near Saho, Stone tablet
Chamba, circa 10th century
54.5 x 17 cms Acc. No. 1

Chamba is a treasure house of ancient inscriptions epigraphs comprising eulogies (*prashastis*) grants (*vastu sasans*), temples and fountains inscriptions (*silapatta*) which have been studied and analysed by the scholars. The Sarahan Prashasti has been rated by them as a class by itself and one of the finest account of Indian love-poetry. It has been described as a love poem dressed in stone. The inscription dwells on the idea of eternal friendship between goddess Parvati and Somaprabha, wife of Rana Satyaki, who raised a memorial in the form of Shiva (Chandra-Shekhara (temple at Saho) in her memory. The inscription is drenched in the love of Rana Satyaki for his wife Somaprabha and extols her charms in the flowery style of Indian erotics. It goes on to describe limb by limb the beauty of his wife drawing similes and metaphors from the animal and vegetal world as was the custom of Indian Classical literature. "Her beauty is described as the highest tide of the ocean of passion, a cluster of blossoms on the tree of love or the presiding goddess of the realm of king spring or the sum of the beauty of the three worlds. She is the spell named mind perplexing capable of rendering three worlds obedient thus lost in the multitude of doubts one cannot decide about her."

Rana Satyaki was contemporary of Raja Sahilla Varmana the founder of Chamba town and on palaeographical grounds, too, Dr. Vogel assigns the *prashasti* to the 10th century AD. He seems to be a man of great aesthetic virtue and elite. Rana Satyaki has been hailed in the inscription as "Narendra" the man of

warrior class. The author of the inscription was evidently well acquainted with the rules of Sanskrit grammar and rhetoric, therefore, an able poet serving under him. The presence of the *Prashasti* dispels the belief that this peaceful valley was the scene of endless warfare between the Rana, Thakurs and the life under them was nasty, short and brutish where Rana fought the Rana and Thakur fought the Thakur. Judging from this inscription as well as other inscriptions it appears that Ranas were great lovers and the love was the great aim of their lives. Make love not war seems to be their motto.

The *Prashasti* comes to us in the format of manuscript (*pustaka yatha lipi*). The inscription is carved on the front and back of the slab consisting of 22 lines of elegant Sanskrit poetry. The temple founded by Satyaki is indicated, *deva-kulan-kulanka mukta endlekh angta shekharsey*, and in the final valedictory stanza Shiva is spoken of Himarashmi shekhara. Evidently, the inscription has the present Chandra Shekhara temple of Saho of which only the *shivalingam* and the Nandi bull remain extant and belong to Rana Satyaki period. Judging from the massive *sivalingam* installed in the sanctum-sanctorum and more than the life size, bull Nandi facing, it seems that the Chandra-Shekhara temple was a splendid and monumental piece of art lying in height and glory with the Lakshmi-Narayana, the main temple of the Chamba town. (SMS)

15. Rana Nagapala of Devi-ri-Kothi Inscription

Devi-ri-kothi, *Paragana Baira*, Churah region, Chamba
Stone, *Circa 12th century* Acc. No. A 9, A 10, A 11

The fountain stone slab hailing from Devi-ri-kothi (Churah area of Chamba) is presented to us in the form of a miniature shrine comprising two upright slabs and surmounted by another slab having eave cornice like side projections. The image installed inside is of Vishnu represented as Vaikuntha with the side faces of Narsimha and Varaha, seated on Garuda and accompanied by Lakshmi. The inscription at the base of the pedestal is in the late *Sharda* characters of 12th century AD and speaks of the image having been carved by artisan Subhag to the orders of illustrious Rajapal.

But the most important part of the inscription is carved on the stone slab placed to the left of the miniature shrine. Obviously, there must have been an inscription at the right side, which at the time of its recovery by Dr. J. Ph. Vogel was said to have been taken away by a lama to the remote areas of Pangji and never recovered. The remaining inscription incised on the left in *Sharda* characters contains twenty-five lines and the poem of great literary merit is composed by Rajaguru Kamala-Lanchhana in Sanskrit. The poet according to Prof. Vogel indulged in the use of rhyming words with great melodious effect. The poetry relates the sad plight of Rani Balha, the wife of Rana of Devi-ri-kothi, who on the demise of her husband wanted to accompanying him to the funeral pyre in the ritual of Sati, but was prevented from doing so by his son Rana Nagapala because of the new born babe, which needed tending and looking after. Rani Balha resists food and reduces herself to Skelton (*samadhimarna*), indulging herself in the acts of charity and compassion to the poor and as

an act of piety builds the present altar.

Prof. Vogel felt sad that no "literary productions of the poet Kamala-Lanchhana has been bequeathed to us except this mutilated eulogy." Vogel himself an eminent Sanskritist and Indologist in no less degree admired the skill of the stone mason who incised the inscription in no less remarkable manner than that of the poet who composed it. The date of the inscription can be reckoned from the accession of Raja Lalita Varman mentioned in the inscription (1160 AD) and by the name of Rajaguru Kamala-Lanchhana.

The inscription is important in many ways too for it sheds light on the society of that period. The prevention of Rani Balha from entering the funeral pyre was in accordance with the injunction of *dharamasastra* that the "pregnant women or those that have younger children should not practice the rite of Sati." (P.V. Kave, *History of Dharma Sastra*, Vol. 4, page 237) In the context of the ritual of Sati, the inscription uses the word *anugamana*, which is opposite to the word *sahagamana*. While *sahagamana* indicate burning together on the funeral pyre, the rite of the *anugamana* is usually followed by *Kalagi*, *Charana-padukas*. costume, turban, sword and dagger. The inscription is important for it tells the way it was prepared. First, a fair copy seems to have been prepared by *Rajaguru*, and then the mason received a stone tablet with a fair copy of the size of the stone on which it was incised. He first drew the letters on the surface of the stone under the supervision of the *Pandit* and then the mason Tyaga incised them. (SMS)



16. The Mul-Kihar Inscription

Kihar area, Circa 12th century

71 x 53 cms

The inscription which contains the record of the foundation of a cistern in the Mul-Kihar area of Churah (Chamba) was carved on a large slab (2'.5" x 1'.10" x 11"). The large portion of the slab was considerably mutilated and damaged and consequently disappeared. Yet enough remains to make out chief contents of the inscription. It is a document of significant interest both historically and literary. The inscription relates how a cistern of clear water was constructed evidently in the memory of the deceased Suramati, in all likelihood by her husband named Goga. In the verse 30, the date of the inscription is expressed in the regional year of Raja Vijeshvara who according to Prof. J. Ph. Vogel could be identified with ease with Raja Vijaya Verman's reign, which must fall about the end of 12th century AD. The date according to him agrees with the paleographical evidence offered by Mul-Kihar inscription. Verse 30 further confirms that the Rana of Mul-Kihar owned allegiance to the Rajas of Chamba.

The first stanza of the inscription apparently preceded by the usual *mangala* in prose is almost destroyed and is followed by the innovation to various gods including lord Varuna the god of waters as we have had frequent occasion to notice takes a prominent place both in the carvings and inscription on monument. The inscription mentions Rana's ancestors the first member of the genealogical portion being Rana Gaja Pala. The central theme of the inscription however is the grandson Goga who sheds tears of blood as he is unable to save his wife, the delight of his eye Suramati from the jaws of the death as she lies helplessly in his

lap. The inscription tell us about her three sons and the daughter Bhappika by name with teeth like jasmine buds, a slender waist, a face like a full blown lotus, the voice of a cuckoo and the eyes resembling dark blue water lilies.

According to Prof. Vogel, the author of the Mul-Kihar inscription was not only a scholar but a rare poet whose good taste prevented him from indulging in bombastic phraseology which so often distinguishes the classical literature of India. His language is simple and the rhetorical figures of speech are applied in such proportion as not to obscure but to elucidate the sense of each verse. The similes if not original are well chosen. If we compare the verse 15 in which the charms of Suramati's daughter are landed with numerous passages in Indian poetry devoted to the praise of female beauty of which our Sarahan Prashasti affords a good example we cannot but admire the chase of moderation of the writer.

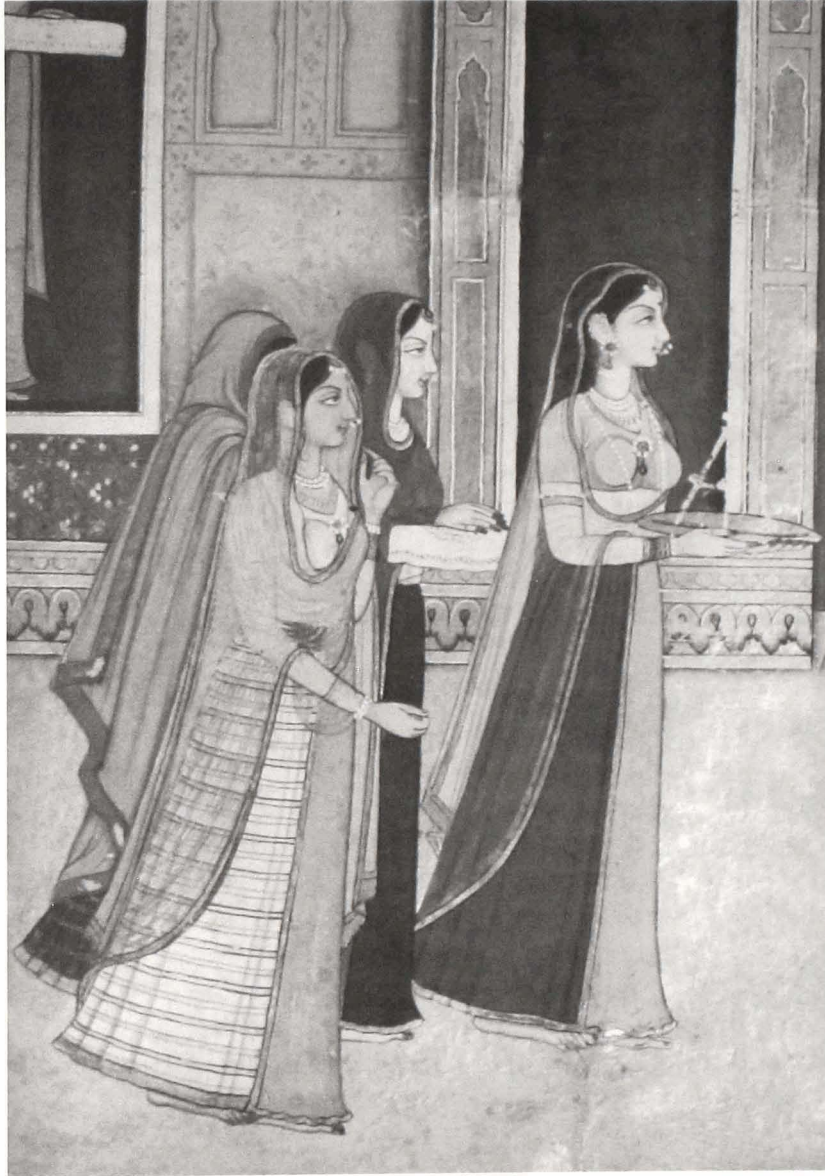
Another point of considerable interest is Rajanaka (Rana) Gaja Pala mentioned in verse 8 of our inscription can be the same person the Thakkura Gaja Pala who according to *Rajatarangini* collected a force to restore the pretender Bhikshachara to the throne of Kashmir but was treachously murdered by his own relatives before he could give effect to his design. The Gaja Pala of Kashmir chronicle lived in the reign of Jasta of Chamba at whose court Bhikshachara had found a refuge for several years. SMS



[Faint, illegible text in Devanagari script, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]

वि प्रसिद्धात्पश्यतु ह्यकर्म उ
रस्यगिरयपरम सुखमीस्य
यद्भवति विरुध्यरद्वा विरुध्यते
सुख उ अ सुख उ द सुखमिति;

Pahari Miniature Painting



Painting in Chamba

Vijay Sharma

Chamba, an erstwhile principality situated in the bosom of the north-western Himalayas had the rare fortune of escaping the attacks of the invaders in the past with the result that its rich cultural wealth has not been lost. The rulers of this hilly state were devotees of Vishnu as evident by numerous sculptures enshrined in various temples. The Vaishnava *bhakti* movement was at its peak in north India during the 16-17th centuries and during this period several temples and shrines dedicated to Vishnu and his incarnations Rama and Krishna, in particular, were commissioned in Chamba and its surroundings.

Raja Balabhadra Varman (r. 1589-1641) had consecrated the Bansi-Gopal temple and also had erected a small Krishna shrine at Nand mohalla near the old palace 'Rangmahal'. He also gifted numerous gold ornaments studded with precious jewels, including a gold chest-plate of great value for the decoration of the torso of Lakshmi-Narayan image, the principal deity of Chamba town. Recent research by Dr. Vishwa Chander



Fig. 1

During Raja Balabhadra's reign, Jagat Singh of Nurpur attacked Chamba in 1623 and treacherously killed the regent Janardan Varman. Janardan's infant son Prithvi Singh was smuggled to Mandi where he was

brought up under the care of Raja Hari Sen (1623-37). In 1641, young Prithvi Singh drove out the Nurpur troops with the help of Mandi and Kullu states, regained his kingdom, and established himself as Raja. He was the only Chamba ruler who visited nine times the Imperial Mughal court, where he was honoured by Emperor Shahjahan. Raja Prithvi Singh (1641-64), having become familiar with the art of painting during his exile in Mandi, was a real connoisseur of the arts and he patronised artistic activity in Chamba.



Fig. 2

Unfortunately, very few paintings of Raja Prithvi Singh's period, except for a few portraits, are available. The figures engraved on the copper pedestal of Hidimba Devi Temple at Mehla, (Fig. 2) commissioned by this Raja, however, display the style of Chamba painting prevailing during his reign. Raja Prithvi Singh is said to have embellished the 'State-Kothi' of Brahmaur with splendid wood carvings depicting figural work inspired by Mughal art. A wooden door acquired from the State-Kothi, Brahmaur and now on display in the Bhuri Singh museum Chamba (Fig.3) shows young Raja Prithvi Singh standing in front of prince Dara Shikoh portrayed as falconer on the other panel of the door.

We know of some Manikanth Gujarati painters working at the Chamba court during the reign of Raja



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Chhatra Singh (1664-90), and the visage of this Raja has come down to us in several portraits. The portrait studies in respect of this Raja and his collaterals, Miyan Jai Singh and Shakat Singh (Fig.4) as well as some other paintings illustrating various themes – Dasavatara , Ragamala and Nayika-Bheda - evidence a mature painting style having distinct characteristics practised at Chamba. An interesting painting depicting the scene 'The descent of the Ganges' (Fig. 5) is a typical specimen of Chamba painting of Raja Chhatra Singh's atelier. In this picture, the figure of Bhagirath, particularly the facial features bear remarkable similarities with that of Raja Chhatra Singh's likeness.

Since the Dasavatara theme was popular in Chamba, it was repeatedly depicted in stray miniatures and wall paintings, metal sheets and wood carvings. An early and dispersed Dasavatara series from a Chamba workshop, datable to the late 17th century, is of special relevance. Two folios from this Dasavatara series, Parshurama and Kalki, are preserved in the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba.

The idioms and traits of this mature and well-established painting style that had developed during Raja Chhatra Singh's period continued in the reign of his son and successor Raja Udai Singh (1690-1720), though only a few portraits of this ruler have survived. The present writer recently discovered an unusual kind of dated and inscribed breastplate, (Fig.6) locally called *kanchua* (Sanskrit *kavacha*), which is used as armour on the torso of the idol of Lakshmi-Narayana, the principal deity of Chamba. This breastplate is important for two reasons: first because the inscription is dated (1715 AD) and bears the name of Raja Udai Singh, the donor, on whose instance the plate was remade and offered to the deity; and second, for the



Fig. 6

draughtsmanship of the figural work embossed upon it. The figures engraved on the breastplate bear a remarkable stylistic similarity to the ones in the paintings. Two folios from a dispersed Ragamala series, Ragaputras Sarang and Saindhava depict the painting style that prevailed during the reign of Raja Udai Singh. The round chubby faces, the elongated almond-shaped eyes with reddish corners, and circular forms for indicating the prominent chest muscles of the male figures are invariably noticed in miniatures of the late 17th century. These traits continued in practice in the Chamba painting style, though in a slightly refined manner, until the mid-18th century.

Raja Udai Singh took to evil ways, fell in love with a barber's daughter and consequently was assassinated in the vast fields of Udaipur, near Chamba town, by the state officials. He was succeeded by Ugra Singh, who was living in exile in Jammu and with the help of Jammu ruler he succeeded the Chamba throne. During his reign (1720-35), an apparent influence of Jammu painting is discernible in the Chamba style.

Raja Dalel Singh was a pious ruler having deep interest in religious activities. In the year 1747, he made

an offering of a gilded silver *torana* engraved with Dasavatara figures to the Lakshmi-Narayana temple of Chamba. An inscription on it reveals the names of two artisans Laharu and Mahesh, hailing from the 'Gujarati-Manikanth' *tarkhan* family of painters. Raja Dalel Singh had to abdicate in favour of Umed Singh under the pressure of the Mughal governor and later he became a recluse.

Raja Umed Singh (r.1748-64) was an ardent devotee of the goddess Chamunda and he constructed the temple dedicated to the great goddess at the Village Devi-ri-Kothi in the Churah region of Chamba state in the year 1754. He embellished this temple with exquisite wood carvings and murals done in the Chamba style, which are credited to the *tarkhan*-carpenters Gurdev and Jhanda. Several portraits in respect of this prince are extant. A *Dasavatara* set painted by the painter Mahesh is known and one of the folios of this dispersed set depicting 'Matsya Avatara' is exhibited in the Chamba Museum. Mahesh was a well endowed portrait painter as revealed by two posthumous portrait studies done by him in respect of Raja Prithvi Singh and his son and successor Raja Chhatra Singh, both these are now preserved in the Chamba Museum.



Fig. 7

Another important series of *Bhagvata Purana* deserves special mention; it was painted by Laharu in the year 1758 at the instance of Miyan Shamsher Singh (Fig.7) the younger brother of Umed Singh, as revealed by an inscription in *takri* written on the last picture of this set. Laharu and Mahesh were indeed two gifted painters who, perhaps, were working jointly in the same family workshop of the Gujarati painters. Raja Umed Singh had also commissioned a series on the Ramayana theme and only a part, '*Balakanda* and '*Ayodhyakanda*' of that was completed during his lifetime. The architectural edifices dominate the compositions of these Ramayana paintings. The shady trees having thick foliage are arrayed in a row upon rocky grounds. The male figures, particularly the courtiers and retainers, are shown wearing richly patterned and striped *jama* in these pictures.

Raja Umed Singh died at the age of 39 and was succeeded in 1764 by his son Raj Singh, who was nine years old at the time. During that period, Chamba remained under the influence of Jammu for some years. Evidence reveals that Guler painters received patronage at the Chamba court when Raja Raj Singh was only of about fifteen years of age. Like his father, he was also a great devotee of Chamunda, the goddess of war. He also had commissioned a series of *Devi Mahatmya*, which was painted by the Guler painters and is now preserved in the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba. Several portrait studies in respect of Raja Raj Singh are extant and well known; two of them are preserved in the Chamba museum collection.

Nikka, the eldest son of famous Guler painter Nainsukh, was the most talented painter as revealed by his immaculate work depicting 'Brahma bows at Vishnu's feet'. He and his collaterals, the four sons of

Nikumal, were provided with land-grants in the fertile area of Rilhu within Chamba territory at the Chamba-Kangra border. These Guler painters painted a great deal of paintings for the Chamba court. The group of remarkable paintings comprising the series of '*Rukmini-Mangal*', '*Sudama-Charit*' and the '*Usha-Charita*' are the works rendered by these gifted painter brothers - Nikka and Ranjha.



Fig. 8

After the arrival of the Guler painters at Chamba, a change can be discerned in the style of the local Chamba painters. The Guler style not only influenced the Chamba style but it swept almost all the centres in the hills. Local Chamba painters also assimilated gradually the idioms of Guler painting. They also started working in the new style imbibing the pictorial conventions of Guler style, which can be noticed in their works; two such examples, a scene of '*Danalila*' and another from the '*Aranyakanda*' of Ramayana (Fig. 8) apparently reveal this fact.

Raja Raj Singh was killed in 1793 while defending the boundaries of his domains in the Rilhu area, when Kangra forces laid an ambush for him. A temple stands at village Nerti at that very spot where this Raja fought

bravely and fell. Raja Raj Singh was succeeded by his son Jit Singh who was eighteen years old in 1793. During Jit Singh's reign, no extended series of paintings seem to have been painted in Chamba, except for the paintings related to the subjects of 'Baramasa' and 'Ashta-Nayika'. Chhajju and Harkhu were the leading Guler painters settled in the village Rajol in the Rilhu area at the Chamba-Kangra border. Chhajju seems to be a painter of considerable merit; he painted the likeness of Raja Jit Singh with remarkable perfection. Another example of his immaculate workmanship can be seen in a picture, in which Radha and Krishna, the divine lovers, are seen standing on the bank of Yamuna in the moonlit night. His brother Harkhu was also a gifted painter as evident by two of his competent works, one depicting the exiled Sita in Valmiki's hermitage and another showing 'Vishnu and Lakshmi seated under a canopy'. The brush work of both these painter brothers is precise and perfect and the colour scheme employed by them is of soft muted colours. Besides, the standard-Kangra type treatment in the female faces can be noticed in the paintings done by them.

Raja Charhat Singh of Chamba was only six years of age in 1808 at the time of his father Jit Singh's death. The murals of 'Rang-Mahal' and 'Obri-Shivadwala' were executed during his reign (1808-44). The portraits in respect of Raja Charhat Singh are preserved in the collection of Bhuri Singh Museum, which suggest a declined phase of painting.

The tradition of painting continued even after Raja Charhat Singh and it is evident from the pictures that the Guler painters, the grandsons of Nikka, were still rendering their services to the Chamba court. Two dated examples of late Kangra style done by a painter named as Attra are noteworthy. One of his works, dated

1860, depicts the scene 'Yama's court'. This painting bears a long inscription of art-historical importance at its back mentioning the names of all the Guler painters, who had been working for the Chamba court right from the reign of Raja Raj Singh of Chamba. Another inscribed painting does mention a painter named 'Manu', who presented his work depicting '*Nayika's shringar*' to Mehta Syama as evident by a brief inscription on the reverse of this painting. The portrait of Bagha Wazir (Fig.9) is also an interesting example of the declined phase, in which he is shown listening to a *Gaddi's* petition.



Fig. 9

The painting tradition seems to be continued in Chamba though on a small scale, in the late 19th century. The equestrian portrait of the child Raja Shyam Singh apparently confirms this suggestion. A late Chamba painting depicting the manifestations of '*Dasamahavidyas*' is another dated work, which was painted in the year 1880. Sohnu and Jawahar were two such painters from the Gujarati-Manikanth family who were active in Chamba in the early twentieth century. Some of their works, though lacking refinement, are preserved in the Bhuri Singh museum. However, Prem Lal (died 1974) hailing from the Gujarati-Manikanth painter family, was a versatile artist of exceptional merit and he revived the tradition of painting in Chamba. Some of his works are also preserved in the Chamba museum.



Month of Baisakh, Kangra painting from a *baramasa* series, circa 1825

17. Kalki-The Future Incarnation of Vishnu

Illustration to a *Dasavatara* series
From a Chamba workshop, *circa* 1700
Opaque watercolours and oxidized silver on handmade paper
21.2 x 14.3 cms, Acc. No. 08.151.17

Dasavatara or 'the ten incarnations' of Vishnu remained a popular theme of Hindu mythology and finds frequent mention in the *puranic* texts. The tenth and last incarnation of Vishnu, which has yet to come, is described as 'Kalki'. This incarnation has invariably been noticed in paintings, mural, metal sheets and even on wooden relief found in the Chamba region.

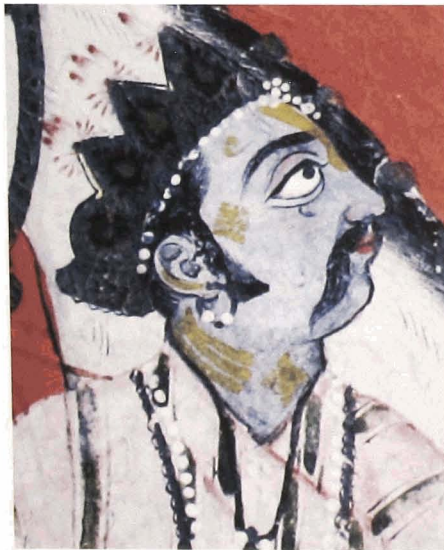
Texts reveal that Vishnu will appear as *avatara* in the form of a warrior riding on a white horse. He will ride through the world bearing a drawn sword blazing like a comet to destroy the wicked and for the resurgence of virtue in the next age.

In the composition of the painting, the crowned and blue complexioned Kalki is seen mounting a caparisoned white stallion. Kalki sports drooping

moustaches and is dressed in pinkish striped *jama* and tight green trousers. His slightly raised head suggests his readiness to be in the saddle and proceed any moment for the salvation of man kind.

His sword in yellow sheath is tucked in his waistband and is partly visible. The hind legs of the horse apparently indicate somewhat movement. The dull orange hue of the background helps in highlighting the figure of Kalki and his spirited mount.

The style of this painting is completely different from that of the Gujarati Manikanth painters in composition, colour scheme and especially in the treatment of rendering the face. This suggests that some painters other than those of Gujarati Manikanth were also working for the Chamba court. (VS)





18. Ragaputra Sarang of Raga Sri

A folio of dispersed Chamba Ragamala series
From a Chamba workshop, first quarter of the 18th century
Opaque watercolours, beetle wings and gold and silver pigments on handmade paper
18.8 x 18.1 cms, Acc. No. 64.14

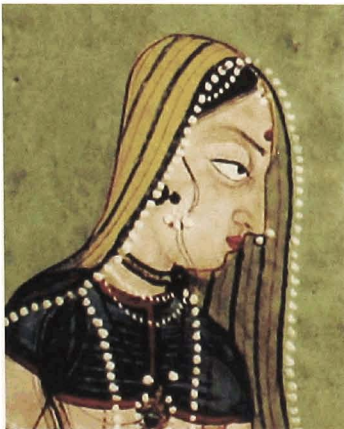
Inscribed at top red border in *Takri* characters reads: '*Raga sarang sri
rage da putra gor*' (Sarang, the son of Raga Sri)

Ragamala, a popular subject of Indian miniature painting opens up a magical world of hosts of *Ragas*, *Raginis* and their *Ragaputras* holding the onlooker spellbound with their charm and mystical quality. It has been the favourite subject of the Pahari painters as well who preferred to follow especially the Ragamala system based on the musician Kshemakarna's classification. Thus, several sets of the Ragamala paintings were prepared for the royal patrons of the hills, particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The present folio comes to us from a dispersed Ragamala set painted in a Chamba workshop. The painting is a visual presentation of the 'Ragaputra Sarang', the son of Raga Sri. Clad in white *jama* and striped tight trousers, the Ragaputra is represented here as a young *nayaka*, who stands at the right of the painting holding a pole. A dagger is shown tucked with the sash at the waist. He looks intently to the young damsel, who wears the garments of *choli* and *ghaghra* and engaged in churning the milk. The musical mode of

Sarang is compared with the sound of churning milk. The transparent yellow veil with stripes further adores the female. The monochrome sap green background further adds to the beauty of the rather simple composition of this painting.

The Ragamala folio in square format from a Chamba workshop is characterized by precise compositions, bold lines and palette of glowing passionate colours. The work is datable to the early 18th century. An inscription in *takri* characters at the top red border identifies the standing youth as 'Ragaputra Sarang, the son of Raga Sri'. Some other folios from the same set are known, which are housed in the Bharat Kala Bhawan, Varanasi, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh and some are now in the private hands. (VS)



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19. Ragaputra Chandra of Raga Malakausha

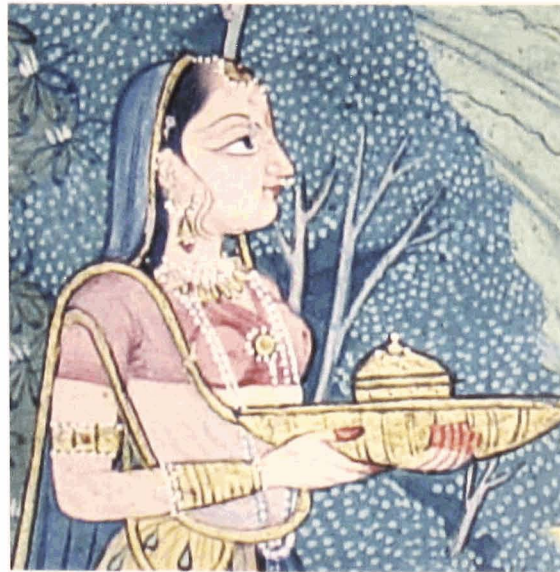
A folio of dispersed Chamba Ragamala series
From a Chamba workshop, circa 1765-70
Pigment painting and gold and silver pigments on paper
18.8 x 28.2 cms, Acc. No. 00.681.17

According to the musician Kshemakarna's system, Ragaputra Chandra or Chandrakaya stands as fifth son of Raga Malakausha. The Sanskrit text for the visual imagery speaks of a couple making a votive offering to the new moon.

Here, in the visual presentation of the Ragaputra Chandra, a handsome man is shown clad in white *jama* and sporting red *patka* and a turban with golden bands. He stands together with his wife on a terrace enclosed with red balustrades. With his raised right arm, he seems to offer to the new moon, while his wife attired in golden skirt (*ghaghra*) with leaf pattern and a diaphanous blue veil holds the offerings. She is keenly looking at her lord. Deep green conical trees and the leaves of a plantain break the rich yellow background.

A curved sky at the horizon is dotted with tiny stars and a new moon. Some white zigzag clouds apparently visible at the placid sky. The light mauve coloured floor of the terrace creates nice contrast to the yellow background.

This Ragamala folio in vertical format, though from a Chamba workshop, bear remarkable influence of the Guler style which had been becoming popular in the hills. Especially, the facial type of the female represents a blend of local Chamba style and alien influences. Such elements can also be noticed in some of the murals of the temple of Devi-Kothi in Baira *pargana*, which was constructed by Raja Umed Singh (r. 1748-64) of Chamba (VS)





20. Birth of Krishna

An illustration to the *Bhagvata Purana*
Chamba, The school of Laharu, dated 1758
Pigment painting on handmade paper
28 x 20.5 cms, Acc. No. 08.153.17

In this vertically composed picture, the dark grey monochrome background suggest the pitch dark and the dead of night. An architectural edifice with its door closed with a lock apparently suggests the feeling of a jail, where the wicked king Kamsa had imprisoned his sister Devaki and her husband - Vasudeva. Vasudeva, clad in light mauve *jama* and his wife Devaki in a red skirt (*ghagara*) both resting against a bold bolster carry with their hands the newly born blue-complexioned baby, i.e. Krishna.

Here, Krishna is not shown as infant child but artist has rendered him as a crowned and four-armed Vishnu with his conventional attributes, though the deity is smaller in size suggesting him as a baby. Vasudeva intentionally looks at his son's face envisaging the means of a escape of his son

from the wrath and clutches of the evil Kamsa.

The composition as well as the cool colour scheme provides an air of placidity of the mid night. The dark background illuminates the bright pavilion, topped by three white turrets, and figures placed in it. Two conical shaped trees, invariably seen in Laharu's other works, makes the composition symmetrical. Strangely, the painter Laharu has not shown the doorkeepers here, as seen in another painting by him depicting the same episode, where he lays the figures of two doorkeepers dozing near the door. The Chamba museum folio appears to be the opening leaf of the Laharu *Bhagvata* of which some 26 folios are still extant and are preserved now in the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba. (VS)





21. *Shakta-Bhanga*: The Breaking of Cart

An illustration to the *Bhagvata Purana*,
Chamba, The school of Laharu, dated 1758
Pigment painting on handmade paper
28.8 x 20.4 cms, Acc. No. 08.157.17

When a new born baby becomes turns three months and is ready to be brought out of the house for the first time, a ceremony called *utthana* is performed. When Krishna's mother was absorbed in the ceremony, she saw that the child felt sleepy. She carefully lay down the baby Krishna in a cradle, which she placed under a handcart. While the mother Yashoda was engaged in receiving the guests, Krishna started crying due to hunger and wanted milk.

At that time, Krishna decided to kill Shakatasura, a demon who assumed the form of a cart under which he lay. He struck the cart violently with his legs and broke it. Everyone was petrified when they heard the shattering sound of Shakatasura falling down dead. With great anxiety, the mother Yashoda ran quickly to her son.

The scene is set in an open space enclosed by a vista of conical trees arrayed in a row. The sap green

monochromatic background apparently suggests the lush grassy ground against which the figures as well as the cart are silhouetted. In the upper part of the painting, the blue complexioned Krishna after breaking the cart (*shakata*) kneels forward to his mother Yashoda, who advances to receive her son in her arms. Two more female figures are seen behind Yashoda exchanging thoughts on this strange incident. The demon in the guise of Sakata (cart) is turned upside down. All earthen pots containing milk and butter are broken and their contents are seen spilled all over the ground

In the lower part of the picture, the white complexioned Balarama, holding his sporting stick rushes upwards followed by three more *gopa* boys. All are bare bodied except the shorts and turban they sport. Laharu, the painter of this *Bhagavata Purana* series takes delight in painting two-third faces as seen in case with a *gopa* boy and a female standing behind Yashoda. (VS)





22. Krishna and the Cowherds Kill the Demon Aghasura

An illustration to the *Bhagvata Purana*
Chamba, The school of Laharu, dated 1758
Pigment painting on handmade paper
28 x 20.5 cms, Acc. No. 08.162.17

The tenth book of the *Bhagavata Purana* gives a detailed account of child Krishna's exploits. During his childhood his maternal uncle and sworn enemy Kamsa sent several demons with the intent to kill Krishna, but the latter vanquished them all. One such incident, on which the present picture relies, finds mention in the twelfth chapter of *Bhagvata Purana's* tenth book, which gives the following description:

“One day Krishna wanted to enjoy a picnic within the forest and therefore he went out early together with gopa boys, accompanied by their respective groups of calves. While they were enjoying, Aghasura, the demon sent by Kamsa appeared there with intent to kill Krishna. The demon assumed the form of a huge python and lay on the road. The gopa boys unaware of demon's plan entered with the group of their calves into the mouth of gigantic python. Krishna was still outside and Aghasura was waiting for him, thinking that as soon as Krishna entered he would close his mouth so that everyone would die. Meanwhile Krishna was thinking of how to save the boys and kill Aghasura. Eventually, he entered the mouth of Aghasura and when he was within the demon's mouth along with his friends, he expanded his body to such extent that the demon suffocated and died. After this, Krishna, by casting his nectarean glance upon his friends, the gopa boys, brought them back to life and with pleasure they all came out unhurt.”

This finely rendered work, though slightly damaged at the lower middle part, illustrates the above-mentioned episode in which cowherd boys with their calves stand on the elongated tongue of the mighty python and entering inside of his wide-open mouth.

Krishna, in the midst of the picture is shown dancing with joy after killing the demon Aghasura disguised in the form of a giant python. The demons body is spotted with gold streaks out of which gopa boys and calves are jumping out miraculously. The scene is carefully laid in an open space surrounded with typical conical shaped trees arrayed in a line.

The young Krishna is identifiable by his purple complexion and by the headgear. He sports striped shorts a fluttering *uttariya* and his usual stick in his raised hand. The fanciful conical trees with roundish foliage are rendered skillfully which lead to the decoration to the otherwise dull sap green background.

The folios of this *Bhagavata purana* set exhibit the marked stylistic conventions of Chamba art, which is reflected by the precise drawing, brilliant colour scheme and decorative trees. The painter Laharu, who painted this set in 1758 for his patron Mian Samsher Singh, the younger brother and wazir of Raja Umed Singh of Chamba expresses his remarkable power of observation. He lays more emphasis on the specific subject matter filling the space of his compositions with monochromatic backgrounds or simple architectural edifices. (VS)



23. King Dasaratha receives the *payasa*

From a Chamba workshop *circa* 1760-65.

Pigment painting on handmade paper

23.2 x 34 cms, Acc. No. D-68

This painting illustrates an episode from the great epic Ramayana (canto 16). On the request of *devas* to annihilate the evil and arrogant devil king Ravana, Vishnu desired king Dasharatha to be his father. Dasharatha who was without a son at that very time, was performing *aputreshthi yajna* to have progeny. During the *yajna*, a strange red-complexioned extraordinary being arose from the fire. Dazzling like the sun, he emerged from the flames of fire holding a gold vessel full of ethereal *payasa* (rice cooked in milk and sugar) and gave that to the king Dasharatha. He told the king to give the *payasa* to his wives for the sake of a male progeny. Accepting the *payasa* delightfully, Dasharatha rushed to his inner apartment and gave that celestial sweetmeat to all his three wives with a wish to procure sons.

This episode is well depicted in this painting from a Chamba workshop where the artist split the composition into two parts. At the right, the sumptuously dressed king Dasharatha is shown receiving the gold pot containing *payasa*. From the golden flames of *yajna*, the red-complexioned crowned figure emerges, which is mentioned as 'Agnipurush' written above his head in *Takri* characters. The king Dasharatha is again seen, though in different garments, seated with his wives giving them the celestial *payasa*. All his three queens are identifiable by their names written above their heads. The architecture of the palace topped by three pavilions is ornate. The trees with thick foliage arrayed in a row at the background are typical which reminds one the school of Laharu, the mid 18th century Gujarati-Manikanth painter of Chamba. (VS)





24. Redemption of Ahalya

An illustration to Balakanda of the Ramayana epic
from a Chamba workshop, circa 1760-65 AD
Pigment painting on handmade paper
23.2 x 34 cms, Acc. No. D-76

While Rama and Lakshmana were with sage Vishvamitra in the forest, they pass through sage Gautama's hermitage. Then Vishvamitra asked Rama for the redemption of Ahalya Gautama's wife from a curse. At the instance of the sage, Rama did accordingly and with the mere touch of his foot the Ahalya, who had been turned into a stone slab, was redeemed.

In this episode narrated in the *Balakanda* of Ramayana, the crowned Rama is shown in the middle accompanied by his younger brother Lakshmana and sage Vishvamitra. Emerging from a stone slab into a human, the grateful Ahalya holds a platter of offering for Rama. In the hermitage at the left, the indifferent sage Gautama is seen seated holding a manuscript and a rosary in his hands. Above in the turbulent sky streaked with typical white clouds, the gods Shiva, Brahma,

Indra and the celestial sage Narada applaud this act of Rama.

This picture from a Chamba workshop renders this scene with artistic finesse. The palette of soft muted colours creates a placid ambience. The preference to mark the sap green foreground with tufts of grass is typical of mid 18th century Chamba paintings. The tiny figures of wildlife below the trees suggests the forest. The sky rendered with figures is well balanced with the a vista of decorative leafy trees with numerous birds sporting upon them. The heads of Rama and Lakshmana appear slightly bigger compared to their torsos. Interestingly, the figure of Indra holding a goad on his shoulder, peeping down from the sky, who was responsible for Ahalya's curse dominates. (VS)





25. Portrait of Raja Dalip Singh of Guler

Guler style, *circa* 1740-45,
Attributed to Pandit Seu of Guler
Pigment painting on handmade paper
24.6 x 17 cms, Acc. No. 00.733

The reign of Raja Dalip Singh of Guler (r.1695-1741) is important in the history of Pahari painting. This aesthete prince was responsible for patronising the painters trained in the later Mughal style, who originated and developed a new painting style in the second decade of the eighteenth century in Guler. Besides patronising the painters, Raja Dalip Singh had also sumptuously rewarded a poet Uttam by name, who in 1703 had composed a poetic text '*Daliparanjini*', a Guler chronicle. This historically important text, hitherto unpublished, contains significant information about the Guler State.

The likeness of Raja Dalip Singh, datable to circa 1740, represents him of a mature age, when the famed Guler style had been firmly established by the Kashmiri painter Pandit Seu and his collaterals. Under the canopy of Raja Dalip Singh and his able son and deputy Bishan Singh, these migrated Kashmiri painters enriched the Guler style by producing paintings of considerable merit for the Guler court.

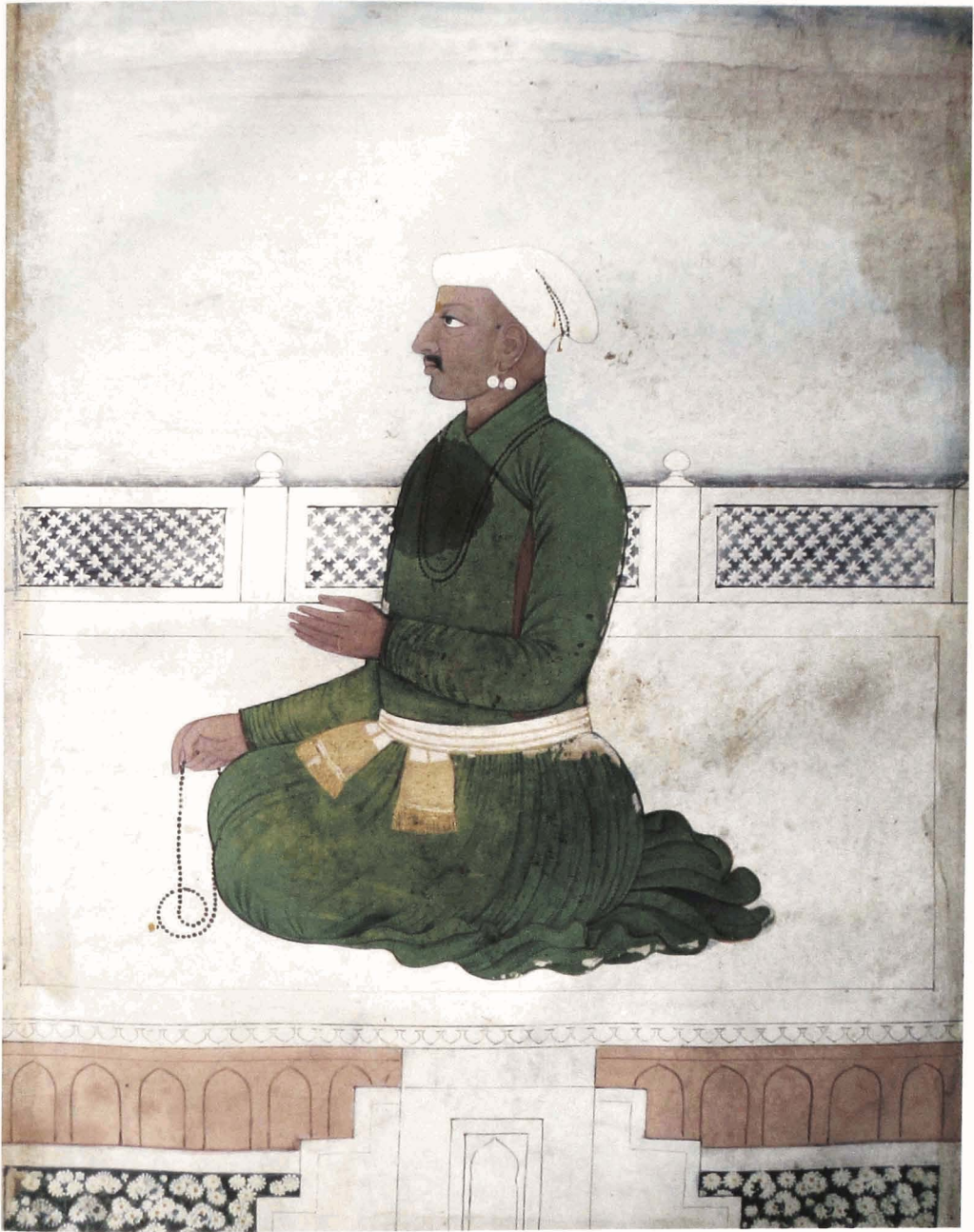
The likeness of Raja Dalip Singh showing him of duskier complexion is attributed here to Pandit Seu, the Kashmiri painter who was active at Guler in the first half of the eighteenth century. On a raised marble terrace, enclosed with balustrades, Raja is seen counting the beads of rosary in his right hand. He wears a green *jama* fastened at the waist with a sash (*patka*) of brocade. He sports a white turban and pearls-studded earrings. The sandal paste mark on his forehead and two strings of *Tulasi* around his neck apparently suggest his religious faith of Vaishvanism. The sky at the background is plain save the crimson streaks. The

whole ambience provides an air of placidity.

The realistic treatment of his face with remarkable softness is reminiscent of the later Mughal style of Emperor Muhammad Shah period (1719-48). The expression on his face is well captured by the artist, which reveals his pious character and of religious bent of mind. The folds of his *jama* are rendered naturalistic. The colour scheme employed in this work is of soft pastel colours.

The meadows with flowers shown on the either side of the stairs in the foreground decorate the composition of this painting. The broad dark blue coloured border at the three sides of the picture is illuminated with gold arabesque designs, which is an alien element rarely noticed in the Guler painting in the first half of the eighteenth century. (VS)





26. Portrait of Raja Raj Singh of Chamba

Guler style, *circa* 1780-85

Ascribed here to the painter Ranjha

Pigment painting on handmade paper

23.2 x 15 cms, Acc. No. 08.325.17

Raja Raj Singh was a brave and able ruler of Chamba, who is still cherished by the people of Chamba for his heroic personality and noble deeds. Like his father Raja Umed Singh (r.1748-64), he was also an ardent devotee of the great goddess 'Chamunda'. After his father's death in 1764, Raja Raj Singh succeeded him at the tender age of nine years.

Raja Raj Singh was also a great connoisseur of arts. He had generously extended patronage to the gifted painters of Guler and had granted them lavish land grants in the Rilhu *paragana* of his territory at the Kangra border. This fact is confirmed by an inscription written on the back of a painting by the painter Attra, belonging to the Guler painter family. The earliest known portrait of Raj Singh in Guler style is in the L.D. Museum, Ahmedabad (formerly N.C. Mehta collection) in which the young Raj Singh (of fifteen years) is shown watching a dance performance.

Around 1770, when the sons of the celebrated Guler painter Nainsukh were seeking royal patronage, it was Raja Raj Singh, who invited them to serve for the Chamba court and extended them liberal land grants. Apart from Nainsukh's sons, he had also given fertile tracts to some other Guler painters, whose names are recorded in the ledgers of the priests at the places of

Hindu pilgrimage. Hence, the Guler style flourished under the generous patronage of Raja Raj Singh. A large number of portraits of this Chamba prince are extant and known.

In this portrait, Raja Raj Singh is shown seated on a floral carpet leaning against a bolster at the balcony of his palace. He sports a long beard and wears a white *jama* tied at the waist with a sash. He sports an orange turban decorated with a plume and *arghu*, a crescent shaped gold ornament. The blue shawl that he wraps around him suggest the winter season. The Raja holds a stem of smoking pipe *huqqa* placed before him. An aged attendant behind him waves the fly whisk (*chauri*) over his master's head. A falcon perched on the balustrade of the balcony and a hand glove placed on floor apparently reveals Raj Singh's passion for hunting. The sword placed beside him in the foreground reminds one of this brave warrior prince.

This sensitive and exquisite work represents the school of Ranjha, who was a fourth son of the legendary painter Nainsukh of Guler. Besides Raj Singh's portraits, Ranjha also had painted a series on the romance of Usha and Anirudha, which is well preserved in the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba. (VS)



27. Brahma Bows at the Feet of Vishnu

Guler, *circa* 1775

Pigment painting on handmade paper

23 x 31 cms, Acc. No. 08.312.17

Vishnu, the protector of the universe, has from time to time incarnated himself for the welfare of mankind. Here, as seen in this Guler painting, Brahma is seen beseeching Vishnu by falling at latter's feet. In an architectural setting, the splendour of Vishnu's heaven (*vaikuntha*) is depicted by jewel studded gold architecture. Underneath a parasol held by an attendant, Vishnu together with his consort Lakshmi sits on a raised couch. A four headed Brahma bows at Vishnu's feet for obvious reason to request him to incarnate himself. A four armed Vishnu holding his conventional attributes leans forward to greet Brahma in a gesture of assurance. Lakshmi smilingly witness this very moment through her diaphanous vermilion veil. To the right part of the picture, *devas* in different hues of their bodies are arrayed in a diagonal row.

The painter of this magnificent painting, following the traits of the Nainsukh *gharana*, has shown great artistic finesse labour in the depiction of ornate walls of the palace. The types of architectural edifices are typical of the circa 1775-80 Guler style. It was the period when the Guler painters had already received patronage of Raja Raj Singh (r. 1764-90) of Chamba. The fine shading work done on the faces and other parts of the figures exhibits the hallmark of the Guler school. The painter of this work, possibly Nikka, the elder son of Nainsukh, successfully renders the frontal face of the female attendant holding the parasol. On the reverse, the painting bears an elaborate and illuminating Sanskrit text in *devanagari* script in gold letters against a blue-black background. (VS)





28. Sudama Takes Leave of Krishna

Guler, circa 1775

Pigment painting on handmade paper

28.5 x 20.2 cms, Acc. No. 08.186

The text of *Bhagavata Purana* contains several legends related to Krishna and the story of Sudama, too, finds mention in this great work. Sudama, a poor Brahman, was a friend of Krishna since childhood when both were students at Guru Sandipan's *ashram*. With the course of time, Krishna became the reputed king of Dvarika, while Sudama stayed as a humble Brahman living in a village. Living through some bad times, when Sudama experienced hardships, his wife reminded him of his friendship with Krishna. Eventually, Sudama set off to meet his old friend.

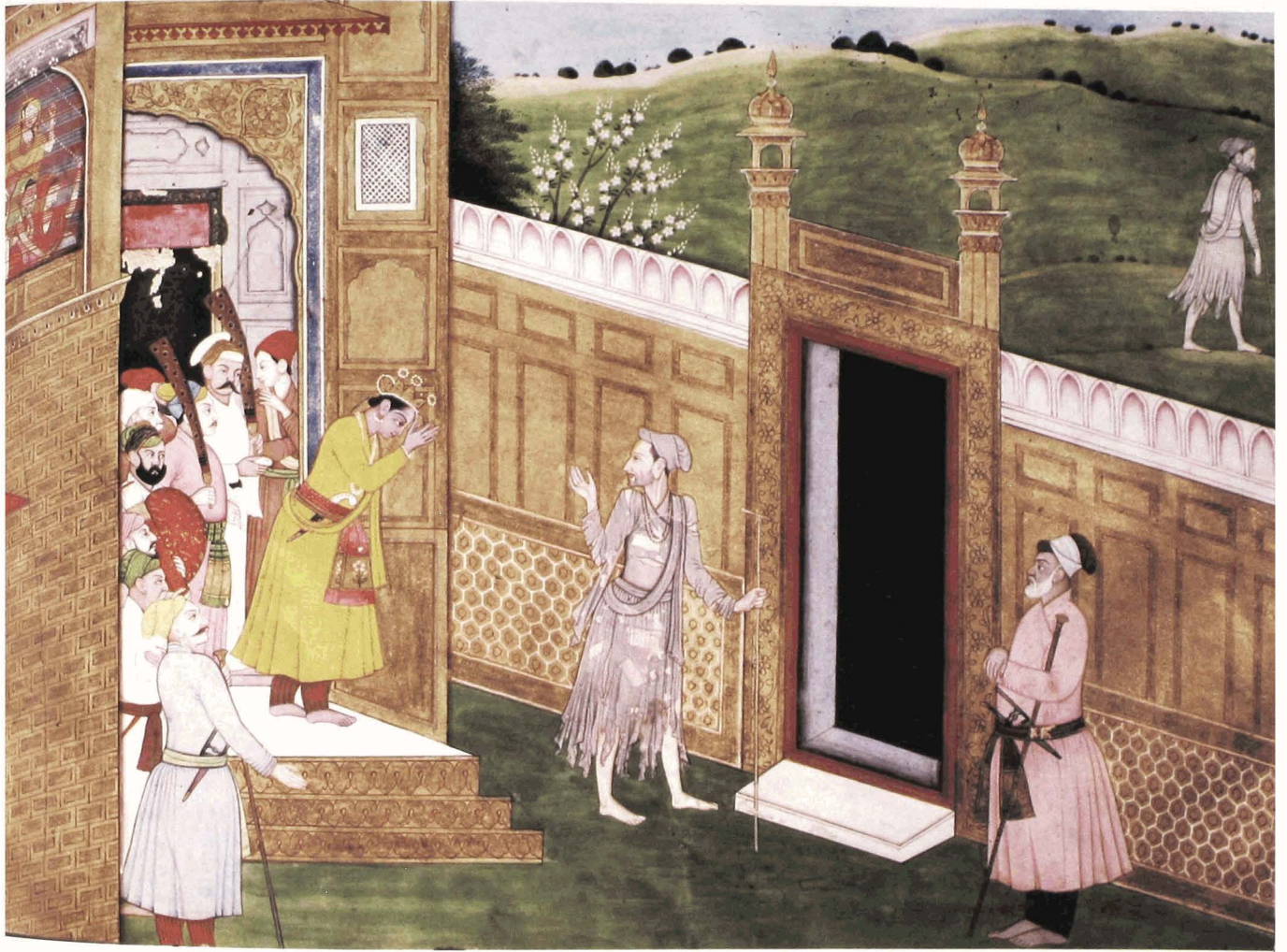
On hearing Sudama's name, Krishna himself rushed bare footed to the door to greet his dear friend. He made Sudama sit on his throne and also washed his feet with great joy. After staying with Krishna for sometime Sudama never asked his friend for help. Sudama greatly enjoyed Krishna's hospitality and finally decided to return to his house empty handed.

In this episode illustrated here, the poor Sudama, clad in rags, is depicted in the middle of the picture taking leave of Krishna. The latter, together with his courtiers, is seen bidding farewell to his dear friend. Near the gate an old doorkeeper holding a long

staff surprisingly witness the love of two unequal friends. Females of the palace, too, are peeping curiously through the bamboo screen from the balcony. The regal affluence of Krishna is depicted by his dazzling palace of gold. With utter disappointment and filled with a heavy heart, Sudama is depicted once more in the deserted background going back to his home.

The artist of this finely executed painting, in all likelihood belongs to the Nainsukh family, and has succeeded in rendering the misery of poor Sudama and in contrast the affluence of Krishna. The variations of facial types noticed in the group of courtiers is remarkable, which reminds one the school of Nainsukh. Possibly, this series together with other paintings was commissioned by Raja Raj Singh of Chamba from the Guler painters (sons of Nainsukh) who were given lavish land grants. The fine brushwork and neatly applied pigments create a magical world. The figure of the poor Brahman Sudama, silhouetted against a gold background, makes the composition lively. The painting in Guler style is datable to circa 1770-75. (VS)





29. Sudama's Bewilderment

Guler, circa 1775

Pigments painting on handmade paper

29.5 x 20.2 cms, Acc. No. 08.187

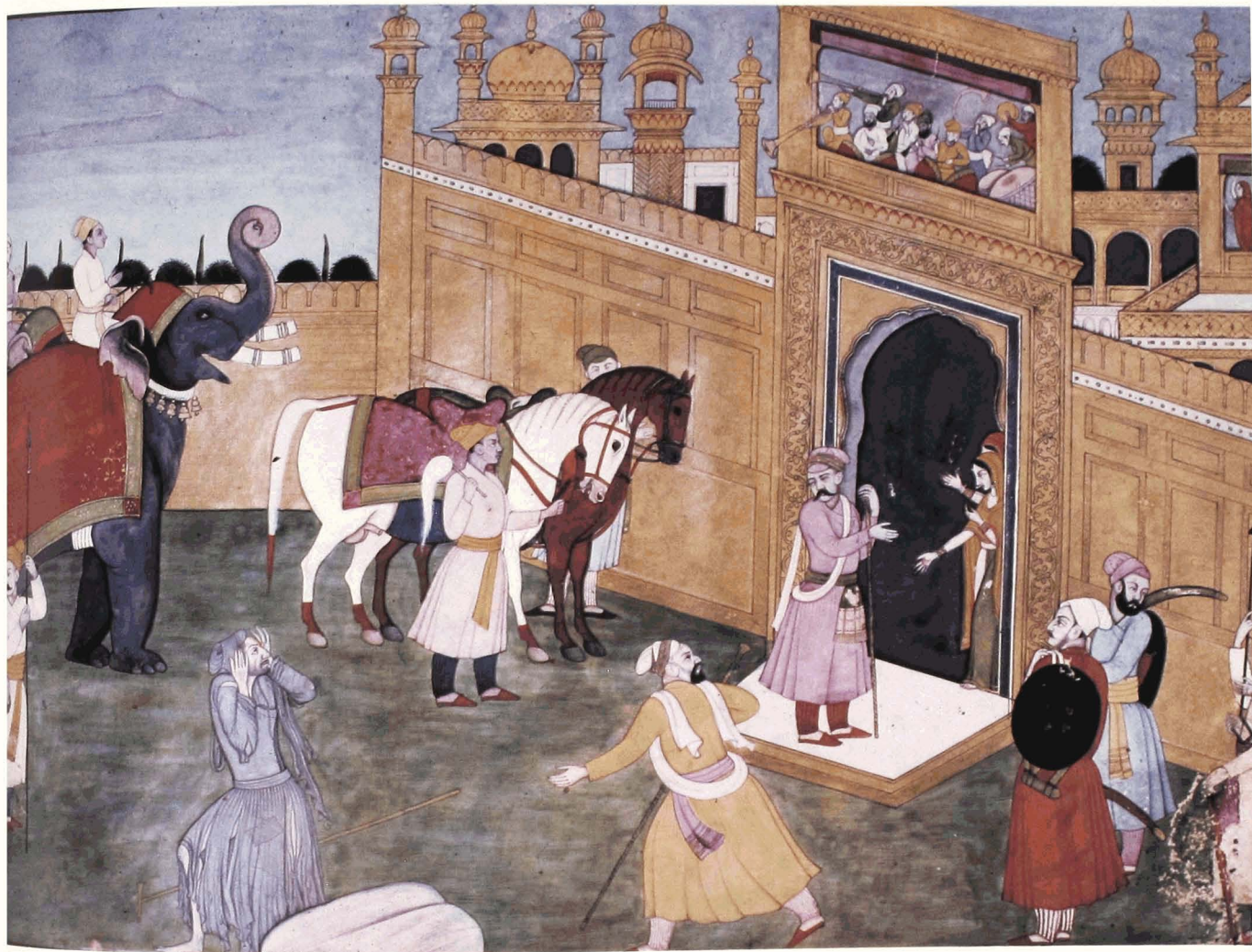
Although Sudama greatly enjoyed his stay while at Dvarika and eventually returned back home. On his return, he found a golden palatial mansion instead of his thatched hut. He could not believe on seeing his family members dressed in extremely nice clothes and waiting for him. Sudama thanked his friend Krishna and lived an austere life after that.

The scene depicted in this painting is dominated by a golden walled architecture. The splendour of the palace of Sudama is further enhanced by showing elephants and horses standing near the entrance in the service of Sudama. Several attendants and servants are seen strolling everywhere in readiness to serve him just at the slightest hint. The doorkeeper holding a long staff and some handmaids humbly greet

Sudama. A band of musicians (*naubat*) above the entrance playing auspicious music in honour of the visit of their master. At the farther distance in the background, a woman wrapped in a vermilion shawl and attended by maids is none other than Sudama's wife. She is anxiously watching the happy welcome of her husband – Sudama – from the balcony of the palace.

The painter of this charming work undoubtedly from the Nainsukh *gharana*, renders intricate details assimilating the Guler conventions. The whispering groups of men standing on the either side of the picture apparently enliven the composition. Sudama's gesture by placing his hands on his ears suggest his bewildered state of mind. (VS)





30. Vishnu Slays the Demons Madhu and Kaitabha

Illustration to *Devimahatmya* text (*Chandi-Path*)

Guler, circa 1775

Pigment painting on handmade paper

15.4 x 24.1 cms, Acc. No. 08. 297

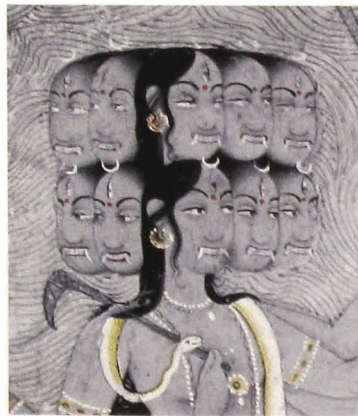
Inscribed in *devanagari* characters at the top red border

In *Devimahatmyam* text (the glory of the great goddess), the demons Madhu and Kaitabha figure in an obscure cosmogonic allegory, which states that they were created from the root of Vishnu's ear, whilst he was sleeping at the end of a *kalpa* age (a day of Brahma). The demons had intended to kill Brahma who was seated on the lotus springing from Vishnu's navel. Brahma on seeing the demons, invoked 'Yoganidra', a goddess personifying Vishnu's cosmic sleep, for help. Before she could act to destroy the demons, Vishnu awoke and annihilated both – Madhu and Kaitabha. Vishnu, therefore, is known by his epithet 'Madhusudana' and 'Kaitabhajit'.

In this painting illustrating an episode from a *Devimahatmyam* (*Chandi-Path*) series, a ten-headed dark goddess Yoganidra, having multi arms and legs, is seen standing in the ocean to the left of the picture. She witnesses the heroic act of Vishnu slaying the demons Madhu and Kaitabha. Vishnu is clad in yellow *dhoti*

(lower garment) and supports a crown topped by a peacock feather. He holds a mace (*gada*) and a disk (*chakra*) in his rear hands, while with his fore hands, he holds the demons and slays them. The orange and light mauve coloured demons, wearing shorts, are seen struggling in combat. The six-headed giant serpent Shesha with its erected hood is coiling to the right of the picture.

In an oval format, the entire scene is set in the grey ocean; the curvy lines, marked with a stylus on silver pigment, indicate the ripples in the water. All the figures are labelled in *devanagari* characters at the top red border. The brushwork is precise and line is fine. This set of *Chandi-Path* seems to have come from a workshop of Guler painters (other than Pandit Seu's descendants) based within the border of Chamba-Kangra area. Most probably, the painter of this series belonged to the family of Fauzu, settled from Guler to Chari (near Kangra) whose family was patronised by





31. Krishna, Aniruddha, Usha and Their Entourage Triumphantly Enter the City of Dwarka

Guler style at Chamba court, *circa* 1790-1800

Attributed to the painter Ranjha

15.1 x 23.1 cms, Acc. No.00.665.17

The eternal romance of Usha and Aniruddha finds mention in the Bhagvata Purana. The beautiful maiden Usha was the daughter of the *Asura* king Bana of Shonitapura. Once she saw a very handsome young man in her dream and developed a deep desire of marrying him. Usha's friend Chित्रलेखा identified Aniruddha, the son of Pradyumana and grandson of Krishna. She went to Dwarka and by using her magical powers smuggled Aniruddha when he was asleep. Usha remained with her lover in her chamber for many days but their secret love was revealed one day when Bana's minister informed him about Aniruddha's presence. At Banasura's command, Aniruddha was imprisoned. Meanwhile, the sage Narada informed Krishna about Aniruddha's captivity. Krishna accompanied by Balarama and Pradyumana waged war against Bana and defeated him and released his grandson. Krishna was about to kill Banasura but spared his life at the request of Shiva.

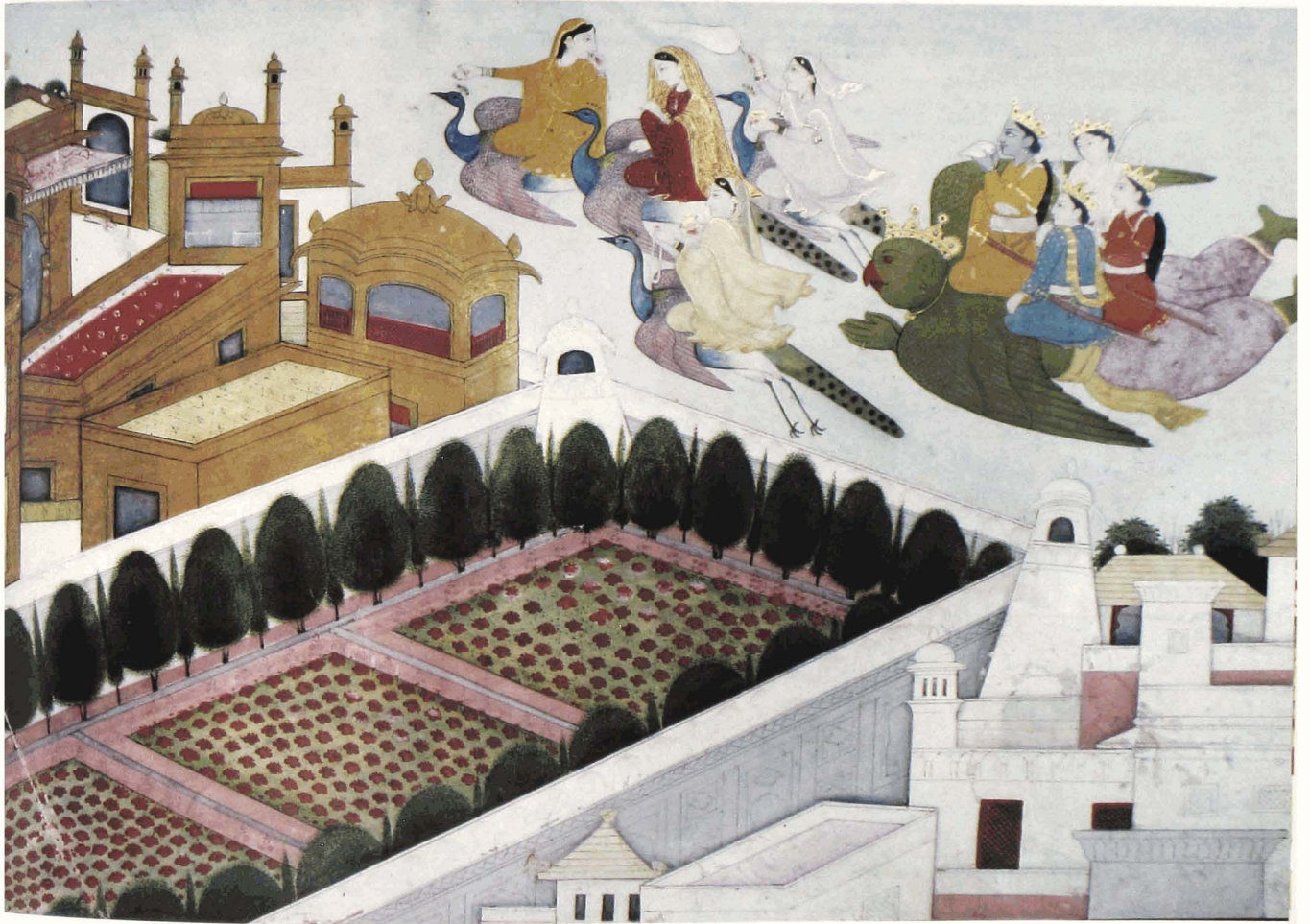
This picture, being the last of the '*Usha-charita*' series represents the arrival of Usha and Aniruddha and others in Dwarka. Krishna, mounted on a green bodied and crowned Garuda, is seen in yellow garments, blowing his conch '*Panchajanya*' announcing his triumph over Banasura. Balarama is seen clad in blue and seated beside Krishna. Pradyumana is also

seen in a white *jama*, while his son Aniruddha in orange robe sits at the back. Mounted on flying four peacock are females from Banasura's palace, among which the one dressed in red *peshwaz* and bashfully holding a gold veil is none other than Usha, the bride of Aniruddha. One of her friends waving a *chauri* over her head reminds one of Usha's royal status.

The entourage is seen flying high in the sky over the city of Dwarka. The shining golden buildings of Krishna's palace apparently indicates his affluence. A garden decorated with meadows of flowers and bulbous trees arranged in rows is enclosed by high walls and watch towers. Interestingly, no inhabitants are shown by the painter in this painting.

This series consisting of 21 pictures, all bound together in an album, is one of the best narratives done by the Guler painters for the Chamba court. The compositions and the stylistic idioms and trends suggest this series could have been painted around *circa* 1780-90 A.D. In all likelihood, it could be the work of the painter Ranjha, who was the fourth son of Nainsukh of Guler. Ranjha's works can be identified by the soft light colours and slightly dwarfish figures. He does not use stippling work in shading over the face and in the treatment of hair. (VS)





32. Sacrifice of King Hammir

Guler, *circa* 1810-15

Pigment painting on handmade paper
33.9 x 24.2 cms, Acc. No. 00.679.17

The medieval vernacular literature of India appears in the form of the bardic chronicles of Rajasthan. These poetic works, composed by the court bards, afford a stirring record of the fierce struggles between the Hindu kingdoms and Muslim invaders. '*Hammir-Rasau*' or '*Hammir-Hath*' is a poetic text that celebrates the prowess of the valorous Hammir, the king of Ranthambor in Rajasthan. This poem gives an account of the war between the King Hammir and the Muslim invader Ala-ud-din. The valour of Hammir in his struggle against the emperor Alau-ud-din is very popular, which inspired Hill rulers to commission it from their court painters. Even Hammir's legend was composed in poetry by the poet Gwal for his Sikh patron Desa Singh Majithia, a favourite of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Later, the poet Gwal also attended the court of Raja Balbir Sen of Mandi for whom he composed a text '*Balbir-vilas*', for which the poet was richly rewarded

In the Bhuri Singh Museum collection, there is a series of eight miniatures narrating the heroism and chivalry of king Hammir. Though he had defeated the Ala-ud-din in the war, but his over enthusiastic soldiers marched after battle holding the banners of Ala-ud-din. On seeing these banners and wrongly assuming this as

Ala-ud-din's victory, all the queens of Hammir performed *jauhar*. Learning this, Hammir was so dejected that he also offered his own head to Shiva after installing his son as Raja.

In the upper right part of the picture, the deserted castle of Hammir is seen on a hillock. Hammir is painted twice; first to the left of picture where he installs his son as his successor. In the middle of the composition, Hammir again is seen beheading himself leaning his head over a shivalingam. All his attendants are seen in a pensive mood on seeing their master's self-sacrifice. The painter of this picture has incorporated interesting details in this painting. To the upper left, the funeral procession of Hammir is shown with royal regalia (*meghadambara*). The royal horses and banners and a band of musicians are also depicted at the cremation ground. The funeral pyre set on fire can be seen at the extreme left in the background. The minute figures are shown bathing in the river. At the top in the sky the crowned king Hammir is shown once more seated on a celestial vehicles (*vimana*) taken to heaven by the angels. The entire composition apparently exhibits the painter's remarkable power of imagination. It is possible that he must have had witnessed the royal funeral. (VS)





33. Equestrian Portrait of Raja Sansar Chand Katoch of Kangra

Guler, *circa* 1815

Pigment painting on handmade paper
29.9 x 18 cms, Acc. No. 00.698.17

Mrigaya or the sport of hunting is royal pastime and various Pahari princes were very fond of having themselves portrayed during hunting expeditions. In number of surviving Pahari pictures, these Hill princes are invariably shown engaged in falconing or shooting at a prey.

The equestrian portrait of Raja Sansar Chand, the celebrated Katoch prince of Kangra apparently reveals his passion for hunting as his pastime. In the foreground, the Raja is shown riding on a well caparisoned brown horse. His hunting dog is also visible below keeping an equal pace with that of the galloping stallion. Clad in a white jama, the Raja is fully equipped with bow and arrow and accompanied by a retinue seen on the farther hill across the river in

the background. These accompanists carry falcons, a huqqa, water-pitchers, and other accessories required for hunting.

Though this portrait does not bear any inscription, yet Raja Sansar Chand Katoch is identifiable by his stout and heavy built structure and his familiar facial type, which is seen in his other portraits. The conical turban of this Katoch chief is typical of the rulers of the Kangra state. This sensitive work, datable to *circa* 1790-1800, seems to have been done by a Guler painter working for this great patron of arts. The painter has rendered fine brush-work, especially in the treatment of Raja's moustaches and beard, where one can see the fine strokes of brush. (VS)





34. Raja Jit Singh with his Rani

Kangra, *circa* 1810.

Pigment painting on handmade paper
31.1 x 24.5 cm (Acc. No. 00.685.17)

Portraiture is one of the important subject matters of the Pahari painting. The Hilly princes were fond of having themselves portrayed in various pictorial settings. A great deal of portraits of the Pahari rulers are known showing them engaged in holding *darbars*, conversing with their *wazir* or courtiers, watching dance performance, performing *puja*, smoking, hunting, strolling in the garden or dallying with women in the harem. The Guler painters were par excellent in rendering the realistic likenesses of their patrons capturing their moods.

In an intimate setting, here, Raja Jit Singh of Chamba is shown seated with his Rani in an ornate marble pavilion. Rani Sharda was a princess of Jammu, who is still remembered in Chamba for the consecration of Radha-Krishna temple in the premises of Lakshmi-Narayan temple complex. Leaning against a crimson bolster, Raja Jit Singh sits on an embroidered carpet enjoying a freshly prepared *huqqa* carried by a maidservant standing behind. His royal status is indicated by a *surpesh* and a plume tucked in his turban. He wears a yellow ochre *jama* and a turban typical to the period *circa* 19th century as evident in several of the

surviving portraits of Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra. A sword fastened with straps at his waist reminds one the dignity of this Rajput prince. Rani Sharda, also clad in richly decorated yellow *peshwaz* and veil, is intently gazing at her lord. She is attended by two maidservants standing in readiness behind her; one waving a fly-whisk and another holding a tray containing a casket of betel-leaf.

The resplendent architecture of the palace seen in the picture is sheer imagination of the painter, who takes delight in decorating the entire setting with cypress trees, blossoms and meadows of flowers in the foreground. A pair of ducks near the water cistern further enhances the beauty of this elegant and softly rendered work. The receding green hills and a river visible through the window suggest the perspective. Even some minutely drawn group of people and a ferry-boat at the farther bank of river can also be seen.

This painting, in all likelihood, appears to be the work of the painter Chhajju, the worthy son of Nikka and the grandson of Guler. Some signed works in respect of this painter are published and well-known.





35. Rama's Victory Procession

Kangra, *circa* 1820.
School of Sajnu of Kangra at Mandi court
Pigment painting on handmade paper
31.1 x 24.5 cms, Acc. No. 00.685.17

In this delightful picture in Kangra style, an equestrian Rama together with his paraphernalia is shown marching ahead with great pomp and show. Possibly, the painting exhibit the scene soon after Rama's triumph over the demon king Ravana.

Here, the blue-complexioned and crowned Rama, clad in richly decorated yellow robe is shown riding upon a beautifully caparisoned stallion. He is accompanied by all his three brothers, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughana, though they are not identified with their names. All are crowned; one of them holds a gold parasol studded with precious jewels. Next to them, in the foreground, are Vibhishana (dark skinned) the rebel brother of Ravana yet devotee of Rama and Jamavana, the king of bears. Holding his usual attribute, a mace (gada) on his shoulder,

Hanumana marches ahead of Rama, while Sugriva (or Amgada) carrying a wrapped sword stands nearby. At the far distance in the background, an army comprising cavalrymen, elephant riders and foot soldiers are seen decorated with armour.

This painting in Kangra style, datable to *circa* 1820, reminds one the school of Sajnu, a gifted painter of the old Kangra town. He had been in the services of Raja Ishvari Sen of Mandi as evident from some inscribed and dated works revealing the signature of this painter. His style exhibits a soft palette of colours, besides fine and ornate workmanship. Sajnu excels in rendering minute intricate details, besides fine shading work visible on the faces of the figures, green background and on the bodies of Jamvana, Hanuman and Sugriva. (VS)





36. Vishnu and Lakshmi Enthroned

Guler style at Chamba, *Circa* 1800
Pigment painting on handmade paper
Size 21.3 x 15.8 cms, Acc. No. 62.68

On the seat of a large lotus flower (*kamalasana*) on a golden couch, Vishnu sits together with his consort and perfect counterpart Lakshmi under a parasol. The crowned Vishnu carries his conventional attributes, a conch (*shankha*), a discus (*chakra*), a mace (*gada*) and a lotus (*padma*) in his four hands, while Lakshmi, too, is portrayed with her four hands holding a manuscript, mirror, lotus flower and a bunch of grapes. Vishnu turns his head towards his consort who looks herself in the mirror she holds. Vishnu wears yellow dhoti garment and an *uttariya* that flutters over his shoulder.

The scene is laid in an architectural setting exhibiting a marble pavilion supported by fluted lotus pillars, cusped arches and balustrade. The red carpet

with floral pattern further embellishes the pavilion. Some utensils and vessels for *puja* are placed before the deities. The background is monochromatic sky coloured, save the finely drawn trees with leafy foliages and blossoms coming out of that.

This painting unmistakably belongs to the family workshop of Nikka of Guler who had migrated to Chamba during the reign of Raja Raj Singh of Chamba (1764-1790). The present work seems to be in the hand of Harkhu, the son of the painter Nikka. The squarish faces and elongated eyes are typical to the early 19th century Guler style. The treatment of hair with a black mass of black and the typical crescent-shaped head ornament (*arghu*) apparently indicative of the date of this work i.e. *circa* 1800. (VS)





37. Sadashiva

Kangra, *circa* 1820

Pigment painting on handmade paper

25.9 x 19.3 cms, Acc. No. 00.699.17

In Hindu mythology, Shiva, traditionally considered the God of destruction has many forms. Sadashiva is a five-faced form of Shiva, who represents the five directions, five elements and five senses. Each head of Sadashiva is of different hue indicating his nature. A brief inscription in *devanagari* at the top red border identifies his heads in following sequence:

Sadyojata: white; *Ishana*: dark; *Vamadeva*: yellow; *Tattvapurusha*: red and *Aghora*: blue.

The exquisitely painted *dhyana* of Sadashiva, as represented in this Kangra painting, affords an interesting iconic image of the deity. Wrapped in a leopard's skin, the ten armed Sadashiva is shown seated on his usual vehicle - the bull Nandi. He wears a long garland of human skulls. A snake curls around his neck,

while baby snakes coiled around his wrists further embellish him. In his ten arms, he holds his various attributes in clockwise order: *kapala*: a skull, *sarpa*: a snake, *padma*: a lotus flower, *damaru*: tabor drum, *akshamala*: a rosary, *khatwang*: a stick, *varada mudra*: boon granting gesture, *shakti*: a spear, *trishula*: a trident and *abhaya mudra*: the gesture of assurance.

Against the dull green background, the white complexioned Sadashiva and his vehicle - the Nandi bull - makes a sombre contrast. The monochromatic background is plain except for the tufts of grass seen in the foreground. The smiling faces of Sadashiva appear benign. The picture is enclosed by a black rule. The bold lines and simplified treatment of face without any shading work suggest the date *circa* 1820 of this work. (VS)





38. Manifestation of the Goddess Kali

Kangra, *circa* 1820

Pigment painting on handmade paper

27.7 x 20.6 cms, Acc. No. 66.1

Kali, who is one of main goddesses of the Tantric tradition is a manifestation of one of the aspects of *Dasamahavidyas* (ten Tantric goddesses), which are usually depicted within the confines of a burial ground, sitting or standing on a seemingly dead Shiva or a corpse.

It is night time as indicated by a crescent moon and stars that dot the sky. The four armed and crowned goddess Kali emerges in the desolate region of *Shmashana* – the burial ground. She holds a sword (*khadga*) and a freshly severed head in two of her hands, while with other two hands she makes the gestures of *abhaya* (assurance) and *varada* (boon granting). She is astride upon a four armed Shiva, who reclines above a corpse (*shava-vahana*) on a burning pyre. The ash-smeared Shiva holds a *kapala* (skull cup) and *vajra* (thunderbolt) in his hands. The dark goddess Kali is bare bodied except for a girdle of chopped

hands. She is adorned with a long garland of skulls and *preta-kundala* in her ears. Her hair is dishevelled and a snake runs across her belly. Her face with three eyes expresses a benign countenance despite her extended tongue and fangs. The henna smeared palms and feet further adorn the goddess. The presence of female jackals, crows and vulture enhance the awestruck atmosphere of the cremation ground.

In the background above the upper right side of the picture, dwarf figures of the *devas* comprising of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and possibly, Surya or Agni (of red complexion) are seen standing with folded hands in obeisance. This painting bearing strong idioms and traits of the late Guler style is datable to *circa* 1820 and seems to have been painted for a practitioner of *Tantra* (*sadhaka*) for the purpose of a visual aid for concentration (*dhyana*) (VS).





39. Sita in Valmiki's Hermitage

Guler, circa 1800

Pigment painting on handmade paper

18.8 x 28.8 cms, Acc. No. 08.314

In the *uttara-kanda* of Valmiki's Ramayana, the banishment of Sita is described at great length. When Sita had been banished by Rama, she was pregnant. She took refuge in the *ashram* of the sage Valmiki, which was located in a forest on the banks of the river Tamsa and started living there as the daughter of Valmiki. Time rolled by and at the due time, Sita gave birth to beautiful and identical twins as effulgent as the moon. The sage joyfully looked at the twins and made the sacrament for them with a handful of *kusha* grass to protect them from evils. The child who was born first and cleansed with *kusha* was named as 'Kusha' and the other cleansed with *lava* was given the name 'Lava'.

With regard to the birth of Kusha, another legend is popular in the hills. While staying at Valmiki's *ashram*, once Sita was going to fetch water from the river, she placed her son Lava in the cradle under the care of the sage Valmiki, who was meditating in his *ashram*. Afraid of any intruder and without informing Valmiki Sita took the child with her. Meanwhile, after the completion of his *puja*, the sage Valmiki saw the empty cradle and did not find the baby anywhere. Eventually, by exercising his divine powers, he created another child with the auspicious *kusha* grass. Then, Sita returned back from the river and was surprised to see the 'new' baby identical to her son. On knowing the whole story, she named the baby 'Kusha' being born of

kusha grass.

The scene is carefully laid in a placid ambience of the *ashram* of the hermit Valmiki. Amidst the trees with thick foliage, Valmiki's thatched hut made of logs is visible. Wrapped in deer's skin, the sage is shown in the middle of the picture creating the child with his spiritual prowess. At the lower right part of the painting are placed on ground the accessories for *yajna* that the sage had freshly performed. In the background, Sita is shown fetching water from the river. She is clad in red garments and a veil of brocade. In the picture, a pair of antelopes, a peacock and birds is shown suggesting the serene atmosphere of the *ashram*. The painter has intentionally shown a female monkey on a tree holding closely her baby, which apparently suggest symbolically the mothers' attachment to the child. On stylistic grounds, this splendid painting can be attributed to a Guler painter, Chhajju by name, who was son of Nikka and grandson of Nainsukh. His father Nikka was the court painter of Chamba during the reign of Raja Raj Singh (1764-94). Chhajju, together with his collaterals Harkhu and Gokal, was also served for Raja Raj Singh and his son and successor Raja Jit Singh (1794-1808). The signed works in respect of Chhajju and Harkhu are known and the works of both these painters can be identified. (VS)



40. Divine Lovers in Moonlit Night

Guler style at Chamba, *circa* 1800

Attributed to Chhajju

Pigment painting on handmade paper

18.6 x 12.9 cms, Acc. No. 00.692.17

Krishna, the divine lover, is a perennial source of inspiration for poets and painters alike. A large number of Pahari paintings based on the legend of Krishna were painted by the Indian painters of various schools.

On the bank of river Jamuna, the fluting Krishna stands with his counterpart Radha in an intimate setting. Gazing into each other's eyes, both the lovers are lost in rapture. Radha has lovingly placed her right hand on Krishna's shoulder. Krishna wearing the yellow *pitambar* is adorned with a crown topped peacock feather. Radha, dressed in a red skirt and a dark

blue shawl with gold stripes, holds a platter containing betel leaf as offering (*tambula-seva*). The foliage of a finely rendered tree with blossoms seems as canopy above them. The crescent moon above in the sky and twinkling stars soothe the erotic tension.

Possibly the work is in the hand of Chhajju, the third son of Nikka, whom Raja Raj Singh of Chamba had rewarded with a land grant. Chhajju together with his other brothers had been painting for the Chamba court until early 19th century. The work is done in a dextrous hand with precise lines and a cool palette of pigments.(VS)





41. Mercury Chasing the Beauty

Kangra, *circa* 1825

Pigment painting on handmade paper

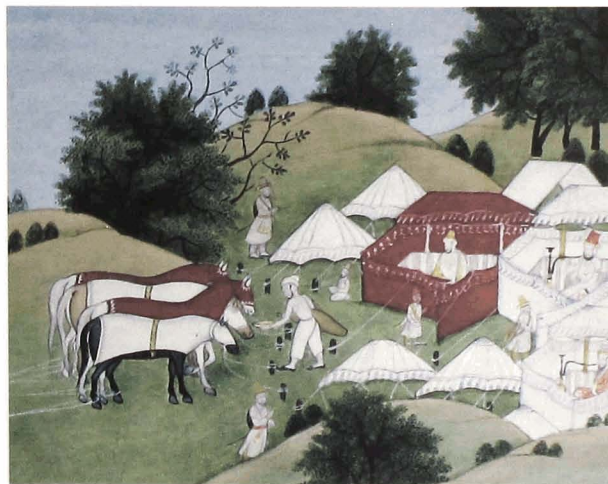
24.4 x 30.3 cms, Acc. No. 00.683

In Indian mythology, mercury is considered to be Shiva's seed. According to '*Rasa-Sastra*', an Indian treatise on alchemy, it is described that if a young and beautiful maiden, fresh from her bath after her first menstruation, passes by a mercury well, the *rasa* or *parada* (quicksilver) gushes out from the well and chases the coy maiden. The young maiden must flee on a swift horse to avoid contact. After fleeing for a long distance (one *yojana*), the mercury's movement becomes weak and it is gradually deposited into small pits whence it is collected by people.

This interesting story attracted the attention of the Mughal patrons and painters in the 18th century and the painters of Pahari schools also borrowed this subject from their Mughal counterparts. This

immaculately rendered Kangra painting illustrates the above mentioned narrative of the '*Rasa-Sastra*'. A beautiful maiden in a royal attire is shown riding on a swift horse. Mercury in the form of a smoky grey cloud gushing out of a well pursues the fleeing maiden. A group of traders encamping in tents is discernible to the right in the background who are interested in obtaining the mercury.

This highly refined painting displays a palette of soft pastel colours to limn intricate architecture, a castle on a hillock and a group of traders, who have encamped, waiting to collect the mercury. The facial type, the turban and jewellery worn by the coy maiden is in typical Kangra style suggesting the *circa* 1825 AD, the period of this elegant work. (VS)





42. Tossing of Flower

Kangra, circa 1825

Pigment painting on handmade paper

23.5 x 17.3 cms, Acc. No. 08.152

The erotic sentiment is the dominant characteristic of the *Riti-kaleen* Hindi poetry. Bihari, the renowned medieval poet, has left an indelible mark on the minds of aesthetes. His 'Satsai', a collection of some seven hundred verses, is perhaps the most celebrated work of Hindi literature. Riti or romantic poetry was the main source of inspiration to the painters of Rajput schools. The poetic text of the Satsai was greatly admired in the Hills and several paintings were painted by the painters for different courts. Some of the verses were so popular that they were painted more than once at various Pahari ateliers.

The present Kangra painting, ascribable to circa 1800, describes a gallant hero (*nayak*) who loses his heart to a maiden of ravishing beauty, when she comes forward to toss a flower. The picture illustrates the following verse of Bihari:

बढति निकसि कुचकोर रुचि कढत गौर भुजमूल।
मन लुटिगो लोटनि चढत चोटत ऊँचे फूल॥

“*Nayika's* voluptuous pointed breasts and her fair shoulders were bared from her mantle when she stepped forward to toss a flower to the *nayak*. On seeing *nayika's* captivating gesture forming three folds (*trivali*) above the naval, the *nayak* loses his heart to her forever.”

Clad in a yellow robe, the blue complexioned Krishna-like *nayak* strikes a flower in the air. The bashful *nayika*, whose braid is visible underneath her diaphanous veil, turns her head towards her *sakhi* standing behind. The scene is placed in a palatial setting. The colours employed are soft pestle and glowing. The plantain leaves to the right of the picture balances the composition. The squarish heads of the figures with elongated eyes apparently suggest the 'Standard Kangra' facial type, which was the style prevalent around 1800-20. (VS)





43. A Falcon on a Perch

Chamba, circa 1825

Pigment painting on handmade paper

43 x 28.5 cms, Acc. No. 62.73

Mughal painting abounds in the representation of subjects of natural history. Especially well known are paintings in this genre by the celebrated Mansur. Pahari painters also took to this subject in keeping with the demands of their patrons. It is well known from the portraits of Hill princes that they were fond of falcons.

The present study of a falcon appears to have been painted at the instance of a Chamba prince or an aristocrat. The depiction of this falcon on a perch apparently suggests that the bird was a pet of a royal personage. Raja Dalel Singh (r.1735-48) and Raja Raj Singh (r.1764-94) were great falconers as noticed from their portraits.

The drawing in this study of bird is precise and naturalistic; especially the wings are painted

immaculately with great care. The bird's eye, beak and the sharp claws - all are rendered by the painter with attention.

A *takri* inscription written at the back of another study of a falcon, in Chamba Museum, suggests the name of the person, who had caught that bird. The word '*Jandrod*' recorded therein suggests a name, otherwise 'Marod' was the term in Chamba for the group of people who used to catch birds.

The Mughal emperors were also fond of falconing and they had been demanding for falcons as part of tribute from the Pahari princes. The figure of a Mughal prince carved on a wooden door from Brahmaur (Chamba) shows him receiving a falcon from young Raja Prithvi Singh of Chamba. (VS)





44. Botanical Study of a *Datura* Plant

Chamba, *circa* 1825

Pigment painting on handmade paper

36 x 20 cms, Acc. No. 66.15

The study of flora and fauna has been a popular subject of Mughal painting. Pahari patrons, keeping pace with their Mughal counterpart, also inspired painters to render nature studies. In the 18th century the Pahari painters took to this genre of art and excelled in it even though it was not their favoured type of painting. The Chamba painter, for the delight of his patron, too, did such botanical studies as seen in the depiction of this *datura* (Indian thorn apple) plant. *Datura* plants have narcotic and sedative properties but are administered by Ayurvedic physicians in drugs for the patients suffering from mental disorders.

Against a monochromatic vermilion background, the study of an enormous *datura* flower is impressive. The *datura* plant is known for its intoxicating effect. Besides, its flower is offered to Shiva during worship. Although the subject matter is somewhat drab, yet the painter has sensitively rendered this study in a dextrous hand. The bold and expressive line employed in the present study of *datura* plant suggests its dating to *circa* 1825 AD. (VS)



45. Agamapatika Nayika

Kangra , circa 1850
Pigment painting on handmade paper
Uninscribed

In the Hills, the cawing crow is regarded as 'kaka-shakuna' an omen of the arrival of a relative or a guest. In Hindi poetry the *agama-patika* nayika is portrayed as addressing a crow perched at the cornice of her home. She offers the crow a *churi* (sweetmeat) if her husband comes back home. Inspired by Hindi poetry, the poets of vernacular poetry also followed suit by conceiving such situations in their works. A Pahari poet named Tularam provides a poetic stanza in Pahari (*Dogari*) dialect that describes the pranks of the *agamapatika* nayika. The words spoken by the *agamapatika* are:

जां महारी आस संपूर्ण होग तां सुने रूपे तुहाडी चुंज मढायौं ।
मो पला घी गुड पाई भला भले चूरियां दी तुकी चोग चुगायौं ।।
जित घड़ी तुलाराम मिले मेकी जित घड़ी, घड़ी इक न लायौं ।
ते जे दिखी करी कन्त म्हारा घरे आऊंदा अज्ज तां उडर कायौं ।।

“If my desire be fulfilled on hearing the news from you I shall plate your beak with silver and shall offer you your favourite mixture (*churi*) of sugar and *ghi*, the moment I meet my sweetheart, O Tularam, then, do not delay in bringing that very moment! If you have seen my lord coming home, O crow! Then fly away from the cornice.”

In this neatly rendered Kangra painting a nayika, dressed in red garments, is shown addressing a cawing crow perched on a cornice of the building. One of her *sakhis* is peeping from the window for her husband's arrival, while two maid servants are engaged in making the bedstead in the upper floor of the glistening white palace. To the right of the painting a crow flies away making an omen of arrival of nayika's husband.

The colour scheme of this work is soft and in pestle colours enhancing the beauty of female figures. The green hillocks and the river in the background suggest perspective. Much of the pictorial space is occupied by the architectural edifice. A pair of ducks near the cistern at the courtyard symbolises the union of lovers. The squarish facial types of the female (standard Kangra type) apparently indicate the date of this work about *circa* 1850.

Though, the painting does not carry any inscription or poetic verse, yet it is possible to know the subject matter from an inscribed drawing in the Boston museum collection depicting an identical composition. The poet Tularam, in all likelihood, was a court poet of the Jammu state. (VS)



46. Krishna Raises the Govardhan Mountain

Kangra, circa 1850

Pigment painting on handmade paper
19.6 x 13.9 cms, Acc. No. 00.692

The lifting of Mount Govardhana is the defining moment of the *Bhagavata Purana*. In Pahari painting several pictures depicting this episode are known. Here, the blue god Krishna is shown standing in *tribhanga* posture in the centre of the painting. All the inhabitants of Braja – elders, young and children and even cattle – are seen taking shelter under the mountain aloft lifted by Krishna on his little finger. This well known episode is narrated at length in the texts like *Bhagavata* or *Harivamsa Purana*. The celebrated Hindi poet Bihari handles this situation to illustrate the subtle expression of Krishna's love for Radha in the following verse from his *Satsai*:

डिगत पानि डिगुलात गिरि लखि सब ब्रज बेहाल ।
कपि किसोरी दरसि कै खरै लजाने लाल ॥

“As Krishna held up mount Govardhana, his hand trembled when his glance fell on the captivating beauty of Radha. The mountain shook and the people of Braj were frightened. Krishna felt ashamed that his love for Radha was no longer a secret and that this had caused anxiety to his own people.”

This painting in late Kangra style datable to 1850 AD is packed with numerous figures of people and and cattle. The old man with folded hands and sporting a grey beard appears to be Nanda, the foster father of Krishna. The type of turban he wears indicates that this work must have been a copy of an early painting. The lines employed are bold and no shading work is done in the face. The trees painted on the either side balance the composition. (VS)





47. Yama's Court

Kangra, dated 1860, signed by the painter Attra
Pigment painting on handmade paper
24 x 16.5 cms, Acc. No. 00.696.17
Inscribed at back in *devanagari* characters

Hindus have a strong and abiding belief in the concept of rebirth and believe that after death every soul has to face Yama's court where one will be offered rewards or punishments depending on his karma. Here, in this late Kangra painting (dated 1860) by the painter Attra, an interesting scene of Yama's court is depicted. In Hindu mythology, Yama is regarded as the god of death who gives punishment according to one's deeds. In this work, a crowned figure seated in a balcony in the left of the picture, Yama is distinguishable by a staff-like *danda* which is his usual attribute. He is shown imparting instructions to his accountant - Chitrugupta, clad in a green j m standing in the lower middle part of the picture. He holds the records of a sinner being held by a *duta* (servant) of Yamaraja. To the lower left of the picture some more *dutas* are shown standing in readiness to comply with the orders being issued by their lord - Yama.

The entire scene is filled with a stirring ambience which creates visions of how sinners are being tortured by the *dutas*. In the background one already has been killed by putting him on a sli, while another tied with a pole suspended downwards is being beaten with hunter by another *duta*. In the middle is shown *kumbhipaka* hell (a septic tank) from which some persons are pushed in; they hold their nose with their hand. One of them tries to come out of the tank but in vain. To the right chamber, a man is shown tied with a pillar and is being tortured by *dutas* while yet another sinner tied with a pole at the proper right of the painting is being put to death by severing his head by a sword held by a *duta*

The painter Attra succeeds in rendering the black complexioned *dutas*, who are almost naked bodied, save the brief *kaupina* or animal hide wrapped around their waists. Attra's style exhibits an apparent decadence of the Kangra style, which was at its peak around circa 1800. Since this work is dated 1860 when the Pahari rulers were politically weak and their financial state was on the decline. They were now a tributary to their new over lord the Sikhs, who had emerged as the paramount power in the whole of . Several gifted painters had already shifted to Punjab working for the Sikh chiefs. Still some preferred to stay in the hills working at the ateliers where their ancestors had been serving.

This painting is important for two reasons: that it is a dated work and also because it bears an important inscription recorded at the back by the painter Attra himself. It reveals the names of some of the ancestors of Attra who had been in the service at the Chamba court since the reign of Raja Raj Singh of Chamba. (VS)





48. *Sakhi parihasa*- The Humour Created by a *Sakhi*

Kangra, dated 1863, signed by the painter Manu
Pigment painting on handmade paper
29.5 x 23 cms, Acc. No. 00.694.17
Inscribed at back in *devanagari characters*

Several paintings from Pahari schools depict toilette scenes, in which the nayika is being adorned with ornaments by her friends. The paintings that depict such situations are generally ascribed as the adornment of a heroine. A finely executed painting from a Kangra workshop is in the Chamba museum collection, where a coy young maiden (nayika) is depicted seated on a raised couch. The nayika's sakhi (companion) sitting on floor near her legs puts an ornament to the toe. For obvious reasons, the sakhi is being struck by a lotus (lila-kamala) held by nayika in her raised hand. The composition of this painting, arranged in an architectural setting, does provide an air of romantic ambience.

Since this picture does not carry any poetic verse, it is not easy to appreciate its precise meaning as to why the nayika attempts to strike her companion with a stemmed lotus. One can only guess such intimate situations as representing sakhi-parihasa or humour created by a friend. The painting could well be based on a poetic verse of the renowned Riti poet Matiram, who very eloquently describes the situation:

गौने के द्यौस सिंगारन को मतिराम सहेलिन को गनु आयो ।
कंचन के बिछुआ पहिरावत प्यारी सखी परिहास बढ़ायो ॥
प्रीतम सौन समीप सदा बजै यों कहिकै पहिले पहिरायो ।
कामिनी कौल चलावनि कों कर ऊंचा कियो पै चलयौ न चलायो ॥

“Before her first meeting with her husband, the newly-wed heroine's (nayika) companions (sakhi) came to adorn her. While putting a ring studded with tiny, jingling bells on the heroine's big toe, one of the companions remarked in jest: May these bells forever jingle in the ears of your beloved husband.

Understanding the pun, the coy heroine coyly struck her companion with the lotus of dalliance (lila-kamala).”

In this painting night time is suggested by a crescent moon apparently visible at the top. Wrapped in red shawl one of the handmaids standing at the right of painting holds a candle light. A freshly prepared huqqa placed besides the nayika apparently indicates her status. The words of the verse are placed in the mouth of an attendant standing in readiness just behind the nayika. The whole atmosphere is enveloped in erotic suggestions. In the background, the blue complexioned minute figure of the nayak is seen in the love pavilion who is eagerly waiting for her newly wed bride for an amorous union.

The painting bears an interesting inscription at the reverse revealing the name of a painter 'Manu' and its date c. 1860. The painter Manu, according to the inscription, rendered this work for one 'Mehta Shyama', who in all likelihood could be an accountant of the Chamba court. Manu's name have never been recorded in the genealogical tables of the painters. Most probably, he could be belong to a painter family based in the Rilhu area at the Chamba-Kangra border, where there was a colony of painters. Scholars have never paid attention to these lesser-known painters working in Kangra style for the Chamba court. (VS)



49. *Dana-lila*: Taking of the Toll

Chamba, circa 1765-70

Pigment painting on handmade paper

30.5 x 21.7 cms, Acc. No. 00.686.17

Dana-lila is a charming prank of youthful Krishna, who together with his companions (*gopa* boys) demand for a toll from the damsels of Braj when they take their products to market. Several paintings in Pahari schools depicting the episode of *dana-lila* are known in which the blue god Krishna is seen demanding for curd and butter from the beautiful *gopis*. Krishna and his friends not only take their curd and butter, but also demand for an embrace and even a kiss



as a toll. The cowherdesses at first show their resentment for such demands, but feel delighted in their hearts and eventually surrendered to that hardy lover i.e. Krishna. This interesting episode is not described in the Bhagavata Purana, however, the Hindi poets of *riti* period have composed poems on this very situation.

This painting in Chamba style represents a local Chamba style imbibing certain conventions of new trends those were prevalent in the Kangra valley during the second half of the 18th century. The figure of Krishna, the romantic hero, is placed in the centre of the composition of this picture, where he is playfully dallying with the cowherdesses. With one of his arms, he embraces a *gopi*, while he caresses another milkmaid with the other hand. The coy *gopis* surrender completely to Krishna and *gopa* boys who also sport with *gopis*.

The incident takes place in a grove against a background of thick trees. The arrangement of river flowing diagonally in the middle of the picture suggest an early convention of the mid 18th century Chamba painting, especially in the *Ramayana* series of *aranaya-kanda* now preserved in the Chamba Museum. On the farther bank of the river, a row of resting cows are typical of the Chamba miniatures. The dresses of *gopis*, especially the *ghaghra* suggest (VS)



50. Dasa-Mahavidyas and Bhairavas

Kangra, Dated, Samvat [vikrami] 1937 (1880 AD)

Pigments on handmade paper

23 x 25.3 cms, Acc. No. 65.82

Tantric subjects in Pahari painting are not uncommon, though these are not as frequently painted as the subjects of Vaishnavite theme or love-poems were rendered. The text of *Devi Mahatmya* (the greatness of the goddess) has been a popular subject of Pahari schools and the depiction of the manifestation of ten Hindu tantric goddesses – the *dasamahavidya* – were equally inspired painters to paint such unusual subjects. The ten forms of the goddesses represent transcendental knowledge and magical powers collectively known as *mahavidyas*. These ten forms of the Tantric goddesses seen in this late Kangra painting (dated, 1880) are in the following sequence:

from left to right

Top row: Matangi, Chhinna-masta, Kali and Bhuvaneshvari;

Middle row: Tripurasundari, Kamala, Bhairavi and Tara.

Bottom row: Bhairava, Vagalamukhi, Dhumavati and Bhairava.

The entire composition is arranged in twelve compartments representing various tantric goddesses and two figures of Bhairavas, identifiable by the dogs as their vehicles. The picture is enclosed by a dark blue border decorated with a creeper design. All the figures seen in this work are rendered with one and half (*dedha-chashmi*) faces, except for the figure of Dhumavati mounted on a chariot driven by a pair of crows. The unknown painter has used very light washes of pigments and his palette of fast pigments apparently suggests the late period of this work i.e. *circa* 1880 AD, as indicated on the lower border. (VS)





Kali Yantra: A Mystical Diagram

Kangra, circa 1850
Pigment painting on handmade paper
71 x 69 cms, Acc. No. 69.72

A yantra is a Sanskrit word meaning a mystical diagram or an amulet, which serves as a visual aid to the devotee (*sadhaka*) in his religious pursuits. It is generally drawn on paper, metallic sheet or birch-bark, occasionally inscribed with *bija mantras* etc. These diagrammatic symbols (yantra) in form of *mandala* or *rangoli*, represent a field of cosmos energy and are regarded as equivalent of a particular deity.

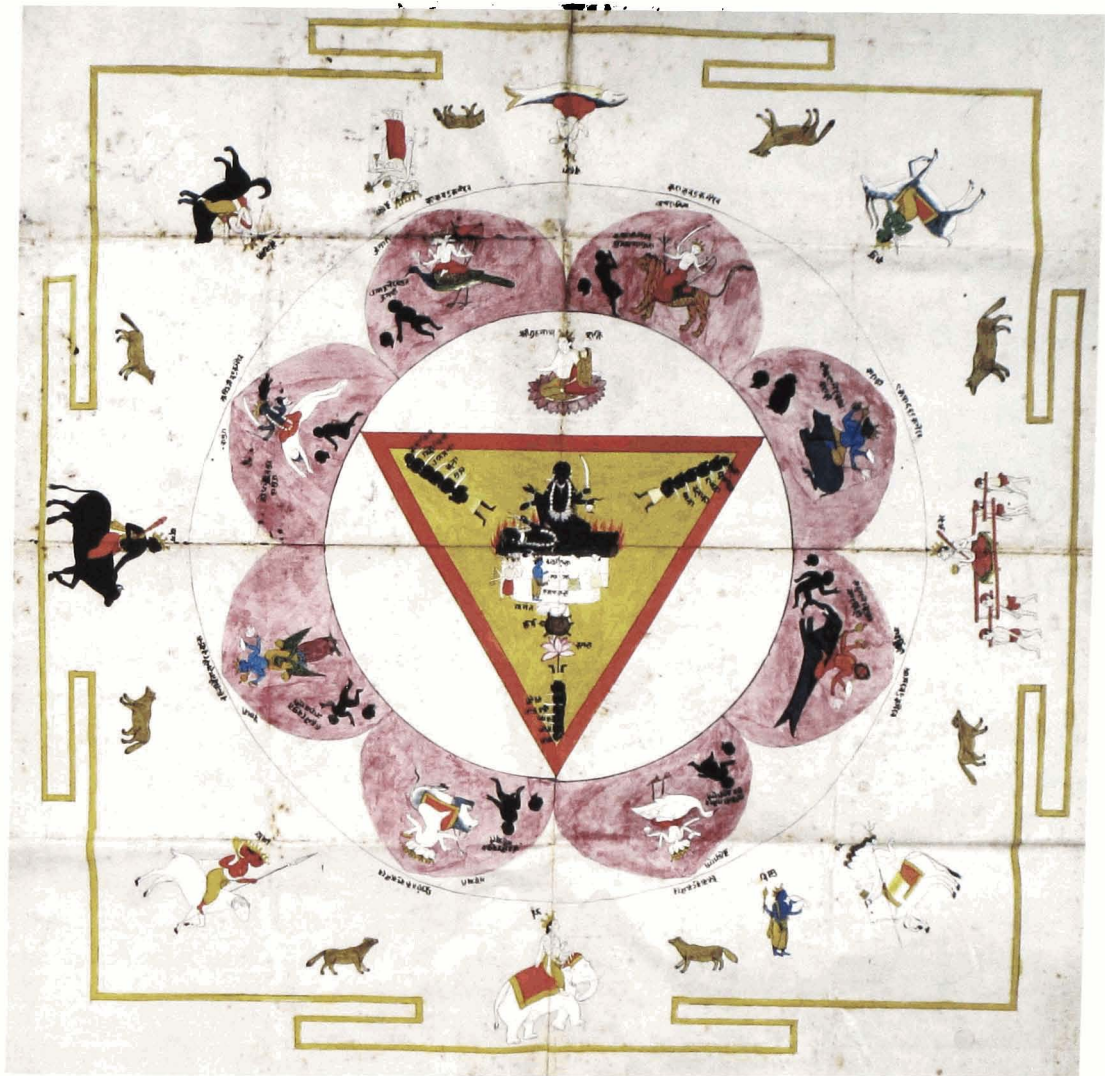
Here, the large sized Kali yantra, from the Chamba museum collection, is drawn in the form of a square depicting the with four major cardinal points.. Set within the square is the encompassing circle which is known as *avidya*, its eight petalled lotus is the eightfold *prakriti* consisting of earth, water, fire, air, ether, *manas*, *buddhi*, *ahamkara*. Here, each petal in the present yantra has been allotted to *shaktis* of different *devas* (deities). The circle is inset with a triangle with its apex pointing downward. An equilateral triangle is the geometrical symbol of the three coordinated cosmic powers: *iccha* (will), *jnana* (knowledge), *kriya* (action) or three aspects of the one embodied in the divine form.

Here the yantra is drawn on a square format with four proliferations indicating the four cardinal directions. The corners suggest the other four intermediary directions of the Hindu Cosmology. Thus, these eight directions of the world are protected by *ashta-dikpalas* who are shown here mounted on their respective vehicles. The order of *pradakshina* is as follows:

1. Vayu, seated on deer.
2. Kuber being carried in palanquin.
3. Five faced Rudra astrides Nandin.
4. Four armed Vishnu holding conventional emblems
5. Indra astride airavata.
6. Agni riding a ram.
7. Yama with his *danda* seated on buffalo.
8. Bhairava riding a dog.
9. Varuna seated on a fish.

The inner square is filled in with an eight petalled lotus, the centre of which shows a triangle with an apex downward. The eight petalled are embellished with eight goddesses all mounted on their respective vehicles. The arrangement of figures in clockwise order commences with following sequence: Aprajita, mounted on lion; Varahi, on wild boar; Narsimhi, on *makara* (crocodile); Brahmani, on *Hamsa*; Maheshwari on Nandin bull; Vaishnavi on Garuda; Chamunda on a corpse and Kaumari on peacock. All these goddesses are fronted by dwarfish black complexioned Bhairavas with varied iconography.

The triangle inset in the inner roundel of lotus is further guarded at the three sides by five *Dakinis* with sword in their hands identically with names written in front of them. A seven petalled lotus emerges forth between the legs of *Dakinis*. The lotus carries above a *kurma* (tortoise) who further supports multi-headed Ananta, recoiled on his back. Ananta, the mighty snake holds *sapta-patala* (the nether worlds) each marked by



a molding. Here the figures of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and Rudra are seen with folded hands. *Sapta Patala* is further topped by *sapta-puri* (seven heavens) marked with architectural edifices as seven inhabitations. On it rests the *vajra-shila* that holds a burning pyre.

Inside the triangle, Kali is shown in sexual

union with Shiva lying prostrate on a burning pyre. In fact, there are two Shivas. Shiva who is in union with the Shakti is active and auspicious while the other Shiva who is seemingly dead (*shava*) is out of union with Shakti. The funeral pyre signifies the dominance of death in this mortal word. The jackals straying about in the yantra suggest the realm of Kali. (VS)

Gyana-Chaupad: the Knowledge Game-Board

Kangra, circa mid 19th century
Inscribed in *devanagari* characters
Pigments on handmade paper
62.2 x 48.6 cms,

The snake and ladder game of Indian ludo is, in fact, a knowledge game-board (*Gyana-Chaupad*) meant for obtaining knowledge of attaining supreme or ultimate goals i.e. Brahma-loka (the abode of Brahma), Shiva-loka (the abode of Shiva) and *Vaikuntha*, the heaven of Vishnu. Interestingly, the painter of this *Gyana-Chaupad* has preferred to paint Rama, one of the incarnations of Vishnu.

The game consisting of some 380 squares, all inscribed in *devanagari* script, making aware the players about the results of various acts both sins and charity. For instance, if someone indulges in liquor, he is swallowed by a snake (see house number 8 at the top left). Similarly, one moves up by ascending spiritual ladder by doing charity or a pious act. Hence, the game is called *Gyan-chaupad* and the playing is *Gyan-baji*.

The game begins from the left square at the bottom of board with the throw of the dice. The squares run further from left to right and then at the upper row

turn from right to left and in bottom to top order. In the game board, the ladders are placed in the squares marked with 'charity' (*punya*) or 'good deed' and similarly, some houses are shown with snakeheads, which swallows the players for following the way of immoral conduct (*adharma*) or committing a sin. Eventually, the game ends at the top houses i.e. *Vaikuntha* (heaven of Vishnu), Brahma-loka and Shiva-loka.

The *Gyana-chaupad* game was meant to be played by the elites of the religious bent of mind. There were limited means of entertainment at that time. The purpose of the game for entertainment was of the secondary importance; its prime concern was to make aware the players by transmitting knowledge to apprehend the values of moral and religious duties. Hence, the game of *Gyana-chaupad* forms a foundation as primer for the players that implies dynamic qualities and the appreciation of the ethical aspect of *dharma*. (VS)

शिवस्य विष्णोर्नामकीर्तने विष्णोर्नाम
विष्णोर्नामकीर्तने शिवस्य नाम

शिवविष्णोर्नामकीर्तने शिवस्य नाम
विष्णोर्नामकीर्तने शिवस्य नाम



२०	३०	३८	३९	३६	३७	३८	३९	४०	४१	४२	४३	४४	४५	४६	४७	४८	४९	५०
वसवः ने ६३	इन्द्रः ने ६४	विलोमः ने ६५	गुरुवः ने ६६	महावः ने ६७	सर्ववः ने ६८	मक्ति ने ६९	सर्ववः ने ७०	कवितः ने ७१	वसवः ने ७२	मक्ति ने ७३	ज्ञान ने ७४	गंधर्वः ने ७५	महावः ने ७६	सर्ववः ने ७७	विलोमः ने ७८	देवलो ने ७९		
शिवः ने ६३	विष्णुः ने ६४	ब्रह्मा ने ६५	गणेशः ने ६६	महाशिवः ने ६७	श्रीगणेशः ने ६८	शिवः ने ६९	विष्णुः ने ७०	ब्रह्मा ने ७१	गणेशः ने ७२	महाशिवः ने ७३	श्रीगणेशः ने ७४	शिवः ने ७५	विष्णुः ने ७६	ब्रह्मा ने ७७	गणेशः ने ७८	महाशिवः ने ७९	श्रीगणेशः ने ८०	
शिवः ने ६३	विष्णुः ने ६४	ब्रह्मा ने ६५	गणेशः ने ६६	महाशिवः ने ६७	श्रीगणेशः ने ६८	शिवः ने ६९	विष्णुः ने ७०	ब्रह्मा ने ७१	गणेशः ने ७२	महाशिवः ने ७३	श्रीगणेशः ने ७४	शिवः ने ७५	विष्णुः ने ७६	ब्रह्मा ने ७७	गणेशः ने ७८	महाशिवः ने ७९	श्रीगणेशः ने ८०	
शिवः ने ६३	विष्णुः ने ६४	ब्रह्मा ने ६५	गणेशः ने ६६	महाशिवः ने ६७	श्रीगणेशः ने ६८	शिवः ने ६९	विष्णुः ने ७०	ब्रह्मा ने ७१	गणेशः ने ७२	महाशिवः ने ७३	श्रीगणेशः ने ७४	शिवः ने ७५	विष्णुः ने ७६	ब्रह्मा ने ७७	गणेशः ने ७८	महाशिवः ने ७९	श्रीगणेशः ने ८०	



Chamba Rumal



The Pictorial Handicraft of Chamba Rumal

Kamal Prashad Sharma

The word 'Chamba Rumal' implies a peculiar visual art form that represents unique and charming embroidery done on a hand-spun cloth with untwisted silken thread, which is greatly inspired from the art of Pahari painting. The tradition of this kind of pictorial embroidery was known and practiced in some areas of Himachal Pradesh and Jammu, which remained once important centres of Pahari painting.

'Rumal' is a Persian word which means a kerchief, a square piece of cloth worn on the head or around the neck. But the word Rumal in case of *do-rukha* embroidery of Chamba was coined for the embroidered textiles wearing the figural and floral designs. The cloth employed for the embroidery was generally unbleached muslin or *khaddar*. Machine made cloth, *khasa*, has also been used for the purpose in the later period. The drawing was drawn in outlines with fine brush by the accomplished Pahari painters. Sometimes, the female embroiderers would prefer to draw the patterns and figures themselves. This resulted in two different styles, one elegant and fine in draughtsmanship while the other is somewhat coarse and bold in treatment.

This craft originated, developed and flourished in the erstwhile state of Chamba in the 17th-18th century AD, when the fascinating art of painting was at its zenith. Thus, the images of miniature paintings were translated into *kasidakari* (embroidery), which took the pride of becoming the celebrated feminine craft tradition of Chamba. This pictorial handicraft of Chamba possesses a distinct characteristic of its own, which differentiates it from other forms of embroideries in India.

In Mandi, Suket and Bilaspur, the type of

embroidery was different from the style prevalent in Chamba. In these former states the embroidered rumals with floral and bird motifs were called *hathaparu*, used for giving presents during marriages.

The artistic activity of Chamba rumal survived and practiced only in former Chamba state where painters continued to work even up to the present time. Women of the royal house or the wives of the nobles used to embroider the well-composed rumals in the leisure hours as a pastime activity. Since this pictorial handicraft of embroidery on the pieces of cloth employing unique *do-rukha tanka* was originated, developed received wide patronage and remained in practice for a considerable period (more than two centuries), hence its (Chamba's) name came to be associated with this handicraft and acquired its generic name as 'Chamba Rumal'.

Art historians and scholars are of the opinions, that, the development of this traditional craft of embroidery started during the reign of Raja Umed Singh of Chamba (r. 1748-64). The craft continued to flourish under his successors Raj Singh (r. 1764-94), Jit Singh (r. 1794-1808) Charhat Singh (r. 1808-44) and Sri Singh (r. 1844-70).

This extraordinary pictorial handicraft further continued during the rule of Rajas in succession following Sri Singh. A wall hanging gifted by Raja Gopal Singh of Chamba (r. 1870-72) to British dignitary most probably Lord Mayo, Governor-General of India, who visited Chamba on 13th November, 1871, not in the year 1883 as Margaret Hall has mentioned, that the hanging depicting Mahabharata is a gift by Raja Gopal Singh of Chamba in 1883. However, in November 1883, during the reign of Raja

Sham Singh, Chamba was visited by Sir Charles Atchison. Raja Sham Singh (r. 1873-1904) introduced this craft of embroidery as subject in the State girl's school, which was maintained by the Church of Scotland Mission with a grant-in-aid received from the State. Raja Sir Bhuri Singh became the foremost name in uplifting this craft of rumals on large scale. He arranged for producing number of embroidered rumals and took them to Delhi on the special occasion of Imperial Durbar held in the years 1907 and 1911. "It is also known that some of the articles of local crafts, particularly of wood, too were, taken by the Chamba Raja to Delhi. Those articles including the rumals must have been displayed there and distributed amongst the nobles particularly those from Britain." This was most likely that these embroidered pieces of cloth (rumals and wall hangings) were admired and they got the first general appreciation and, thus, Chamba earned the name related to this marvellous needle craft.

The theme and subjects of this handicraft were almost drawn from the epic, legends of Bhagavata, Rasamandala, Shiva family, Vishnu's *dasavatara* or even the lyrical poetry as *Nayika-Bheda* etc. The scenes of general order of actual life e.g., royal hunting, horse-riding and royal and native marriages are also appeared as a subject of embroidered textiles. The aesthetic appeal, stylistic features and formal qualities of this art form were examined and debated at large by the scholars of the subject.

The foremost object for, which the embroidered rumals were popularly known in Chamba was a customary gift during marriage and since, these colourful rumals or wall hangings became one of the main items for the dowry, even the brides used to embroider the rumals with great passion for their own

marriages. These rumals were also used for offering *tamol* during marriage ceremony and coverlets for the gifts. As a result, the traditional subjects of such nature i.e. wedding scenes became equally popular and had repeatedly been embroidered in square and oblong format, which were found in large number and became the pride in the collections of various museums worldwide.

The popular subjects such as Rasamandal, hunting scenes, *dasavatara* of Vishnu, *dasamahavidyas* and *Nayika-bhed* (*ashta-nayika*) etc. invariably seen in these embroidered textiles have been borrowed straight from the Pahari miniature painting of the Chamba-Kangra schools. Almost rumals are enclosed by a decorative border of two to four inches wide band filled in with meandering creepers, which lend a remarkable effect to the rumals.



Rasamandala

The *rasa lila* of Krishna and the gopis is a dance of eternal and divine love, a love that leads to self-knowledge and it is neither a narrative dance or a dance of mere romantic pleasures. It is a dance of movement and not of stance, it a dance of heart felt feelings and not of *abhinaya*, it is a dance not only of emotion but of transformation, it is a dance not merely of the affirmation of love but of its inner understanding, it is a dance not of superficial exultation but of a deep and inner realisation, it is a dance of heart throbbing sensuality that leads the chastened mind to serene spirituality and not just romantic thrill and excitement, it a dance in time and space that takes the dancer to beyond both time and space. Among the many *lilas* of Krishna there is scriptural evidence and ancient inscriptions that the *rasa lila* may have been an actual theatrical performance much before it appeared in miniature paintings and possibly even before it was incorporated in the sacred texts. This suggests not only its antiquity but even more its primal and universal expression of the human condition. Of all of Krishna's *lilas* the *rasa lila* stands differently and must be understood initially within the context of *shringara bhakti* but even beyond as a form of yoga and *atma jnana* or self knowledge, for Krishna's flute is not just music but a call to eternity, his sensual love a doorway to a love transcendent, his very being an invitation to selfrealisation.

Kapila Vatsyayan writes: It is thus evident that between the period of Harivamsha (latest date suggested third century AD) and Shrimad Bhagavata (about 10th century AD) on the one hand and the Sanskrit *kavyas* and *natakas* on the other, the Krishna theme, and the *rasa* in particular, was known to many parts of India and constituted a key motif of mythological, poetic and dramatic writing. (p. 174.)

Although the *rasa lila* does not find mention in the Natyashastra it is a part of Harivamsa and the Vishnu Purana; however after its inclusion in the Bhagavata it was an important part of texts on aesthetics, which suggests that the *rasa*, which existed in times ancient as a distinct category of performance assumed aesthetic importance only in the medieval period and becomes foundational in Vaishnava thought because of the dashama skanda of the Bhagavata.. The Bhagavata exhorts devotees of Vishnu to:

listen with faith stories of my life that purify the world
singing and remembering and enacting my deeds and
incarnations

*sraddhalur mat-katah srnavam subhadra loka pavanih
gayann anusmaran karma janma caabhinayan muhuh*
Bhagavata Paurana 11.11.23.

It is interesting to note that Jain texts of this period also mention the *rasa*. From then on circular dances called variously *rasa*, *rasaka*, *hallishaka* and *charchari*





were well known and discoursed in texts on dance and music. It has been suggested that "the *hallishaka* (out of all the circular dances) mentioned in the *Harivamsha* denoting a circular dance of many women around one man, may have been the earliest." (P. 174) The *rasa* became an important part of the literature of the *bhashas* and thus entered the *pushtimarg* Vaishnava tradition particularly in Gujarat and Rajasthan and equally in Bihar and Orissa and was subsequently taken to Assam and Manipur when Vaishnavism spread there. However Vrindavana remained the hub of the Bhagavata faith and Vaishnavas from all parts of India

gathered there to celebrate the love of Krishna and returned to their homes and carried the *rasa*, in all its theatrical richness with them. The dancing and the fluting Krishna became the leitmotif of Vaishnava literature across the country and it is not surprising that artists in Rajput courts were greatly touched by it. We are here mainly concerned with the embroidered textiles popularly known as Chamba rumal which represent the round dance of Krishna and gopis - *rasa lila* or *rasamandal*. Some interesting rumals are preserved in the Chamba Museum; two exquisite examples representing *rasa* are being reproduced here. (KPS)

Ashta-nayika

'*Nayika-bheda*' or the classification of heroines has been one of the popular subjects of Rajput painting. Keeping pace with their counterparts in Rajasthan, Pahari princes equally showed their interest in commissioning the series of painting based on *nayika-bheda*. The earliest mention of the eightfold classification of heroines or '*ashta-nayika*' finds place in the '*Natya-Shastra*' of Bharata. The later writers, inspired from Bharata, also composed treatises on the *nayika-bheda* subject. A great deal of Pahari paintings based on *Nayika-bheda* subject are known. These Pahari painters also played an important role in making the designs for the Chamba rumal embroidery. The Rumal reproduced here representing eight heroines is one of the rare examples of this subject in embroidery.

The oblong sized embroidered rumal depicting *ashta-nayika* subject is arranged in two registers, each

containing four oval shaped vertical compartments. Each compartment exhibit an individual nayika in the following manner:

Upper row: Svadhinapatika, Utka, Vasaksajja, Vipralabdha.

Lower row: Abhisarika, Proshitapatika, Kalahantrita and Khandita.

Against the off white background, the figures are done in dextrous hand with vivid silken threads. The outlines of the figural and floral designs are worked out with stem stitch in black coloured thread, which gives the painting-like effect. The entire composition of rumal is enclosed with a meandering creeper design often seen in the Kangra paintings.

(KPS)





The Game of *Pachisi*

Embroidered rumal, Chamba
circa early 19th century AD
(Acc. No. 08.563.20)

The game of *pachisi* was a popular pastime in Chamba. The *pachisi* is presented to us on an embroidered on textile and the royal players seen at the four corners can be identified by the bolsters against which they lean. The central square of the *pachisi* is occupied by a four armed Vishnu with Lakshmi seated on his lap indicating the *vaikunthloka*, the realm of Vishnu where each player strives to reach in the game. Each royal player is supported by two attendants holding money bags and seen engaged in exchanging money as the players win or loose on the throw of the dice. The *pachisi* dominates the entire composition and

its geometrical shape filled in with colourful silken threads brings it very near to the work of an abstract art.

The composition is enclosed by a running band of creepers inset with flowers of different hue and colours providing the rumal an unparallel charm and grace. The figures are dextrously drawn and seem to be the work of a mature painter well versed in Kangra tradition of Pahari painting. The outlines of the figures are rendered skilfully with black thread making them more lively. (KPS)



A Royal wedding

Embroidered textile, Chamba, early 19th century
(Acc. No. 64.1)

The foremost object for, which the embroidered rumals were popularly known in Chamba was a customary gift during marriage and since, these colourful rumals or wall hangings became one of the main items for the dowry, even the brides used to embroider the rumals with great passion for their own marriages. These rumals were also used for offering *tamol* during marriage ceremony and coverlets for the gifts. As a result, the traditional subjects of such nature i.e. wedding scenes became equally popular and had repeatedly been embroidered.

These embroidered textiles, rumals and wall hangings, depicting the scene of regular marriage are also known by the name of *byah* (Skt. *vivaha*) by the folks of Chamba, which precisely set forth the realities of life of the native society. This subject (wedding) of embroidery done on cloth was as favourite as the scenes borrowed from the Hindu mythology and lyrical poetry executed in the tradition of Pahari miniatures. It is, thus, that along with wedding performance under the *vedika* (pavilion) perched with parrots, the marriage procession (*barat*) accompanied by caparisoned elephants and well saddled horses, the musicians playing typical folk musical instruments, the indigenous dowry boxes locally known as *pataris*, bed and cows are displayed, the ladies are singing songs, palanquins (*palaki*) with its bearers, women carrying gifts are arranged in such a way which impart a remarkable degree of realism and local flavour.

Oftenly Brahma, the creator of the universe and Ganesha, the remover of obstacles are shown

sitting on their seats (*asna*). The iconographic form of gods is being represented in a symbol in the *mandapa* drawn under *vedika* during the actual performance of marriage at Chamba.

A Chamba rumal in rectangular format in the collection of Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba depicts a royal marriage scene wherein a wedding procession, the *barat*, is seen proceeding to the bride's place. The prince (bridegroom) is shown seated on a *hauda* mounted on the processional elephant accompanying horse riders, while some male figures holding royal flags and banners are also shown. A group of ladies receiving the groom at the entrance gate of the palace singing *gathas* (*suhag*, the conjugal songs) on the beat of *dholaki*, queen mother of bride holding the *arti* accompanied by three women carrying the sacred articles in the plates for welcome rite (*puja*). In the inner chamber of the palace the bride and groom are shown seated facing each other holding a plate, two men are sitting behind the couple, while the ladies of the household are standing watching the traditional rite of *juth* that was in vogue in the olden days. In the *jharokha* (windows) of the upper storey of the palace women are shown facing each other engaged in conversation. Above all a well-decorated caparisoned stallion with out rider, held by a syce, which is a living symbol of the royalty. This entire composition, finely embroidered with colourful silken threads, is enclosed by a wide border of decorative floral pattern. (KPS)



The Hunting Scene

Embroidered rumal, Chamba,
circa early 19th century
AD (Acc. No. 67.4)

The rumal depicts the hunting scene, which was favourite subject of the Rajput princes of Chamba. The rumal shows a circular format in which the figures of hunters are engaged in the act of preying the wild animals. A figure of *Gaddi* tribal, wearing a peaked cap and accompanied by his dog, is seen beating on the drum to inspire the hunters and to create awe in the wild animals. The beating of the drum was known as '*chad-pana*' in the local dialect whereby the animals were driven to the favourite arena of the hunter where he stood advantage. The sequence shows the hunter successfully encountering the attack of the springing leopard. The hunter defends leopard's attack by employing a shield. Next to him, is an archer chasing a running black buck and shooting arrow at the prey. The sequence ends with a hunter being mauled by the tiger who stands on his hind legs ready to spring upon the hunter whose turban is dishevelled and his weapons are

lying about in disarray, while another hunter makes a last ditch effort to give a blow to the tiger by his sword in order to save his friend's life.

The centre of the rumal shows an octagonal shape decorated at the fringe with a running frieze of lotus petals, filled in with a two-armed deity holding dumb bell shaped objects in his hand, and seated cross-legged on *kamalasana*. The blue complexioned deity in all likelihood is Krishna wearing yellow coloured dhoti and an *uttariya*. The four corners of the rumal show decorative cypress trees, while the border shows a crude arrangement of flowers held together by a thin and leafless creeper. The hunters are dressed in tight fitting trousers and short *jama* and turban typical to the Sikh period paintings, which help us in ascribing this embroidered textile to the early 19th century. (K P S)



Chhabu: The Embroidered Coverlet

Embroidered textile, Chamba, late 19th century AD
\$\$ x \$\$ (Acc. No. ?)

Chamba rumals are invariably done on square and oblong pieces of muslin cloth. Embroidered mostly in square format depicting the scenes from court life, wedding, Rasamandala, as well as with abstract trees and floral ornamentations were popular ceremonial textiles. However, the round circular pieces, serving the purpose of coverlets, are also noticed in Chamba. They served as coverlets and were popularly called as *dhaknu*. These *dhaknus* were used for covering the ceremonial gifts as well as offerings made both for the gods and rulers as well. *Chhabu* were used only for covering the gifts and other edibles to be

distributed amongst the relatives and friends during the wedding ceremonies and other house-hold festivities.

In the present coverlet from the Bhuri Singh collection, an arrangement of floral pattern is seen. The round shape of the textile is enclosed by a running creeper, while the inner part is embellished with four cypress trees. The coverlet is further stitched with a red garment as its decoration. (KPS)



Dance of *Til-Chauli*

Embroidered textile, Chamba

Circa late 19th century

\$\$ x \$\$ (Acc. No.)

The *til-chauli* dance is performed by the ladies of the household after the departure of the *barat* (wedding party) for the bride's house. The dance is performed in the same room, where the other rites and ceremonies are observed. The dance starts when the mother of the groom places on her head a *parat* in which are contained *til* (sesame) and *chaul* (rice) along with a piece of *gud* (jaggery). The *parat* keeps on changing hands from one lady dancer to another, who is surrounded by the other ladies dancing in a circle.

The performance of the *til-chauli* is an appeal to the *gandharvas* to protect the bridal couple and others kith and kin from the evil effect caused by elusive spirits, black magic and other calamities during marriage ceremonies. This dance of *til-chauli* is a grand composite symbol for protection, prosperity and fertility.

Hence, the unusual subject of *til-chauli* dance embroidered in Chamba tradition of *do-rukha tanka* on

the circular coverlets is of exceptional importance, which exhibits the sentiments and beliefs of Hill people that remained the customary practice in this visual form of the handicraft.

A *chhabu* of a red colour frill stitched around its rim, in the collection of Bhuri Singh museum, Chamba, deserves special mention. It depicts a scene of *til-chauli* dance. In this dance sequence, a woman is shown in the centre supporting a *parat* (wide mouthed brass plate) with two hands placed on her head. She is encircled by the other women performing dance. They all are shown wearing traditional dress, viz. *dupatta* (veil), *peswaz* and *suthan* (trouser) and adorning various simple ornaments. Some floral designs are also seen in the surface of the coverlet. This whole composition is encircled with a *bel* (creeper) motif done in the same manner of Pahari painting. The result of composition is an attractive charm in colour scheme leaving the off-white background of the textile blank. (K P S)





Rasamandala, detail of a Chamba Rumal

Wood Carving



Tradition of Wood Carving in Chamba

Vijay Sharma

In the hilly region of Chamba, which has extensive forests, wood is chiefly used for building purposes, both in ordinary dwelling houses and in edifices of a more ornamental character, such as temples and shrines. In Brahmaur area of the Chamba district, we find the art of wood carving extensively applied to secular as well as domestic architecture from as early as 7th century AD.

Early wood carved temples, which have survived in Bharmaur and Chhatrari, possess close affinity in style to the Gupta period temples. The wood carvings in the classical style are seen only in the temples of Lakshna Devi and Shakti Devi, in the villages of Bharmaur and Chhatrari respectively. Both temples were built by Raja Meru Varman about *circa* 700 AD. These temples are profusely embellished with wood carvings showing high degree of excellence, on the façade, ceilings and doorways with rows of the figures of the deities of the Hindu pantheon. The capitals of the wooden pillars are superbly carved with the motifs of 'Puranghat' and *Kichakas* panel of which the central one is adorned with a full-blown lotus flower, reminder of the influence of the Gupta art.

The richness of the wooden craft can be seen in many of the later carvings in various temples, castles, houses etc. in the tribal area of Bharmaur, Chamba, Churah and Pangi. The carved doors, eaves, pillars, window frames, facades, panels, brackets and the balconies of the houses are all reminiscent of the rich tradition of the craft of this particular area. Sometimes one notices different styles in carving techniques, particularly in the temples, on account of the

replacement of the rotten or decayed architectural members. Besides, the wooden masks also had been used during the annual folk dance performed in the premises of the Shakti Devi temple, Chhatrari. Some wooden masks from Chhatrari are now exhibited in the gallery of the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba. The village Ranuh-Kothi, near Chhatrari is famous for the wooden utensils. All these splendid carvings speak of the continuity of the tradition of wood carving as well as the mastery over the techniques.

Usually the woods employed, both for the construction and the decorative carvings for the embellishment of the structure, are *deodar* (Sanskrit: *Devadaru*), walnut, *shisham*, *tun*, *kail* and pine. However, *deodar* is profusely used by the artisans of the Brahmaur, Chamba and Churah areas, due to its good quality for the high relief cutting and durability.

The State-Kothi of Brahmaur was once embellished with the decorative carved panels and brackets. This Kothi of Brahmaur was immensely damaged by the earthquake occurred in April, 1905. Most of the carved panels and brackets were taken to Chamba By Dr. V.C. Ohri and are now preserved in the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba, Himachal Pradesh. The State-Kothi was built by Raja Prithvi Singh (r.1641-1664 A.D.) of Chamba as one of the door panels depicts this ruler receiving honour from the Mughal Prince Dara Shikoh. The other carved panels from State-Kothi, now preserved in the Chamba Museum, exhibit scenes borrowed from the early Chamba painting.



Fig. 1.2.3 and 4 Carved wooden panels from the State-Kothi, Brahmaur, Chamba circa mid 17th century



Another massive door from the castle of a Rana of Swai, near Brahmaur, is an important piece of folk art depicting excellent workmanship of carvings, folkish in treatment. This door, now kept in the Chamba Museum, bears an inscription incised on it in *takri*, revealing the year 1877 AD of its making.

The wooden panels in low relief fixed in the ceiling of the temples of Chamunda Devi at Chamba, Shakti Devi temple, Ganda-Dehra, near Chamba town and the famous shrine of Chamunda Devi at Devi-Kothi (Baira *paragana* in Churah) are known for the

exquisite wood carvings representing fine specimens of figural and floral motifs.

The Khajji Naga temple at Khajjiar (near Chamba) is famous for the marked wood-work depicting the life size images of five Pandava brothers. These high relief carvings are datable to the period to the mid seventeenth century AD. The carvings fixed at the ceiling of the Radha Krishna temple, which stands in the premises of the Lakshmi-Narayana temple complex, Chamba afford the figural and floral motifs done in the late Kangra style of Pahari painting. On

Carved Door from State-Kothi Brahmaur

Wood, village Bharmaur, *circa* mid 17th century AD size

\$\$ x \$\$ (Acc. No.)

Inscribed in *takri* at the right side

The panels of carved wooden door, recovered from the ruined building of State-Kothi, Brahmaur, exhibits figures of great interest. This State-Kothi, meant for the requirements of royal residence and for the administrative purpose, was built by Raja Prithvi Singh of Chamba (r. 1641-64 AD) at Chaurasi town, the headquarter of the Brahmaur area. Inspired by the Mughal art, the door as well as the carved panels for the embellishment of the State-Kothi were executed on the wooden planks of deodar wood in low relief. These magnificent carvings display the figurative and decorative motifs borrowed from a provincial Mughal style of painting.

In the upper registers, young Prithvi Singh is shown holding a large fish in his hands. He was the only prince who visited the Mughal court nine times during Emperor Shah Jahan's time, where he

was sumptuously rewarded with precious gifts. In front of him is standing a royal figure holding a falcon in his right hand. The falconer supporting *shahjahani* turban and a *jama* tied in the Mughal fashion, in all likelihood, appears to be Prince Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Shah Jahan, with whom Raja Prithvi Singh had developed a deep friendship. The falcon held by the Mughal Prince must have been presented by Prithvi Singh as the falcons were greatly demanded from the Hill princes by the Mughals.

In the lower cartouches topped by the cusped arches, again two figures are shown. One of them standing at right appears a royal personage, while the other, holding a sword and a shield, is a warrior. The cusped arches and the chi-star motifs apparently suggest a marked Mughal influence. (V S)



A Magnificent Wooden Door from Swai

Wood, village Swai, Brahmaur area

Dated 1877 AD, size \$\$ x \$\$ (Acc. No.)

Inscribed in *takri* at the right side

The remnants of the old mansion of the Rana (local chieftain) are an excellent example of workmanship in the folk wooden craft. The figurative carvings as noticed in the large sized door of the house of Rana of Village Swai, near Bharmaur are truly folkish in treatment. The human and divine figures are typically folks and have nothing to do with the Pahari painting. The dresses worn by these figures are of the Gaddi tribal people. The men seen in these carvings are shown clad in long woollen *chola* (coat) tied with a *dora* - a long rope made of sheep's wool over the *pyzama*. Men are also shown wearing a long woollen cap. Women's figures are usually depicted doing daily household chores like combing the hair, pounding the rice with a long wooden pestle, playing with children, cooking food etc. This large sized door exhibits several panels displaying figurative compositions based on the vivid aspects of the day-to-day life of the tribal people of Brahmaur region.

This massive doorway reveals several panels held together by iron joists. The doorway is interesting for its size as it is made of deodar wood. The lintel and the door jambs, all three members are carved out of three massive blocks of wood. No nails for the joints have been used and carved panels are fixed by several iron joists.

The door jamb, the horizontal lintel above is divided into three registers and rests on two plane and simple vertical shafts (*shakhas*). The uppermost section shows a series of double lotuses tied together with ribbons; above this is a running frieze of lotus petals. Below this, there is a row of triangular niches,

which shows a tiny devotee in the left looking upwards in awe at the large figure of Hanuman. The second figure shows a devotee sitting on a couch (*chowki*) and worshipping a *Shivalingam* on a pedestal with mouldings. The third niche is carved with a bold relief of a full-blown lotus carved frontally. The central figure depicts an ascetic seated cross-legged holding in his hands a rosary and a water vessel (*kamandal*). He is flanked by two *jama* wearing figures holding swords in their hands. Next in the series of carving is again a full blown lotus, which is followed with an archer (*sharachapadhara*) with a bow and arrow in his hands. The last figure in the row is a squatted warrior holding a shield and sword.

The third register in the lintel represents a series of lambrequin motifs interrupted by small *lingam* in the niches, which apparently indicate Brahmaur as '*Shivabhumi*,' a prominent centre of Shaivaite cult.

Carved wooden door from the mansion of the Rana of Swai (near Ulansa), ruined in the earthquake of the 4th April, 1905. An inscription in *takri* incised on the large sized wooden entrance gate, (*parol*; Sanskrit :*pratoli*) from Swai, mentions the name of a *badhi* Chhajju, who carved decorative and figurative motifs in folkish style. Following is the translation of the inscription:

“The purport of the inscription is that the door was made by the carpenter Chhajju by the order of Rana Jahar in the year 53 i.e. 1877 A.D. Present by Rana Chet Singh of Svai.” (V S)



Wooden Masks

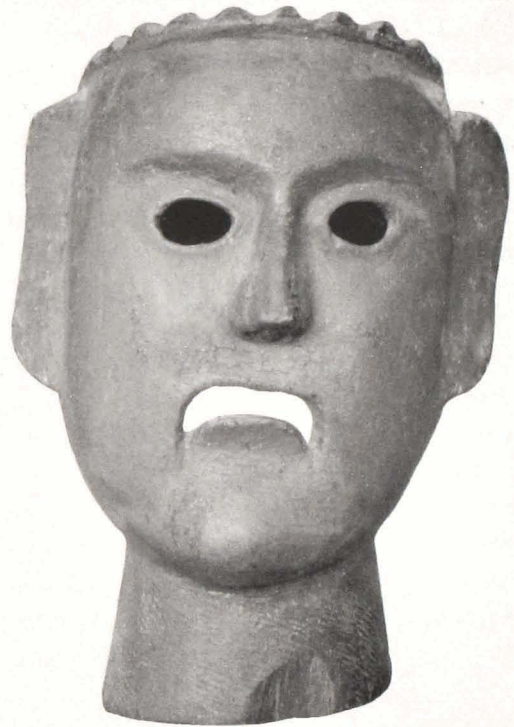
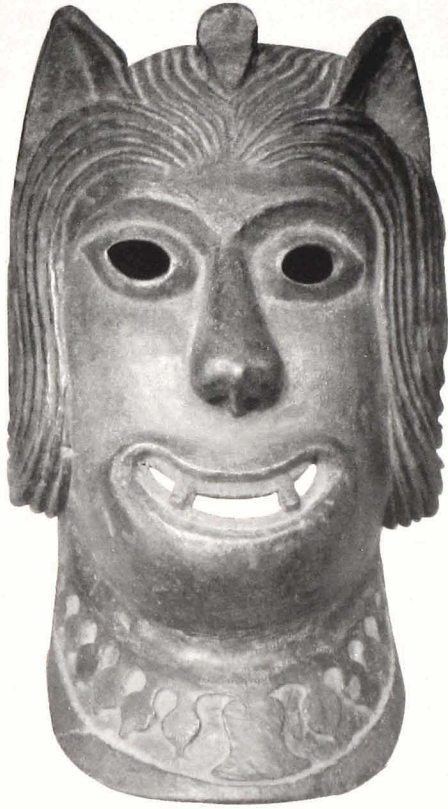
Wood, village Chhatrari, upper Ravi valley
Circa, mid 19th century AD, size \$\$ x \$\$ (Acc. No.)

The wooden masks are used by the folk dancers of the tribal regions of Chamba during the dance and all these dances are of *natya* type. In the folk dances, the masks concern only the deities, human and demons, but no mask of bird or animal is used. Though, hybrid masks of demons are known comprising of flaring nostrils, furrowed eyebrows of lions and horns of buffalos. The masks depict emotions like that of pain, pleasure, horror or pride. Even when these are slightly tilted, these give a different perspective and face expression. No wonder these enchanting masks invite the onlooker to enter the world of dance, that reflects the natural urges and passion of all human being.

Masks are not purely for entertainment purpose. It is the firm belief of the villagers that these serve an effective means of driving away evil spirits

and bringing prosperity and welfare to the village. Even when the mask is not in daily use, it is viewed as the sacred object and is carefully stored in some place in the temple. The people of Chamba have for thousand of years harboured a belief in gods living in the other world. A popular belief held in the villages is that these anthropomorphic gods make their appearance through the wonderful variety of masks.

Masks are prepared out of a simple block of teak or *deodar* wood. The mask is then hollowed from within by means of chisels and gouge. The holes for eyes and mouth are made by piercing them with some sharp instrument. The eyebrows and ridge of face and nose are then carved. The ear lobes, crowns and head-dress are not carved separately. The craftsmanship of these wooden masks is highly indigenous. (KPS)



Coinage in Chamba

INDO-GREEK COINS

Rajesh Sehgal

Graceo-Bactrians taking advantage after disintegration of the Mauryan Empire and after the death Emperor Ashoka occupied the outlying south-western provinces of the empire. They consolidated their power in Aria (Herat), Arachosia (Kandhar), Paropamisadai (Kabul). They also attacked Punjab and extend their rule as far as the river Ravi and then made excursions beyond it. In their excursion Indo-Greeks also entered in the Himalayan region.

In numismatic History of Chamba, a hoard of Silver coins of the Indo-Greek rulers of the Punjab in the second and 1st and 2nd centuries B.C. discovered in 1970, when a road cutting was being made on the Chaura-Sundla Road, near the village Lachori in Junth Pargana, Distt. Chamba, a thin metal pot was discovered containing some Indo-Greek hemidrachms. In course of the cutting the pot was broken and coins were shoveled off in the nearby stream called Salindra, which falls into the river Siul, a tributary of the river Ravi. One of the labourers, however, collected 32 of these coins and sold them. The buyer of these coins presented 15 coins weighing about 2.225 gms. to the Bhuri Singh Museum, (Accession no. 71.5-19) Chamba in 1971. The site where the coins were discovered lies on an ancient route that passes through the mountains and enters into the Jammu and Kashmir region. The hoard of Lachori contained the coins of the periods of Menander, Antimachus-II and Appolodotus.

Menander 155-130 BC

Accession No 71.17

Size 1.9

Weight 2.5

Obverse: Diademed bust of king to left thrusting javelin with right hand, Greek legend above BASILIOS SOTOROS below MENANDROU.

Reverse: Pallas to left with aegis on outstretched left arm, hurling thunderbolt with right hand; Kharoshti legend above Maharajasa tratarasa below Menadrassa.



Monogram 8 Plate -1

Menander 155-130 BC

Accession No. 71.12

Size 2.0

Weight 2.0

Obverse: Diademed bust of king to right wearing a crested helmet, Greek legend above BASILIOS SOTOROS below MENANDROU.

Reverse: Pallas to left with aegis on outstretched left arm, hurling thunderbolt with right hand; Kharoshti legend above Maharajasa tratarasa below Menadrassa.



Monogram 18 Plate -2

Antimachus-II 130-115 BC

Accession No 71.5

Size 1.9

Weight 2.4

Obverse: Winged Nike to left with palm and fillet; Greek legend around BASILIOS NIKEPHOROYANTIMAXOY
Monogram 2 on left.

Reverse: Rider (King?) on prancing horse to right; around Kharoshthi legend Maharajasa jaydharasa Amtimakhasa.



Plate-3

PRATAPADITYA

Size 2.1

Weight 7.64

Accession No. 71.28

Obverse: Utterly barbarous copy of the Kushana standing king; letter ke under the left arm.

Reverse: Utterly barbarous copy of the goddess, hands missing. On right Sri-Pratapa



Plate-5

Apolodotus 115-95 BC

Accession No 71.18

Size 1.8

Weight 2.45

Obverse: Elephant moving to right. Greek legend left BASILIOS; top APOLLODOTOU; right SOTOROS; Below Monogram 11

Reverse: Humped bull to right; Kharosthi legend right Maharujasa; top Apaladatas left tradarasa



Plate-4

VINAYDITYA

Size 2.1

Weight 7.75

Accession No. 68.48

Obverse: Utterly barbarous copy of the Kushana standing king; but on right Ja

Reverse: Utterly barbarous copy of the goddess, hands missing. On right Sri-Vina[-]; on left di[tyal]



Plate-6

KARKOTAKA DYNASTY OF KASHMIR

Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba possesses 10 coins of electrum (gold-silver alloy) of the rulers of the karkotaka dynasty of Kashmir.

A hoard of 320 copper coins of the later rulers of Kashmir was found in the village, Biddangi in the Chamba district and is now preserved in the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba Accession no. 79.1-320.

These coins are of Kshemagupta(associated with Didda), Abhimanyu Gupta, Tribhuvana Gupta, Bhima Gupta, Didda, Sangaramadeva, Anantadeva, Kalasha, Sussala, Jayasima Deva I, Jayasima Deva II.

During the entire period of the history of Chamba, we do not have any coin issued by its rulers. The numismatic vestiges of this period that we have from the Chamba region show that the Indo-Sassanian coins and the coins of the Rulers of Kashmir were flowing in there and they served the monetary needs of the people of this area. The popularity of Indo-Greek (Indo-Sassanian) coins and karkotaka dynasty of Kashmir in this region is well evident from the finds of a number of hoards. The known of Chamba State is stated to be the copper

Chakli which was also issued in the reign of Raja Chadhat Singh(1808-1844A.D.) and Raja Sri Singh. On obverse *Sri Chadhat Simhasya yam mudra*(in nagari letters) followed by a trident flanked by brackets on either.

Reverse: *Sri Lakshmi Nath Sahai* (in Nagari letters) at the bottom trident flanked by brackets as on obverse. Probably Sam (in Nagari) on left and numerals in Persian script on right.

Chakli at Bhuri Singh Museum

Accession no 66.53-58 copper (Chamba)

Accession no 51.9-24 Mandi Toshkhana

Accession no K 19-29(Chamba Tressuary)

The type and script of the legends on the coins, names and dates of the kings who issued the coins, provide authentic information on the several aspects of the social, economic and political conditions of the period.



Plate-7

Traditional Jewellery of Chamba

Kamal Prasad Sharma

The mountain system and ranges associated with rivers and tributaries forming the basins determine the natural division of the Chamba district in the five subdivisions, viz. Bharmaur, Bhattiyat, Chamba, Churah and Pangi resulting into vivid variety in cultural habits, language and traits of its inhabitants and so the jewellery. Now Chamba is inhabited by people with splendid tribal background and present a rare blend of the old and new trends in jewellery. The jewellery that was in vogue in the Chamba regions concentrated on the head and the neck. Wearing of the jewellery was not confined only to women, men also wore it. The women, of course, wear jewellery profusely and during the festival s or marriages, they bring out all their jewellery and deck themselves with it from head to toe.

The jewellery of the Chamba region is mainly of silver and gold and has an amazing variety of designs. There are ornaments, which are for special occasions and there are ornaments meant for daily use. At the time of marriage, a bride is presented with jewellery from the bridegroom's family as well as from her side as a part of her dowry.

Champakali or jaumala:

The prominent necklace common in Chamba district is *champakali* (*champkali*) or *jaumala*. The *champakali* derives its name from the buds of *champaka* flower (*Michelia champaka*). In some regions of Chamba, *champakali* is also named as *jaumala*, which differs from *champakali* in size and its buds resemble the barley shoots (*jau*). In *champakali* and *jaumala*, several pieces of *champak* and *jau* shaped silver buds are strewn to form a single necklace. The silver buds are hollowed from inside and sometimes a thin silver sheet is cut into several pieces in the shape of

buds. Very rarely the silver leaves thus strung together to form a necklace have small bunches of hallowed *pipal* leaves or *jhumkas* attached to it.

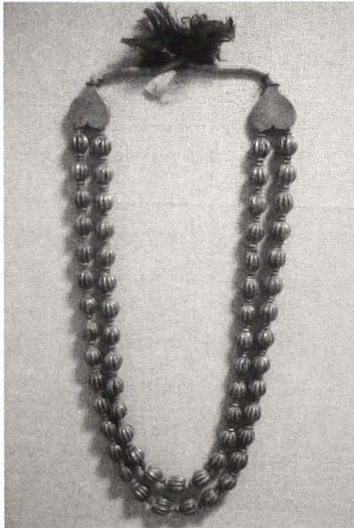


Champakali or jaumala

Dodamala:

Dodamala is prepared from the beads resembling soap nut (*doda*). *Dodamala* is prepared by means of hallowed round silver balls approximating the size of a soap nut. To half portion of a bead is prepared by stamping a silver sheet on a mould called *dodamala-kimosh*. Then, both the units are soldered at the edges, leaving a hole at the ends. The beads are then strung together with a cotton thread. Usually *dodamala* is a two or three stringed necklace and this two stringed *dodamala* is quite popular among rural women. At each end of the necklace, a betel shaped or a triangle plaque is provided which holds the strings of *dodamala* together. Each of the plaque has a small twisted thread by which the necklace is tied at the back of the neck. Usually, each string of necklace carries twenty-five to

thirty beads. This type of necklace is very popular throughout the Chamba region, even the men wear a *doda mala* once in a while.



Dodamala:

Sabih

Sabih or *sabih* is such an ornament, which is very enchanting to look at and is worn through the Chamba area. The word *sabih* is derived from the Sanskrit “*chhavi*” which means an image or portrait. True to its name, the *sabih* consists of a large square or rectangular frame as a silver case, on which is fixed a handmade painting depicting mythological subjects and then a glass panel is set over it. In many cases the image of Shiva, Durga and Vishnu etc. are seen in *sabih* pendent. In short, the *sabih* is a painting covered by a glass and framed in a silver case.

The *sabih* is suspended from four or five rings attached to the upper part of the frame through which is multi-coloured thread is passed. These rings are affixed

with circular discs for decoration. A *sabih* often has few bunches of *jhumkas* (tiny jingling balls) suspended from its lower portion. Sometimes round circular discs are also attached at the lower portion.



Sabih

Satladi or *Rani hara:*

The major ornament for the neck is *satladi har*. The number seven is considered to be an auspicious one in Hindu religion. The *satladi har* is a seven stringed necklace made of circular flower rosettes. When these chains are combined with large enamelled plaques or embossed with plaques carrying geometrical patterns then it is called *chander har* or *gunj*. These chains end in triangular plaques decorated with floral and figural motifs. Attached with these plaques are three or four silver chains, which cover the back portion of the neck when the necklace is worn. The *chander-har* or *gunj* as it is called in the Chamba town is made of a five or seven strings with a square pendant at the centre of a necklace and two other smaller square plaques set on

either side. *Satladi har* is also called as *Rani har*, when certain modifications made to it, but the basic form remains the same.



Satladi or Rani hara

Horse-hair bangles and rings

The rings for finger or bangles for wrist were also at one time prepared from horse-hair and bamboo. Black and white horsetail hairs were woven around a ring of thin stripes of bamboo in such a way that a chess board-like design appeared on the surface. Some interesting samples of rings and bangles are preserved and displayed in the Bhuri Singh museum, Chamba. The women of horse attendants in Chamba used to carry on this household craft, when horses were in plenty and were the main sources of transportation in hilly region. This unusual craft was also adopted by the other women, who were equally versed in this craft.

These bangles as wristlet were also used as a protective charm against the effect of evil eye and black magic. For the purpose, these wristlets, only in black and white hair of the horse were employed and that too of a male horse. Presently, an old woman living in the Charpat quarter of the Chamba town is carrying on this tradition.

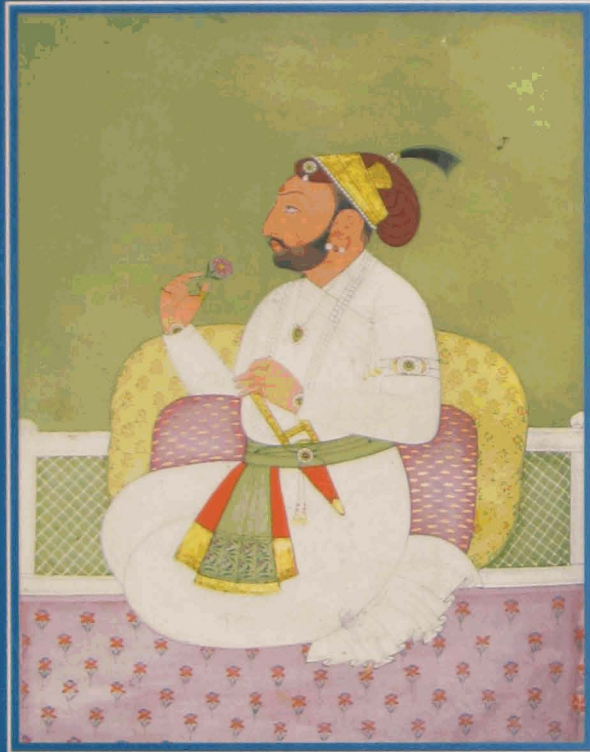


Horse-hair bangles and rings



Bhuri Singh Museum
Chamba





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