

Nikka, 2.10.2026–30.5.2027
Park Villa Rieter
Museum Rietberg, Zürich

GBF^{for Cooperative Research}
on South Asian Art and Artists
Foundation

NIKKA

On the Indian Painter Nikka of Guler



On the Indian Painter Nikka of Guler

Nikka is a painter from the Pahari region in North India who lived during the second half of the eighteenth century. He was part of a well-established family of professional painters working for royal patrons, for whom they created acclaimed portraits and exceptional series of paintings accompanying religious and literary texts.

Little has been recorded of Nikka's life. What is known is that he was a son of the painter Nainsukh, that he died in 1833, and that he had three sons – also painters. Moreover, we know that the prince of Chamba gifted him the land where his descendants still live today, six generations later.

Nikka never signed, inscribed, or dated any of his works, as was typical for the time. Only his father occasionally did so, noting the year and day – and sometimes even the occasion for a painting's creation.

Thus, the works exhibited here under Nikka's name have been posthumously attributed to the artist. These attributions are being made for the first time and reflect the current state of research, based on the work of B. N. Goswamy and Eberhard Fischer for the "Pahari Masters" exhibition at Museum Rietberg, Zurich (1990), and further research by J. P. Losty, John Seyller, and Jagdish Mittal. Fischer writes on these attributions at length in his book "A Dubious Place: A Pahari Painting Attributed to Nikka of Guler at the Museum Rietberg Zurich" (2025).

Until now, Nikka's paintings have been subsumed into the group of works made by the six "Masters of the First Generation after Manaku and Nainsukh", active in the Pahari region and Punjab between 1750 and 1820, without being further differentiated. This exhibition brings Nikka's artistic profile into sharper focus, particularly his achievement as a portraitist, revealing that this hitherto wholly unknown artist was in fact one of India's greatest painters.

Most of the art exhibited here entered the market in the first half of the twentieth century thanks to Indian art dealers in Delhi, Lahore, and Amritsar. The works held by Museum Rietberg were all either purchased at auction or from galleries in London, Paris, and New York – financed largely by patrons including Lucy Rudolph, Ursula Dohrn, and Balthasar Reinhart. Key works were also donated to the museum by the collectors Alice Boner, Horst Metzger, and Eva and Konrad Seitz.

Indian painting forms a significant component of Museum Rietberg's collection. Areas of focus beyond the Pahari artists include works from Mughal studios, as well as from Rajasthan, Bundelkhand, and Odisha.

This research was made possible by **GBF Foundation for Cooperative Research on South Asian Art and Artists.**

Painters of Guler: Seu, Manaku, and Nainsukh

Nikka's Artistic and Family Heritage

Guler was a small, forested kingdom in the central Pahari region with a walled court and surrounding city. The painter family had settled there by the seventeenth century at the latest, working for the princes in the region with an interest in art. The painters attributed their success to their family goddess, whom they believed capable of securing these patrons (see plate 2b). Professor B. N. Goswamy was able to reconstruct their family trees using pilgrim registers (see plate 2a).

This room introduces painter Nikka's artistic heritage using works by his grandfather Seu, his uncle Manaku, and his father Nainsukh – all acclaimed painters during their lifetimes.

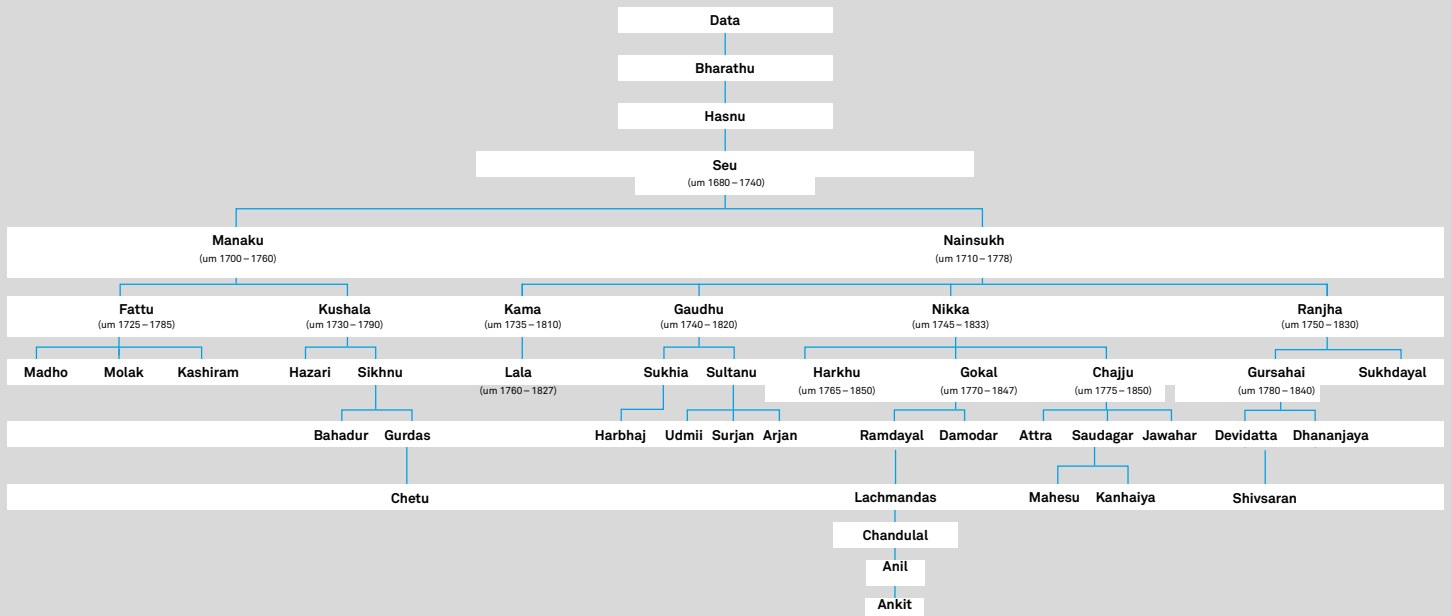
The earliest extant work from the family workshop is the “First Guler *Ramayana*”, made for the Raja of Guler by **Pandit Seu** ca. 1720. Today, his works are preserved in Lahore, Chandigarh, and Zurich. These small-scale paintings fell out of fashion ca. 1725, and Pandit Seu's eldest son **Manaku** created subsequent scenes from the “Siege of Lanka” on a larger scale. Shortly thereafter, he also created the “First Guler *Gitagovinda* Series”, which he signed and dated 1730. These works represent the highpoint of the early style of Pahari painting, and its eventual conclusion.

Seu showed an interest in the achievements of the Mughal painters, whose close observations resulted in realistic renderings. He began sketching the faces of those around him and, later in life, created works with complex themes and meticulous detail. His second son **Nainsukh** carried forward this development, composing his portraits with sensitivity. His keen powers of observation and delicate brushwork allowed him to produce what today are regarded as the most celebrated masterpieces of his time.

All six sons, the “**Masters of the First Generation after Manaku and Nainsukh**”, were major painters who specialized in creating elaborate series of paintings for a number of royal courts. Room 3 seeks to attribute their paintings, including works by Nikka, to specific masters based on stylistic characteristics.

As exhibited here, works on paper were typically drawn and painted with squirrel-hair brushes. Finely ground pigments dissolved in water with a touch of gum arabic would be applied in multiple layers. These were then transferred to paper by rubbing an agate stone on the reverse, lending the works an enamel-like brilliance.

Family Heritage of Nikka, the Painter



Family tree of the Guler family of painters headed by Pandit Seu
(seventeenth to twenty-first centuries)
(after B. N. Goswamy, 1990)



Pandit Seu
(active 1720–1740)



Manaku
(active 1725–60)



Nainsukh
(active 1730–1778)



Nikka,
(active 1760–1820)

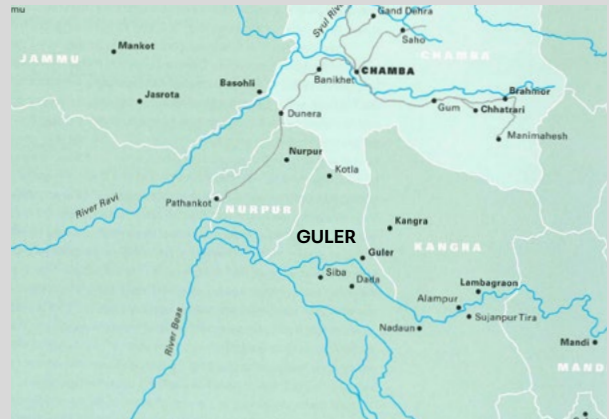


Goddess Kul, family goddess of the Guler family of painters headed by Pandit Seu

The goddess stands with a leg fused to the ground at the kingdom of Guler, holding the names of the royal courts commissioning the painters

Large-scale work on paper, early nineteenth century

Previously owned by Chandulal Raina, now in a private collection in Mumbai



The Pahari region in the 19th century
Map taken from Fischer/Ohri/Sharma, 2003, Devi Kothi (detail)
Add: Punjab

The Pahari Region in Northern India

Pahar in Hindi means “mountainous land” and denotes the western Himalayan foothills of northern India. This region bordering Kashmir and Nepal historically possessed little economic significance due to a lack of natural resources. Steep, terraced hills meant that neither cattle rearing nor rice or buckwheat farming were profitable. For this reason, the Pahari region held little attraction for conquerors and was largely spared from plundering. People only fled to the mountains when war or epidemics ravaged the lowlands (Punjab) or Delhi. Yet a number of Rajput princes established small, fortified royal court cities with temples and marketplaces along important trade routes and at river crossings.

These Pahari hill states were obliged to pay tribute and provide military service to the Mughal emperors from the late sixteenth century onwards. Nevertheless, they retained considerable sovereignty. The power of regional princes was only curtailed after the horrific plundering and massacres perpetrated by Gurkha troops in 1809, followed by the gradual annexation of the region by Sikh armies. Eventually, the princes were stripped of all remaining power by the British colonial government. Today, the region comprises two states, Jammu and Kashmir, and Himachal Pradesh.

The Start of Pahari Painting

The earliest surviving paintings by Pahari artists were produced for two princely courts: **Mandi** and **Nurpur**. In the kingdom of **Mandi**, the artist known as the “Early Master at the Court of Mandi” portrayed the ruler in the manner of contemporary Mughal masters as early as ca. 1635, alongside a large-format *Ramayana* series in the same style. His studio continued to operate for several decades thereafter.

Groups of artists from southern Rajasthan and northern Gujarat were brought in to work on the Krishna temple being built in the fort at **Nurpur** ca. 1610. This considerably boosted art production at the time. Indeed, paintings by these immigrants are thought to have inspired the development of a wholly distinctive style in the family

workshop of **Kripal**, his son **Devidasa**, and his grandson **Golu** in Nurpur even decades later. This early Pahari style was soon adopted by painters across the region and subsequently refined thanks to the influence of Mughal models. For instance, immigrant painters from Gujarat (*Gujarati Manikant chitrera*) produced lifelike paintings of the ruler as a temple visitor in late seventeenth century Chamba.

The earliest paintings by the **Guler** painters known to date are those of Pandit **Seu**, created around 1720 for his royal patron. We do not know where Seu trained as a painter. Nikka was one of his grandsons and artistic heirs.



Kripal of Nurpur (active ca. 1660–90)

“Freezes at the Very Thought of Her”

Folio 18 from the first *Rasamanjari* series

Nurpur, ca. 1680

Museum Rietberg, REF 5

Permanent loan from Eberhard and Barbara Fischer



Not yet identified master artist from Nurpur

Raja Mandhata of Nurpur in a courtly attire

Nurpur, ca. 1675

Museum Rietberg, 2005.10

Gifted by Balthasar Reinhart

Inscription: “*pathania raja ...*”



Master artist from the court of Raja Chhattar Singh of Chamba

Raja Chhattar Singh visits a Rama shrine

Chamba, ca. 1690

Museum Rietberg, RVI 1250

Gifted by Alice Boner



Pandit Seu of Guler (ca. 1680–1740)

Hanuman outwits the female demon Surasa

Folio from the small-format Guler *Ramayana* series

Guler, ca. 1720

Museum Rietberg, RVI 842

Acquired with funding from the City of Zurich



Not yet identified master artist from Guler

Lakshman confronts the monkey king Sugriva

Folio 30 from the small-format Mankot *Ramayana* series

Guler, ca. 1720–25

Museum Rietberg, RVI 2101

Gifted by Horst Metzger



Pandit Seu of Guler (ca. 1680–1740)

The leader of the monkeys tells Rama of the destruction of the Madhuvana grove

Folio from the small-format Guler *Ramayana* series

Guler, ca. 1720

Museum Rietberg, RVI 844

Acquired with funding from the City of Zurich



Pandit Seu of Guler (ca. 1680–1740)

Fight of the drunken monkeys and bears

Folio from the small-format Guler *Ramayana* series

Guler, ca. 1720

Museum Rietberg, RVI 845

Acquired with funding from the City of Zurich



Manaku of Guler (ca. 1700–1760)

Rama in the battle of monkeys against the demons

Ramayana folio from the *Bhagavata Purana* series of sketches

Guler, ca. 1740–45

Museum Rietberg, RVI 1515

Acquired with funding from the City of Zurich



Manaku of Guler (ca. 1700–1760)

The demon brothers Hiranyakashipu and Hiranyaksha
Folio from the small-format Guler *Bhagavata* Purana series
Guler, ca. 1740
Museum Rietberg, RVI 2199
Gifted by Balthasar and Nanni Reinhart



Manaku of Guler (ca. 1700–1760)

Krishna dances to charm
Folio from the first Guler *Gitagovinda* series
Guler, signed and dated 1730
Museum Rietberg, RVI 990
Acquired with funding from Balthasar and Nanni Reinhart



Workshop of Pandit Seu and Manaku of Guler

The imperial sacrificial ritual performed by Yudhishtira
Tinted sketch for an unknown *Mahabharata* series
Guler, ca. 1740
Museum Rietberg, RVI 1908
Gifted by Eberhard and Barbara Fischer



Manaku of Guler (ca. 1700–1760)

The battle of the gods against the demons of released snakes, lions, and boars
Folio from the small-format Guler *Bhagavata Purana* series
Guler, ca. 1740
Museum Rietberg, RVI 1766
Acquired with funding from the City of Zurich



Nainsukh of Guler (ca. 1710–1778)

Raja Balwant Singh slays a tiger with his sword
Jasrota, ca. 1750–55
Museum Rietberg, RVI 1330
Gifted by Alice Boner



Nainsukh of Guler (ca. 1710–1778)

Portrait of Raja Balwant Singh of Jasrota "At the Age of 18"
Jasrota, dated March/April 1742
Museum Rietberg, RVI 1907
Acquired with funding from the Rietberg Circle



Nainsukh of Guler (ca. 1710–1778)

Raja Balwant Singh resting before a fireplace
Jasrota, ca. 1755–60
Museum Rietberg, RVI 1552
Acquired with funding from Lucy Rudolph



Nainsukh of Guler (ca. 1710–1778)

Raja Balwant Singh stands pensively by a window
Jasrota, ca. 1755–60
Museum Rietberg, REF 28
Permanent loan from Eberhard and Barbara Fischer



Manaku of Guler (ca. 1700–1760)

Two demons disguised as monkeys approach Rama's army, encamped before the golden city of Lanka

First page from the large-format *Siege of Lanka* series

Guler, ca. 1725

Museum Rietberg, REF 52

Permanent loan from Eberhard and Barbara Fischer



Nainsukh of Guler (ca. 1710–1778)

Raja Balwant Singh of Jasrota views an artwork with the painter Nainsukh
Jasrota, ca. 1755–60

Museum Rietberg, RVI 1551

Gifted by Balthasar and Nanni Reinhart, Eberhard and Barbara Fischer

The Painter Nikka of Guler

Nikka of Guler was the third son of painter Nainsukh. He was born ca. 1745 in Jasrota (now Jammu and Kashmir) and passed away at the advanced age of eighty-eight in Chamba (now Himachal Pradesh). His ashes were scattered in the rushing waters of the River Ganges at Haridwar in 1833, an act recorded by the family priest in the pilgrim register.

Nikka (whose clan name was Raina) was a member of the artisan *suthar* or *chitrera* caste of carpenters and painters – that is, the artisan caste within the Hindu system. The Rainas were longstanding citizens of Guler, recorded in registers as residents across generations.

Nikka is thought to have been raised in his father Nainsukh's household, joining his workshop as a child. We do not know whether he was exposed to further artistic influences in Lahore or another Mughal hub.

Nikka's application for the position of court painter ca. 1780 proved successful: Raja Raj Singh of Chamba gifted him arable land, providing him with the means to support himself and his family. The plot was in the hamlet of Gaggal, on Chamba's border with Guler, and remained Nikka's main residence until his death. Here, he fulfilled his role as court painter, appearing before his rulers to deliver the paintings they commissioned on special occasions such as *Diwali* (a New Year's festival).

Nikka had three sons, also talented painters: **Harkhu**, **Gokul**, and **Chhajju**. They occasionally signed their paintings – most likely because they were in competition with one another and wished to clarify the authorship of their work.

Fortunately, we know how Nikka looked, for an unknown artist depicted him ca. 1780/90 while painting in Chamba. The work bears the title *Guleriya Nikka charter* ("Nikka of Guler, Painter"). Nikka sits on the ground with his knees drawn up, his artist's board resting at an angle on his lap and a brush in his right hand. He gazes intently before him as if engaged in creating a portrait. A pot of water and shell cups of paint are placed about his feet.

In this work, Nikka appears to be roughly forty years old, handsome and robustly built with a neatly trimmed, dark full beard. He is unadorned with jewellery but finely dressed, wearing a *jama* robe knotted beneath his left arm in the Hindu style.

Nikka depicts himself bowing humbly before the prince in his painting of a procession in Chamba. He is shown bearing writing implements and a pair of scissors tucked into his sash, all accessories denoting a literate painter. Another supplicant stands beside him: this somewhat older, gaunt man might be his cousin Khushala.

A third portrait of Nikka also exists, as small-scale, seated portraits were made of all four of Nainsukh's sons ca. 1815. Nikka no longer trimmed his beard in old

age, having adapted to the fashion of his new patrons, the Sikh commanders who had by then usurped power in his homeland.



1 Nikka painting



2 Nikka as a supplicant



3 Gaudhu and Nikka



What to look out for in Nikka's painting "A Dubious Place" (1780)

About the Themes

Sexual activity is central to Nikka's "A Dubious Place", here set at a disreputable location shunned by all. In Indian painting of the time, sexual acts involving villagers or peasants were generally considered improper and shameful, making the content of this work truly exceptional. Indeed, Nikka's depiction of a young man and two schoolboys from a respectable background observing this "vulgar" or "obscene" display of sexuality renders the work particularly unique.

About the Composition

In this painting, Nikka seamlessly integrates five separate scenes into a single composition. He places his figures against an even, beige backdrop, with barely any variation between the sandy ground, earthen façades, and sky. The dancers in the foreground are viewed from a slightly elevated position. The boys entering the scene are at eye level with the viewer, while the lovers in a room are placed on a higher level. Yet the figures are expertly linked together through the sophisticated interplay of their respective eyelines. Since the colour palette consists only of a few muted tints, these interactions capture the viewer's attention entirely.

Nikka's depiction of nearly naked male bodies, large-scale and fully three-dimensional, is also unique in Indian painting

of the time. Here, he depicts actual men of different ages, unidealized and unabashed, engaging in physical activity. Their individual faces are unmistakably portraits of robustly built contemporaries of the painter. Shown in profile, turned to one side, or seen from the front, they reveal nuanced emotions despite their rugged appearance.

Equally astonishing is the precision with which garments, fabrics, equipment, columns, and a birdcage are depicted, with patterns, cut, and workmanship scrupulously rendered. This dedication to meticulous craftsmanship sets Nikka apart from other painters of his generation.

About the Provenance

This raises a final question: for whom did Nikka create this unique painting? Certainly not for an aristocratic patron and his harem. Yet there was no commercial art market in the eighteenth century. Did Nikka paint the work as a way of coming to terms with a shame-laden or traumatic sexual experience from his own childhood? Did he keep the painting for himself, carefully tucked away, until his descendants sold it to the artist Abdur Rahman Chughtai in Lahore a century later? From Chughtai, it passed from a German collector to a London art gallery, reaching Museum Rietberg in 2020.



Nikka (ca. 1745–1833), third son of Nainsukh
 A Dubious Place
 Chamba (Gaggal Village), ca. 1775–80
 Museum Rietberg, 2020.312
 Acquired with funding from the Rietberg Circle

This place of disrepute is a puzzling work, painted by Nikka in the Himalayan town of Chamba ca. 1780

In the foreground, figures dance in a walled palace enclosure, or seraglio.

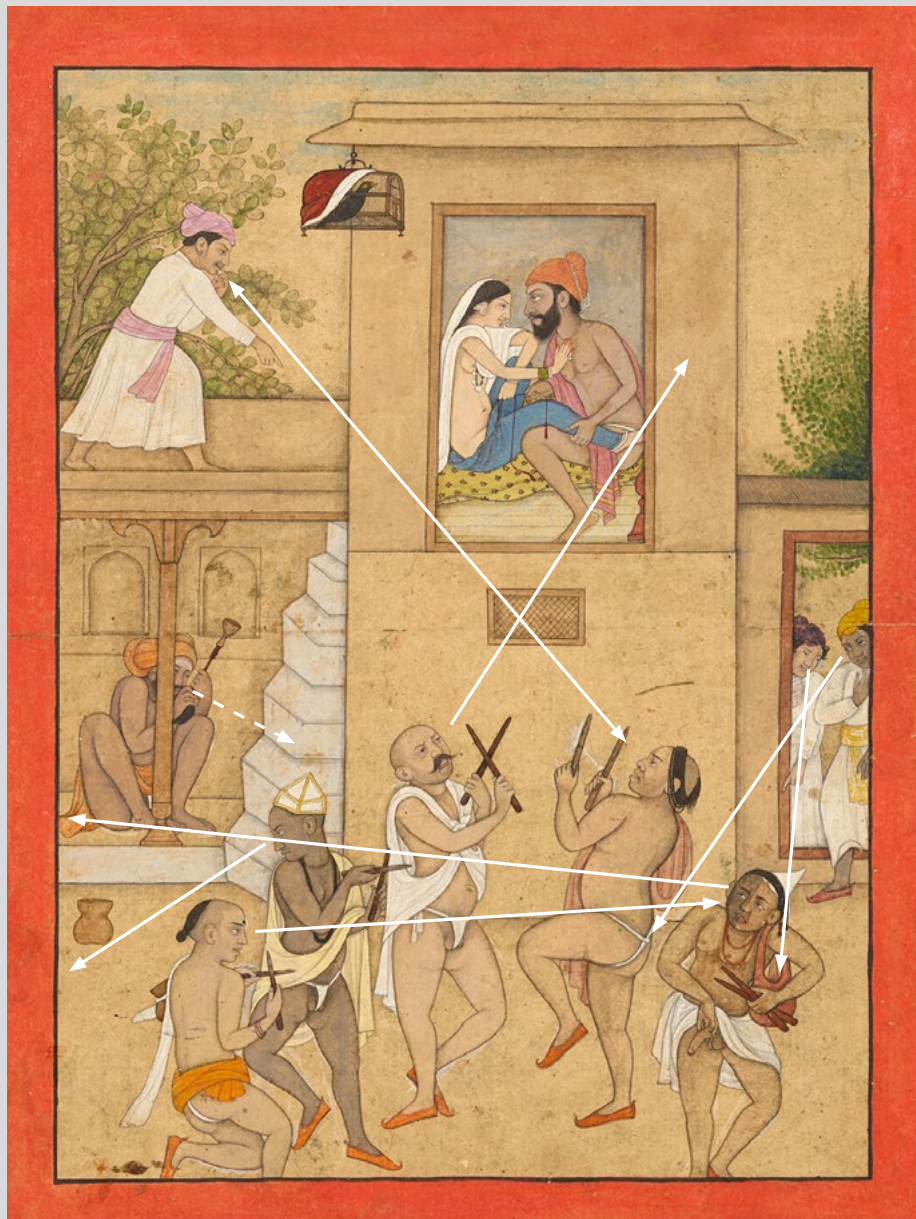
(1) Five men, scantily clad, are dancing to the beat of their percussion sticks, singing suggestive songs at the top of their lungs. All of them make it more than clear that they are “real” men, and one even exposes his penis completely, his face half-blackened with soot. Their black woolen cords, distinctive caps, shoulder bags, and water gourds identify them as a band of mendicant singers and members of the Suthra sect. The sect founder claimed that singing such offensive songs shocks people out of their everyday routines, while the songs’ sexual suggestiveness confuses and confounds them, thus opening a new path to spiritual freedom and a higher state of being.

(2) A young *kanphat* yogi (a sadhu, or ascetic who has renounced worldly life) sits in the shadows of a gallery behind a column. Already wreathed in hashish smoke, he is shown smoking a water pipe. He too is an outsider who survives by begging.

(3) A young man has climbed onto the boundary wall, lured by the vulgar singing and sweet smell of hashish. He approaches the scene, fascinated and titillated by the disreputable proceedings in the courtyard.

(4) A romantic liaison is taking place in the upper part of the central image. A burly man is initiating intimacy by loosening the drawstring of a woman now older than she once was. It’s clear he has just bathed, as he is only wearing a towel around his hips and a fragrant flower garland pinned to his turban. The woman is likely used to handling men. She is not yet old, but her skin has begun to sag. Her spurning of the man’s forceful advances is probably only coquettish. The birdcage with the chatty mynah bird belongs to her – perhaps an advertisement of her trade.

And (5), to the far left in the half-shown doorway, two boys hesitate to enter this disreputable place. The elder boy has already put a foot over the threshold. With his right hand on his chin, he is clearly surprised – perhaps a little doubtful, or afraid. The younger boy is quite happy to simply point at the group of men. Neither have yet entered the space fully, but they most likely will – only to later feel ashamed of their behaviour, back in the comfort of a respectable home.



Five scenes unfold simultaneously in Nikka's "A Dubious Place". They include five men dancing, a sadhu, a couple, and – looking on – a young man and two boys. The painter connects this multi-scene composition with a network of deftly linked eyelines.



This painting is executed with only a few, mostly muted pigments. However, when examined under UV light, underpaintings incorporating Indian yellow (*gaugoli*) are revealed to have been washed in, producing graduated beige and brown tones. The number of minute details rendered in yellow and white, as seen in the eyes, is remarkable.

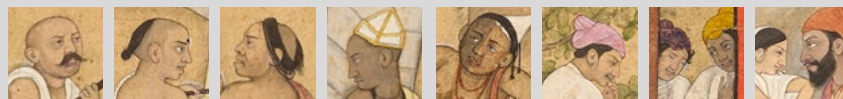
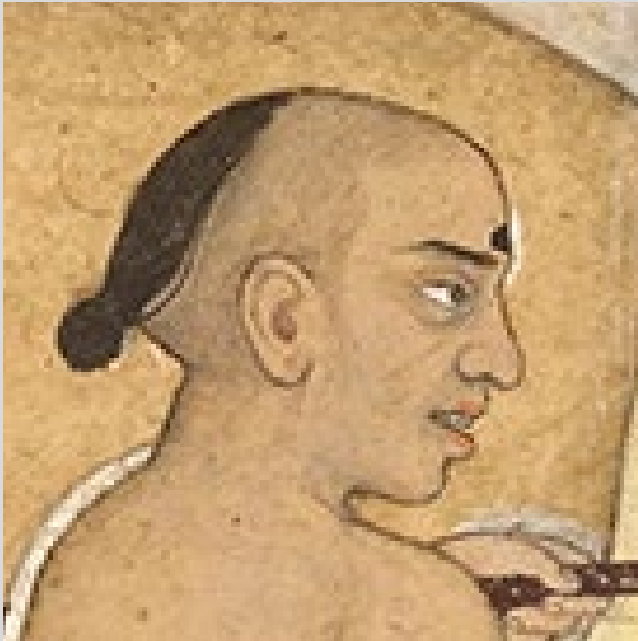


- 6 Pandit Seu, Nikka's grandfather, also painted a multi-scene work in his old age. It shows a dignified man reciting the ballad of an abandoned woman to his friends. The individual stanzas are illustrated in the background, contextualizing the narrative.

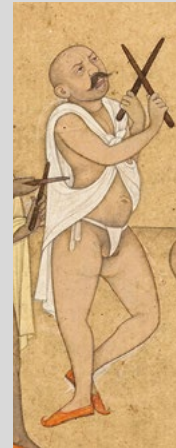


7 Pandit Seu renders the ruler of Guler's face with great precision in this study for an official portrait. It can be presumed Seu was permitted to observe him informally.

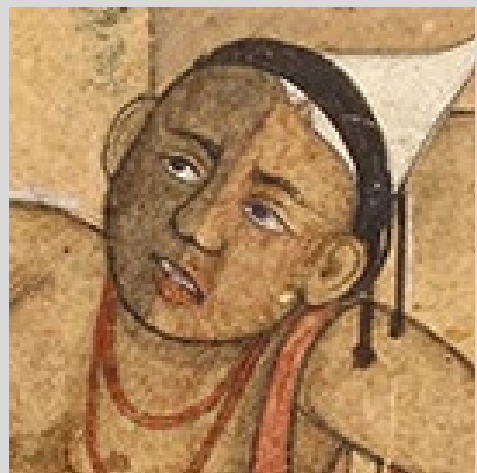
Nainsukh's double portrait captures both physiognomic similarities and differences between father and son. The sketch, devised with a fine-pointed brush, was most likely intended to serve as a model for future portrait commissions.



It appears that Nikka was also thinking of a father and son when portraying these two dancing men. The singing peasants' faces are true to life and highly detailed, suggesting they were actual acquaintances of the painter.

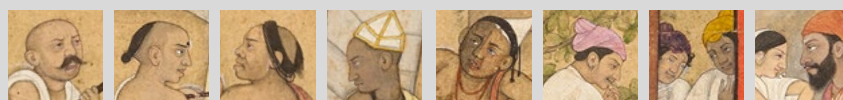
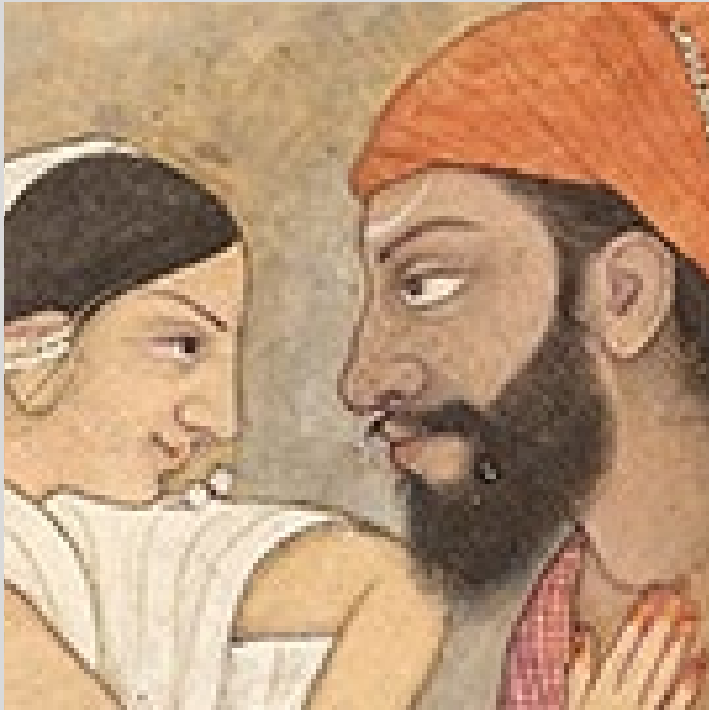


Nikka achieves a delicate rendering of the male nude without the use of direct light falling on the figure (i.e. without cast shadows).



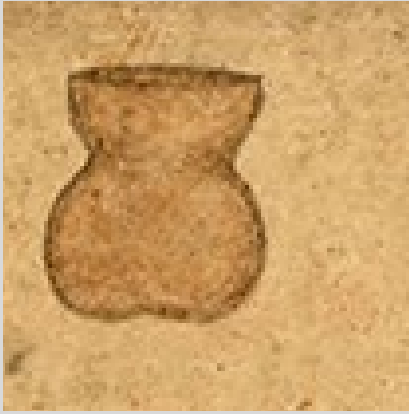
left: With his pursed lips and glazed eyes, the bearded face of the sadhu, likely under the influence of cannabis, is particularly striking.

right: One of the young men dances, biting his lip with intense concentration. The other shyly exposes himself, yet brazenly looks the viewer straight in the face..



top left: The neatly dressed young man with peach fuzz on his cheek and upper lip betrays his uncertainty, perhaps also his embarrassment, at his desire to witness “the obscene”.

top right: The two boys are still undecided about whether to enter. They know they will be stepping into a disreputable space. These adolescents are encountering sexuality outside of their family: at a rendez-vous between a labourer and a “loose woman”.



Nikka depicts clothing and equipment including the knotted ends of cords, coiled strings, and the finished edges of baskets, with exceptional precision and attentiveness.



This depiction of a procession in Chamba (upper left) shows Prince Raja Raj Singh in his court, with the crown prince and his attendants in the centre, as both are deferentially greeted by the painter and his companion. From behind half-closed doors, the inhabitants of the street watch as armed men converge. Distinguished Rajput courtiers observe the proceedings from a balcony (upper right). The court kitchen and its workers are depicted below them, completing the highly avant-garde, vertical composition.

Nikka of Guler
 Raja Raj Singh of Chamba
 and Prince Jit Singh
 Chamba, ca. 1782
 Wereld Museum, Leiden
 RV 3025-81 (Reproduction)



top: Nikka adopted the painting's composition from works by his father Nainsukh, but here imbued it with more atmosphere. The piece is framed by vertically cropped columns placed on each side, and a raised awning with a marble balustrade, while young court attendants occupy both the centre and the landscape beyond. His painting is more complex thanks to the larger number of figures, the balustrade in the foreground, and, above all, the far more nuanced landscape..

below: Nikka painted Raja Raj Singh of Chamba and his son ca. 1785. The scene unfolds during a monsoon storm, as the pair listens to music on a marble terrace.

Over the next twenty years, Nikka refined these background landscapes. They not only became more detailed, but also grew increasingly atmospheric, animated by meticulous depictions of agricultural workers.



In Nikka's series of "holy" craftspeople, he reveals himself to be a keen observer of the physiognomies and body language of both Brahmins and artisans from lower-status castes – spotlighting the proficient craftsmanship of the latter.



He thought that Nikka also produced illustrated manuscripts in his family painting workshop, including hymns in praise of the goddess and the *Book of Omens* ca. 1800. Workshop assistants would draw on Nikka's repertoire of forms for commissioned works such as these – a repertoire he established in his father's workshop and later moved beyond.

The delicate *Book of Omens* comprises seventy-one images of goddesses, gods, and

monsters and other ordinary people such as day labourers and female vegetable sellers, hanged men and madmen, as well as household objects, trees, and all manner of animals. The Sanskrit text on the facing page explains whether such "motifs" in dreams indicate that good or bad fortune will follow.

The original manuscript is shown in the glass display case. A video by Amit Dutta discusses the aesthetic range and quality of the images.



Nikka (ca. 1745–1833), third son of Nainsukh
 A Dubious Place
 Chamba (Gaggal Village), ca. 1775–80
 Museum Rietberg, 2020.312
 Acquired with funding from the Rietberg Circle



Pandit Seu of Guler (Grandfather of Nikka)
 Tinted portrait sketch of Bhishan Singh of Guler
 Jasrota, ca. 1730
 Museum Rietberg, RVI 2247a
 Gifted by Balthasar and Nanni Reinhart



Nainsukh of Guler (Father of Nikka)
 Double portrait of Mian Zorawar Singh of Jasrota and his son Balwant Singh
 Jasrota, ca. 1742
 Museum Rietberg, RVI 1838
 Acquired with funding from the City of Zurich



Pandit Seu of Guler (Grandfather of Nikka)
 The “Romance of the Abandoned Beloved” is narrated during an outing
 Guler, ca. 1740
 Museum Rietberg, RVI 983
 Acquired with funding from the City of Zurich



Nikka (ca. 1745–1833), third Son of Nainsukh
 Raja Raj Singh of Chamba and his son Jit Singh
 with musicians during a monsoon
 Chamba, ca. 1785–90
 Museum Rietberg, RVI 946
 Gifted by Balthasar and Nanni Reinhart



Nikka (ca. 1745–1833), third Son of Nainsukh
Chhipa bhagat, the devout cloth printer
 Folio from a *Bhakta-Mala* series
 Chamba, ca. 1790–1800
 Museum Rietberg, RVI 908
 Acquired with funding from Lucy Rudolph



Nikka (ca. 1745–1833), third Son of Nainsukh
 Ravidas, the holy Chamar cobbler, thought to be visited by Kabir the weaver
 Folio from a *Bhakta-Mala* series
 Chamba, ca. 1790–1800
 Museum Rietberg, 2011.388
 Gifted by Danielle Porret



Nikka (ca. 1745–1833), third Son of Nainsukh
Book of Omens, 75 folios
 Chamba, ca. 1775–80
 Museum Rietberg, 2014.155
 Gifted by Barbara and Eberhard Fischer, Sam Fogg and Francesca Galloway

Master Workshops and Family Workshops

Pahari paintings were initially created in family workshops led by the eldest member of the family. Masters who were particularly successful would train at a royal court, receiving yearly commissions to be delivered on special occasions such as New Year's Day. A number of these commissioned works depicted significant poems and epics including the *Gitagovinda*, *Bhagavata Purana*, and *Ramayana*. The master would draft the desired content on paper, then outline this composition in aqueous red ochre. A thin chalk primer was subsequently

applied onto the brushwork sketch, after which the composition, still faintly visible, was traced in definite lines. Finally, paint was applied in the workshop as per the master's specifications – although for important works, he would carry out this work personally. A key responsibility of the workshop master was developing the features of individual faces and figures. But he also oversaw how many coats of paint would be applied and polished, as well as signing off on all final works before they were handed over.

The First Generation Following Manaku and Nainsukh

It is thought that **Manaku's** two sons, Fattu and Khushala, were raised in their father's household in Guler, although **Fattu** later became closer to his uncle Nainsukh – perhaps even living with him. This might serve to explain why Fattu's early work draws on Manaku's visual language, whereas his later work bears Nainsukh's influence.

Nainsukh created a second *Gitagovinda* series ca. 1760, following his pilgrimage to Puri, designing and sketching all the works independently. However, the 151 folios were hand-coloured by two younger colleagues – most likely his eldest son **Kama**, possibly helped by Manaku's younger son **Khushala**. It is thought that these two masters later also collaborated to create the extraordinary *Bhagavata Purana* series.

Experts believe that **Gaudhu**, Nainsukh's second son, was commissioned to create a new series of works illustrating the *Ramayana* ca. 1770. Complex spaces featuring diagonal constructions were his speciality, contrasting with clearly organized landscapes that included lively, miniscule figures. **Nikka**, Nainsukh's third son, attained a position at Chamba's court at an early age. He began by illustrating epics but went on to establish a reputation as the best portraitist of his generation. **Ranjha**, Nainsukh's youngest son, created brilliant works to accompany intricate love poems, incorporating labyrinthine palace settings and animated figures. Nainsukh's grandsons were also successful painters – until photography and printed reproductions made their work commercially unviable.



Kama (ca. 1735 – 1810)



Gaudhu (ca. 1740 – 1820)



Nikka (ca. 1745 – 1833)



Ranjha (ca. 1750 – 1830)



Nainsukh of Guler (ca. 1710–1778)

Double-sided folio depicting a seated nobleman (front) and draft sketches for the *Gitagovinda* series (back)

Basohli, ca. 1765–75

Museum Rietberg, RVI 1329

Gifted by Alice Boner



**Sketch by Nainsukh, revised by Kama (ca. 1735–1810),
first Son of Nainsukh**

Sketch for the second Guler *Gitagovinda* series

Basohli, ca. 1765–75

Museum Rietberg, 2006.177

Acquired with funding from Hans and Jolan Tobler,
Eberhard and Barbara Fischer



**Preliminary sketch by Nainsukh, completed by Kama (ca. 1735–1810),
First Son of Nainsukh**

Radha leans pensively on a tree

Folio from the second Guler *Gitagovinda* series

Basohli, ca. 1765–75

Private collection



Fattu (ca. 1725–1785), second Son of Manaku

The Pandavas' palace in flames

Folio from the large-format *Bhagavata Purana* series

Basohli, ca. 1760–70

Museum Rietberg, REF 50

Permanent loan from Eberhard and Barbara Fischer



Master of the first generation after Manaku and Nainsukh of Guler

The goddess triumphantly slays the shape-shifting buffalo demon Mahisha
Guler or Chamba, ca. 1790

Revision commenced ca. 1820

Museum Rietberg, RVI 1867

Acquired with funding from the City of Zurich



Ranjha (ca. 1750–1830), fourth Son of Nainsukh

Shiva awaits his bride, Parvati

From an unknown *Kumarasambhava* series of sketches

Basohli, ca. 1800–10

Museum Rietberg, 2005.12

Acquired with funding from Hans and Jolan Tobler,
Eberhard and Barbara Fischer



Kama (ca. 1735–1810), first Son of Nainsukh

“Now Krishna plays in joyful spring, dancing with the girls...”

Folio from the second Guler *Gitagovinda* series

Basohli, ca. 1775

Museum Rietberg, RVI 2108

Gifted by Horst Metzger



Manaku of Guler (ca. 1700–1760)

“Now Krishna plays in joyful spring, dancing with the girls...”

Folio from the first Guler *Gitagovinda* series

Guler, dated 1730

Museum Rietberg, RVI 2107

Gifted by Horst Metzger



Kama (ca. 1735–1810), first Son of Nainsukh

Krishna and Radha appear on the balcony

Closing page 150 from the second Guler *Gitagovinda* series,
with Manaku's inscription

Basohli, ca. 1775

Museum Rietberg, REF 31

Permanent loan from Eberhard and Barbara Fischer



Fattu (ca. 1725–1785), second Son of Manaku

Krishna instructs the women

Folio from the large-format *Bhagavata Purana* series

Basohli, ca. 1760–70

Museum Rietberg, REF 46

Permanent loan from Eberhard and Barbara Fischer



Fattu (ca. 1725–1785), second Son of Manaku

The journey of the cowherd families to Vrindavan

Folio from the large-format *Bhagavata Purana* series

Basohli, ca. 1760–70

Museum Rietberg, REF 47

Permanent loan from Eberhard and Barbara Fischer



Kama (ca. 1735–1810), first Son of Nainsukh

Wedding of Krishna's parents

Folio 5 from the small-format *Bhagavata Purana* series

Guler or Basohli, ca. 1775–15

Museum Rietberg, RVI 1900

Gifted by Horst Metzger



Kama (ca. 1735–1810), first Son of Nainsukh

Krishna shelters the cowherds from the torrential rain
beneath Mount Govardhana

Folio from the small-format *Bhagavata Purana* series

Guler or Basohli, ca. 1775–85

Museum Rietberg, RVI 1772

Acquired with funding from Lucy Rudolph



Kama (ca. 1735–1810), first Son of Nainsukh

Krishna's deeds are reenacted

Folio from the small-format *Bhagavata Purana* series

Guler or Basohli, ca. 1775–85

Museum Rietberg, REF 38

Permanent loan from Eberhard and Barbara Fischer



Gaudhu (ca. 1740–1820), second Son of Nainsukh
 Commemorating a pilgrimage to Haridwar (with Nainsukh's ashes)
 Basohli, ca. 1778
 Museum Rietberg, RVI 2207
 Gifted by the heirs of Werner Reinhart



Gaudhu (ca. 1740–1820), second Son of Nainsukh
 Preparing for exile
 Folio from the second Guler *Ramayana* series
 Basohli or Guler, ca. 1775
 Museum Rietberg, 2018.1245
 Gifted by Eva and Konrad Seitz



Gaudhu (ca. 1740–1820), second Son of Nainsukh
 The ascetics of Dandaka seek Rama's protection
 Folio from the second Guler *Ramayana* series
 Basohli or Guler, ca. 1775
 Museum Rietberg, 2011.2
 Gifted by Danielle Porret



Nikka (ca. 1745–1833), third Son of Nainsukh
 State portrait of Raja Bir Singh of Nurpur
 on the terrace as a monsoon approaches
 Chamba, ca. 1810
 Museum Rietberg, RVI 2208
 Gifted by the heirs of Werner Reinhart



Nikka (ca. 1745–1833), third Son of Nainsukh
 Two aristocratic lovers track an approaching storm
 Chamba, ca. 1815–20
 Museum Rietberg, 2018.1250
 Gifted by Eva and Konrad Seitz



Ranjha (ca. 1750–1830), fourth Son of Nainsukh
 Feeding the Brahmins
 Unfinished folio from the second *Nala Damayanti* series
 Basohli or Chamba, ca. 1810–20
 Museum Rietberg, RVI 1513
 Acquired with funding from the City of Zurich



Ranjha (ca. 1750–1830), Fourth Son of Nainsukh
 Usha and her attendants examine paintings
 Unfinished folio from the second *Aniruddha Usha* series
 Basohli or Chamba, ca. 1810–20
 Museum Rietberg, RVI 978
 Acquired with funding from the City of Zurich



Master of the first generation after Manaku and Nainsukh of Guler
 Krishna playing the flute
 Guler, ca. 1770–80
 Museum Rietberg, RVI 1763
 Gifted by Wera Esslinger

Imprint

Curator: Eberhard Fischer
Assistant Curator: Sonika Soni
Coordinator: Johannes Beltz
Technical Images: SIK-ISEA
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