Master's Thesis of Asian Languages and Civilizations

Pictorial Repetition and Response
- Images of Shukadeva and Parikshit
in Eighteenth-Century Kishangarh Paintings -

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the images of Shukadeva and Parikshit in paintings produced in the Kishangarh kingdom of northwestern India in the eighteenth-century. In a number of paintings, Shukadeva and Parikshit, narrators of the *Bhagavata Purana*, are depicted together, and through such paintings this thesis examines the process by which patrons and painters engaged in the production of art.

This unique format of depicting the narrators of the *Bhgavata Purana* has been argued to be related to the development of Kishangarh's poetic literature. In addition to this, I suggest that the artists' connections to the Mughal Empire and its atelier, as well as the politics and poetry, including the rise of the *shahrashob* genre of the 1740s, also contributed to the development of such paintings. I argue that the Kishangarh painters, for example Mughal émigré Bhavani Das, were selective in their adaptations of such external changes. Through the painters' pictorial responses to literature, i.e. their adaptation of composition or techniques, we can recognize their agency. Due to the political turmoil and literary changes in eighteenth-century north India, Kishangarh poets also responded to contemporary literary subject matters in a similar manner, by writing their versions of the *Bhagavata Purana*. To reflect the patrons' writings, I suggest that Kishangarh painters chose these images of Shukadeva and Parikshit and successfully created a new type of painting through repetition and responses to earlier pictorial examples.

Keyword : Kishangarh, *Bhagavata Purana,* Shukadeva, Parikshit, Savant Singh, Bhavani Das, *shahrashob*

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1. Introduction

One day, Parikshit departed from the city Hastinapur to hunt in the forest, where he encountered a brahmin in meditation.[1] As the brahmin was in a deep state of meditation, he did not respond to the king's summons. Thinking that he was being ignored, Parikshit threw a dead snake at the brahmin to insult him. After returning from the hunt, Parikshit regretted his reckless deeds, but at that time, the brahmin's son had already cursed him to be killed by a snake bite within seven days. When the account of the curse reached the palace of Hastinapur, Parikshit accepted his destiny and abdicated the throne to his son. He then left for the banks of the Ganges and meditated on Krishna, surrounded by many saints, gods, and goddesses. One of the saints on the riverbank, Shukadeva, renowned for his supreme knowledge of Krishna, expounded the life of Krishna to the king.[2]

The *Bhagavata Purana* begins by pondering Parikshit's actions when confronted with 'death'. Shukadeva and Parikshit are the narrators who lead this story of the *Bhagavata Purana*. Shukadeva, which literally means "parrot," appears as an ascetic and expounds the truth of Krishna worship through the *Bhagavata Purana*. Parikshit, on the other hand, is a worldly king of noble birth.

In this thesis, I examine the art historical background of the eighteenth-century Kishangarh paintings depicting images of Shukadeva and Parikshit.[3] The Shukadeva paintings depict scenes of the two figures narrating the *Bhagavata Purana* (fig. 1). Parikshit, who could not escape the disastrous consequences, attempts to seek Krishna's world, and Shukadeva appears to guide him. However, the primary focus of the *Bhagavata Purana* is the

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[1] In transliterating Indian words, I keep diacritics to a minimum and follow real pronunciation. However, where original sentences are cited, the original diacritical marks have been used. When a word exists in English dictionaries (for example, "brahmin"), it is neither transliterated nor italicized.

[2] Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare trans., *The Bhagavata-Purana* Part 1 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), 137-151. When I cite the original text, I used the following version: *Bhāgavatapurāṇa,* contribution by Ulrich Stiehl, Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages (GRETIL), SUB Göttingen, July 31, 2020.   https://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_bhAgavatapurANa.htm.

[3] I will refer to paintings that depict images of Shukadeva and Parikshit as "Shukadeva paintings" in this thesis.

discourse about divine love, with Parikshit's liberation being a secondary concern. Hence, the portrayal of the two characters' discourse can be considered a unique theme within the *Bhagavata Purana*.

This thesis particularly focuses on the Shukadeva painting in the Victoria and Albert Museum (VAM, fig. 1) among the several versions of Shukadeva painting from Kishangarh. In addition to the VAM version, three more versions in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin (fig. 2), Los Angeles County Museum of Art (fig. 3), and the Cleveland Museum of Art (fig. 4) are currently identifiable examples of Shukadeva paintings from Kishangarh. Apart from previous studies which have primarily focused on patronage, this thesis provides a critical exploration of the relationship between patrons including Savant Singh (r. 1748-1757) and the painters of Kishangarh. I examine the art production in Kishangarh, the stylistic origins of Kishangarh's painters and their connections to the Mughal Empire, and how the patron's intention were interweaved with the formal style of the painters. Ultimately, the thesis expands its scope of study to north Indian paintings. I contend that the subject matter of these paintings reflects the political conflicts present in north India, suggesting that Kishangarh's patrons and painters were actively responding to contemporary north Indian art traditions.[4]

The unique case of these Shukadeva paintings provides an opportunity to delve into the art production in eighteenth-century Kishangarh. Among the eighteenth-century Kishangarh paintings I have encountered, this type appears to be quite exceptional. While numerous paintings of Radha and Krishna remain, there are very few examples that repeatedly depict a specific subject matter like the Shukadeva paintings. In addition, if the Shukadeva painting emerged due to the widespread of the *Bhagavata Purana* text and

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[4] In this thesis, I use the term 'north India' in a sense to refer to the region encompassing the Rajput kingdoms and the capital area of the Mughal Empire, centered around Delhi. Although I do not broaden the scope in this work, I utilize this term to include the areas of Punjab hills to the north and Bengal to the east, where communication with Mughal court culture is prominent, rather than strictly delineating the Mughal center and culturally influenced peripheries.

Krishna worship, I also raise the question of the conspicuous absence of Krishna, who is a central figure in the story. The main part of the *Bhagavata Purana* narrates the life of Krishna; however, in the surviving Kishangarh paintings illustrating the *Bhagavata Purana,* those depicting Krishna do not outnumber the Shukadeva paintings. Why did the patrons of and painters of Kishangarh patronize and paint the image of Shukadeva and Parikshit, and not Krishna?

I believe we can understand the Shukadeva paintings in a broader context by situating Kishangarh within north Indian and its politics. Located in the vicinity of Ajmer, Rajasthan, Kishangarh is a city known to have been founded in 1611 by Kishan Singh (r. 1611-1615).[5] The city was surrounded by powerful Rajput kingdoms: Jodhpur to the west, Jaipur to the east, and Mewar to the south. Due to its geographical location and barren lands, it had few strategic and economic advantages, which resulted in the Maratha's lack of interest in the region during eighteenth-century. Indeed, the economic and geographic importance of Kishangarh was not substantial. However, Kishangarh paintings were different: Kishangarh was one of the regions that produced the finest paintings in eighteenth-century north India. Paintings from Kishangarh are known for their distinctive facial features, such as elongated, slanted eyes, and their affinity to Mughal portraiture. The pioneering study that focused on Kishangarh paintings and painters would be Eric Dickinson and Karl Khandalavala's *Kishangarh Paintings* (1959). They explain the background of the kingdom and describe Kishangarh paintings while trying to attribute the work to various Kishangarh painters.[6] Almost thirty years later, Faiyaz Ali Khan tried to build the history of Kishangarh painting based on records of the Kishangarh court.[7] Although many of these records have not been

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[5] William Wilson Hunter et al., *Imperial Gazetteer of India*. vol. 15 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908-1931), 311. https://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/gazetteer/
[6] Eric Dickinson and Karl Khandalavala, *Kishangarh Paintings* (New Delhi: Lalit Kalā Academy, 1959), 3-4.
[7] Faiyaz Ali Khan's thesis "The Kishangarh School of Painting" was submitted to University of Rajasthan, Jaipur in 1986. Although I could not acquire this thesis, I cite *The Kishangarh School of Indian Art: True Sense and Sensibilities*, a revised version of Khan's doctoral thesis, and later works.

open to other scholars yet, his research helps to understand the primary sources of Kishangarh history. Navina Haidar's doctoral thesis "The Kishangarh School of Painting"[8] has not been published; however, it articulates the characteristics of Kishangarh painting on a regional basis and corrects dating suggested in previous studies. Haidar's work became the foundation for many scholars interested in Kishangarh, such as Heidi Pauwels. Pauwels' analysis on Savant Singh's poems endeavors to uncover the interconnectedness within the Indian poetic traditions, demonstrating that it cannot be divided into the binary of Islam and Hindu.[9]

While I connect Shukadeva paintings to the political situation in Kishangarh, this is not a new way of looking at Indian painting. In discussing Rajput paintings, it has been argued that Mughal paintings styles gradually spread as Mughal political influence expanded.[10] The interaction was also facilitated by painters who migrated to Rajasthan from the Mughal atelier.[11] Thus, several changes occur in Rajput paintings, including the depiction of patrons. In the seventeenth century, patrons began to be depicted as more realistic figures rather than symbolic representations.[12] Illustration of epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavata Purana*, and *Ragamalas* remained popular, but large-scale projects decreased, especially in the Mughal Empire. By the seventeenth-century, many painters in the imperial atelier who could not find work at the Mughal court went in search of patrons, and Rajput kingdoms provided a great alternative.[13] Mughal painters, now working for Rajput kingdoms, focused on portraiture. By the eighteenth-century, Rajput paintings

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[8] Unfortunately, I could not have access to her thesis. However, I try to supplement her argument by citing other papers by her and quoting other scholars' papers based on this thesis.

[9] Pauwels cites Savant Singh's works in Kiśorīlāl Gupta's *Nāgrīdās Granthāvalī*. 2 vols. (Benares: Nāgarī Pracāriṇi Sabha, 1965). I cite Savant Singh's poetry based on Gupta's work used in Heidi Pauwels' research.

[10] Vishaka Desai, "Painting and Politics in Seventeenth-Century North India: Mewar, Bikaner, and the Mughal Court," *Art Journal*, vol. 49, no. 4. (Winter 1990): 375.

[11] Desai suggests that this could be due to visual communication between painters of north India while Mughal and Rajput courts brought them together on military campaigns. Desai, "Painting and Politics in Seventeenth-Century North India: Mewar, Bikaner, and the Mughal Court," 376.

[12] Catherine Glynn, "Becoming the Hero: Metamorphosis of the Raja" in *Portraiture in South Asia Since the Mughals: Art, Representation and History*, ed. Crispin Branfoot (New Delhi: Bloomssbury India, 2020), 129-133.

[13] Milo C. Beach, *Mughal and Rajput Painting* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press. 1992), 44-46.

were no longer limited to individual portraits but encompassed courtly banquets and hunting scenes.[14] During this period, a notable exchange of artistic styles took place, evidently exemplified in Bikaner where the painters incorporated Deccani painting styles after participating in Mughal expeditions to the Deccan.[15] Even Thakurs or local chiefs of Mewar and Marwar commissioned portraiture and established sub-styles of Rajput paintings.[16] The school of Kishangarh paintings was established in this period, beginning from the finely characterized fine portraits by Mughal immigrant painters Bhavani Das (1680/1685?-1748/1754) and Dalchand (1690/1695?-1760?). Alternatively, the scholarly focus has been given to the patrons of Kishangarh painting, particularly Savant Singh, a distinguished warrior and poet whose reputation extended across north India. Until the death of his father Raj Singh (r. 1706-1748), Savant Singh patronized poetry and painting, and wrote poetry in his pen name Nagaridas. However, his later years were overshadowed by an eight-year-long battle for the throne with his brother, and not long after the reconciliation Savant Singh abdicated his throne and retreated to Vrindavan, a city known for Krishna worship.

I attempt to develop my thesis from previous studies by reconsidering historical narratives centered on patronage. Previous studies of Kishangarh paintings place special emphasis on the relationship between the patron, Savant Singh, and the painter Nihal Chand (1705/1710-1782).[17] However, I believe that the painters have been overshadowed by their patron, sometimes being described as merely illustrating his poetry. In the second chapter of my thesis, I examine earlier studies on Kishangarh and other Rajput court paintings,

particularly the role of patrons in the Shukadeva paintings and scenes of the *Bhagavata Purana.* The Shukadeva paintings follow the story of Parikshit, which corresponds to an episode of the *Bhagavata Purana*. Among Shukadeva paintings, the VAM version of the Shukadeva painting is crucial for identifying the content, as each figure is inscribed with a name. The Berlin version holds importance as a dated Shukadeva painting. However, the VAM version is the main object of analysis, as I suggest the VAM version predates other existing Shukadeva paintings and estimate the date in Chapter 3. In addition, I begin by questioning why this particular type of Shukadeva painting with two conversing figures was repeatedly found in Kishangarh. I examine the composition of north Indian *Bhagavata Purana* paintings, and how the episode of Shukadeva and Parikshit is represented pictorially. From there, I compare the differences between these north Indian examples and Kishangarh paintings. Also, I will examine earlier research on Kishangarh's patrons and what led the patrons to commission such Shukadeva paintings.

In chapter three, I trace the painters and their work in Kishangarh. Unlike the detailed scholarly analysis of Kishangarh's patrons, especially Savant Singh, the painters' styles have not been analyzed as much. Thus, based on stylistic grounds, I focus on the origins of Kishangarh's painters and their connections to the Mughal Empire. While it is assumed that Shukadeva paintings also show Mughal stylistic traits, these have not been explored in detail. Therefore, I trace the paintings of Bhavani Das, a Mughal-born painter, his son Dalchand, and Nihal Chand, who are credited with perfecting the Kishangarh style. In the second part of this chapter, I analyze the ways in which the literature of Savant Singh is applied to the paintings. I discover the agency of the painters through the way Savant Singh's writings are transformed into the form of a painting, and how the painters reflected this painting method in the Shukadeva painting.

Finally, I argue that the subject matter of the paintings relates to the general political strife in northern India. While Chapter 2 uncovered the unique character of Shukadeva paintings in Kishangarh and examined the patrons' poetry and patronage of the paintings, Chapter 3 focused on the painters and analyzed how they transformed the existing Mughal painting tradition into Kishangarh's own. In Chapter 4, I synthesize these two arguments to read the Shukadeva paintings in the context of north Indian history. I begin by examining the *shahrashob*, which emerged as a popular literary genre in eighteenth-century north India. This genre of poetry became popular in response to the devastation of Delhi following Nadir Shah's invasion in 1739. I argue that painters of Kishangarh would have used the *Bhagavata Purana* as an example of a response to this trend. In doing so, I aim to illustrate that the patrons and painters of Kishangarh were skilled at responding to north Indian art traditions, and provide a contextual framework for understanding Shukadeva paintings.

2. The Development of *Bhagavata Purana* Paintings and the Kishangarh Court

2.1. A Unique Format: The Shukadeva painting in Kishangarh

The Shukadeva painting depicts an episode from the *Bhagavata Purana*, which mainly explains the greatness of Krishna, his life, and the importance of worshiping Krishna.[18] Shukadeva, as the narrator of the *Bhagavata Purana,* leads the story by having a conversation with King Parikshit, ruler of Hastinapur. Shukadeva narrates the different qualities of Krishna with Parikshit asking questions. The Shukadeva painting depicts the assembly for this conversation.

Specifically, the painting scene depicts the story of the first book (*skanda*) of the *Bhagavata Purana*, which describes how Parikshit was subject to meeting Shukadeva. The VAM Shukadeva painting can be read in three parts. Beginning from a distance, the painting presents the background of the story. In the upper left corner, a city is depicted with a fort and buildings between the hills, and inscribed as *Hastinapur* (fig. 5). The middle part of the painting shows the cause of the curse (fig. 6), with the hunting scene (fig. 7) where the king encountered the ascetic. Finally, the forefront of the painting depicts the final assembly with the king receiving Shukadeva's discourse on Krishna's life (fig. 8).

Detailed analysis of the VAM painting makes clear that the painting generally follows the text of the *Bhagavata Purana*. At the center, the blue-skinned Shukadeva (*Sukadevajī*)[19] is speaking to the king Parikshit (*Rājā*), who is seated to the left and holding his hands together. They are surrounded by the Vedic saints mentioned in the *Bhagavata Purana,*

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[18] The *Bhagavata Purana* is believed to be written around the tenth century in south India, and is known to have evoked the *bhakti* (Hindu devotional) movement since the sixteenth century in India. Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India Before Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 111-112.

[19] The names and terms in parentheses are the transliterated inscriptions on the painting.

particularly from verse nine to ten in chapter nineteen of the first book.[20] This assembly

consists of various groups of saints, who are of celestial, Brahmanical, and royal descent.

Atri, Arishtanemi, and Vasishtha sit behind Parikshit, and Parashara is just beside

Shukadeva's throne. A sage Narada (*Naradajī*) holds his instrument, a *vina*, and Brahma's

four sons (the *Sanakādikas*) are depicted as youthful figures at the bottom of the painting.

Across the river, the middle plane juxtaposes the sequence of the king's hunting, divided into

three parts by two groups of trees. The scene depicts the king hunting antelope at the center

while his entourage waits in the right-hand corner of the painting. The small letters in the left-

hand corner are imperceptible, but there is an image of a yogi seated in front of a hut, with

the king (*Rājā*) approaching.

   Although Shukadeva paintings generally depict the events in the text, they do not

faithfully follow the text. The VAM painting is a representative example of Shukadeva

paintings, and one feature of this painting is not found in the *Bhagavata Purana*. Brahma's

four children, the Sanakadikas, do not nominally appear in the text describing the gathering

of Parikshit. Of course, the text describes the assembly of all saints, and the Sanakadikas

could have been included as celestial saints. They teach the importance of devotion, *bhakti* in

the *Bhagavata Purana*.[21] They took part in the transmission of the *Bhagavata Purana* text

seeking the truth about the Lord which can be found in the conversation of other saints. But

from a broader context, the image of Sanakadikas with Shukadeva could have originated in

Salemabad, a city about twenty kilometers away from Kishangarh. In 1749, Savant Singh

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[20] While Atri, Vasishtha, Cyavana, Sharadvana, Arishtanemi, Angirasa(?), Bhrigu, Kumbhayoni(Agatsya), Kavsha, Aurva, Parashurama, Narada sit on the left side, Parashara, Gadhi(?), Utathya(?), Indrapramada, Idhmavaha, Medhatithi, Devala, Arshtishena, Bharadvaja, Gautama, Pippalada sit on the right side. There is a saint uninscribed beside Bhradvaja, whom I conjecture to be Maitreya.

atrirvasiṣṭhaścyavanaḥ śaradvān ariṣṭanemirbhṛguraṅgirāśca /
parāśaro gādhisuto 'tha rāma utathya indrapramadedhmavāhau//
medhātithirdevala ārṣṭiṣeṇo bhāradvājo gautamaḥ pippalādaḥ /
maitreya aurvaḥ kavaṣaḥ kumbhayonir dvaipāyano bhagavān nāradaśca // (BP. 1. 19. 9-10)

[21] Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare trans., *The Bhagavata-Purana* Part 1, 259-260.

wrote a poem titled *Garland of Rama's Romance* (*Ramcaritmala*), showing the influence

from Nimbarkan poets of Salemabad, a city well-known for its devotion to Rama and

worship of the Sanakadikas.[22] While the contents of *Garland of Rama's Romance* is different

from the *Bhagavata Purana*, Shukadeva and the Sanakadikas appear together within the

text.[23] Although such poetry does not directly explain why Sanakadikas could appear in the

Shukadeva painting, a Kishangarh courtier, including poet king Savant Singh, might be

familiar with the image of the Sanakadikas with Shukadeva due to its religious intimacy.[24]

Apart from the VAM painting of Shukadeva, several examples remain in various

collections. The painting at Berlin Museum für Asiatische Kunst (fig. 2) is another example

depicting Shukadeva in Hastinapur. This painting focuses on the arrival of Shukadeva.

Unlike the VAM Shukadeva, there are no inscriptions noting the name of figures but only a

date, "*Samvat* 1814" (1757 CE), on the verso.[25] When we compare the painting to the text of

the *Bhagavata Purana*, the bare-breasted ladies in the upper left corner welcome Shukadeva

to Hastinapur, and in the center field in between the rivers, Shukadeva stands depicted in a

large size compared to his worshipers.[26] Lastly, Shukadeva expounds while seated on the

throne surrounded by many saints, ascetics, and courtiers. In this bottom scene, people are

gathered in a much more compact manner so that we can barely see the green grass. This

Berlin Shukadeva painting does not emphasize Parikshit's life but rather concentrates on

Shukadeva's sermon while appropriating the same composition of the VAM Shukadeva

painting.

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[22] Heidi Pauwels, *Mobilizing Krishna's World: The Writings of Prince Sāvant Singh of Kishangarh* (Seattle; London: University of Washington Press. 2017), 48, 231.

[23] Heidi Pauwels, *Mobilizing Krishna's World*, 174. "Parasa says: Shuka and Sanakadikas, hearts full of love, sing praise of Rama's virtues." in *Garland of Rama's Romance*, verse 14.

[24] In addition, Dvaipayana, or Vyasa, father of Shukadeva, does not appear in the painting. The difference between the text and paintings might have been due to the painters' choice, or the vernacular versions of the *Bhagavata Purana* in Kishangarh, which this paper cannot judge.

[25] Faiyaz Ali Khan, *The Kishangarh School of Indian Art: True Sense and Sensibilities* (Virginia: Universal Pilgrim Productions, 2020), 225.

[26] Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare trans., *The Bhagavata-Purana* Part 1, 33-34 (BP. 1. 4. 5-6); Khan, *The Kishangarh School of Indian Art*, 225-226. Khan assumes the palace in the upper left corner as Roopnagar, a real location in Kishangarh, but the place in the painting can be understood as Hastinapur if we follow the text of the *Bhagavata Purana*.

Later paintings of Shukadeva which appeared in Kishangarh were most likely based on the VAM and Berlin Shukadeva paintings. The Shukadeva type painting in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) follows the composition and figure type of the Berlin Shukadeva painting, but leaves only the scene of Shukadeva reciting the *Bhagavata Purana* and the background palace beyond the river (fig. 3). The Cleveland Shukadeva painting (fig. 4), however, follows the VAM type composition and figure types. Although Parikshit's blue-skinned chest is bare, the saints in the Cleveland version are seated around Parikshit and Shukadeva in an order similar to the VAM painting, and we can recognize them as Narada holding a *vina*, Parashurama behind him with a bow and the four children of Brahma at the bottom of the painting. However, we can also find the similarities between the Cleveland and the LACMA paintings in the figure in the bottom left corner of the Cleveland version (fig. 9). This three-quarter facial type with a long beard and mustache appears multiple times in the LACMA version (fig. 10), which suggests that these figures were transmitted, and interpreted by the painters when reproducing the paintings.

Most Shukadeva paintings were produced in mid eighteenth-century Kishangarh, and we may date them through stylistic analysis. The LACMA version can be dated *circa* 1757 CE by comparison with the Berlin version. Cleveland Museum of Art believes that the Cleveland version was made around 1800 CE, but without suggesting the relation to the VAM version and the LACMA version. The VAM version, the main Shukadeva painting in this paper, is considered to have been painted between 1740 and 1750. Like the Berlin version, this follows the narrative composition divided into three parts, a feature of Kishangarh paintings produced from the 1730s to 1740s, such as *A Love on a Boat* (fig. 11) with the Kishangarh-style red boat; however, the figures' faces are not as a fixed as in the late-eighteenth century Kishangarh painting. The dating process based on formal analysis will be offered in detail in Chapter 3.

The main subject of the Shukadeva painting depicts the moment that Parikshit, who misbehaved towards a brahmin, asks Shukadeva what a man destined to death should do to attain "final beatitude (*saṃsiddhi*)" without any attachment to this world.[27] Although each version may focus on disparate themes, such as Parikshit's life in the VAM version and Shukadeva's arrival in the Berlin version, the main focus of the Shukadeva painting is the gathering of people around Shukadeva and Parikshit. Therefore, the first step to approach the Shukadeva painting would be to understand this conversation.

Focusing on the gathering scene in the painting may have a danger of limiting the appreciation of the Shukadeva painting to just the religious meanings. As Parikshit seeks shelter from Krishna, this is not a wrong interpretation. However, I believe by restricting the meaning of Shukadeva paintings as religious, we cannot fully explain why this Shukadeva painting was copied multiple times in the late eighteenth century. In order to emphasize the distinctiveness of the Kishangarh Shukadeva painting, I first compare the depictions of Shukadeva and Parikshit across different regions in Rajasthan.

2.2. Earlier *Bhagavata Purana* Paintings of the Rajput Courts

The *Bhagavata Purana* is one of the main subjects of Rajput paintings and became particularly significant during the sixteenth century.[28] North Indian painting traditions of this period reflect the significance of the *Bhagavata Purana* in line with the *bhakti* movement. While there must have been earlier examples, a remarkable *Bhagavata Purana* of a long and horizontal format painting is datable to the first half of the sixteenth century (fig. 12).[29] The

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[27] Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare trans., *The Bhagavata-Purana* Part 1, 150 (BP. 1. 19. 37).
[28] Asher and Talbot, *India Before Europe*, 111-112.
[29] Daniel Ehnbom identifies ten anonymous painters who participated in this project. Possibly made in Delhi or Mathura, he suggests that the painters recognized the traditional painting techniques and had a "collective agreement on the proper palette." Figure 8 is at the Cleveland Museum of Art. Ehnbom "Masters of Dispersed *Bhagavata Purana*," in *Masters of Indian Painting I: 1100-1650*, ed. Milo C. Beach, Eberhard Fischer, B.N. Goswamy (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2011), 79-80.

painting depicts Krishna and his worshipers in profiles, and mainly describes the heroic act of Lord Krishna. Their passion towards Krishna and strong emotional expressions are depicted intensely in the painting.[30]

The tendency of describing Krishna worship continued even in the seventeenth-century. In Mewar, Sahibdin is well-known for directing a fabulous series of paintings illustrating the *Bhagavata Purana*. Sahibdin worked around 1620 to the 1650s, and his *Bhagavata Purana* series is dated to 1648.[31] Sahibdin's *Bhagavata Purana* paintings clearly convey the narrative often along with its inscriptions (fig. 13).[32] The kingdom of Kota was another center that made illustrations for the *Bhagavata Purana* series. Painters of Kota also depicted the episodes of Krishna following the text.[33] In addition, the narrative of Krishna worship of the early sixteenth century continued to be painted in the late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century Pahari region in the Punjab hills. Although Pahari paintings are stylistically refined and imply a relationship to the Mughal imperial paintings, Krishna and his heroic deeds were the common subject matters in north Indian paintings.[34]

Given the widespread popularity of the *Bhagavata Purana* across north India, its depiction in Kishangarh paintings is not unexpected. Sumahendra suggests that Krishna worship had inspired and shaped visual forms in Kishangarh.[35] The worship of Krishna was prevalent in the Kishangarh court, and several texts such as the *Gita Govinda* and the *Bhagavata Purana* were widely read by the courtiers. The crown prince Savant Singh was no exception. He was a devotee of the Vallabha Sampradaya, a Krishna worship sect founded by

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[30] The *Bhagavata Purana* was not the only text of the early sixteenth-century north India that reflected the devotional movement of north India. The *Gita Govinda*, thought to be written by Jaya Deva in the twelfth century, was another favored subject matter for paintings that depicts the erotic mood between Krishna and Radha. Asher and Talbot, *India Before Europe*, 112-113.

[31] Beach, *Mughal and Rajput Painting*, 118-119.

[32] Andrew Topsfield. "Sahibdin" in *Masters of Indian Painting 1: 1100-1650*, ed. Milo C. Beach, Eberhard Fischer, B.N. Goswamy (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2011), 399-400.

[33] Stuart Cary Welch ed., *Gods, Kings, and Tigers: The Art of Kotah* (New York and Cambridge, MA: Asia Society Galleries and Harvard University Art Museums, 1997), 94.

[34] Beach, *Mughal and Rajput Painting*, 200-201.

[35] Sumahendra, *Splendid Style of Kishangarh Painting* (Jaipur: Jaipur Printers. 1995), 38-39.

Vallabha in the twelfth-century. Sumahendra comments on the devotional aspect of Kishangarh paintings, which he argues were "aloof from mere eroticism and remained inclined towards devotional love."[36]

However, the Shukadeva painting in late-eighteenth century Kishangarh is unique compared to other regional paintings of the *Bhagavata Purana*. The Shukadeva painting appears various times in Kishangarh, and as analyzed in the earlier section it was not produced as part of the *Bhagavata Purana*, nor does it explicitly depict Krishna, the main protagonist of the text. Although the painting depicts the text, there is not enough reason to copy the scene of Shukadeva and Parikshit multiple times among the many stories within the *Bhagavata Purana*. This becomes clear when we compare the image of Shukadeva and Parikshit in other north Indian paintings. For instance, Shukadeva and Parikshit position themselves in a structure in the upper middle part of a painting from Datia around the 1800s (fig. 14). Their role is restricted to narrating the *Bhagavata Purana* story illustrated below them, and they remain distant from Krishna's story. A Pahari painter also depicted Shukadeva and Parikshit (fig. 15). The painting shows only two people in the architectural frame, while a river flows in the middle of an empty green plane. At first glance, this Pahari painting seems different from other Rajput *Bhagavata Purana* paintings, but it is not unique in that it was produced as part of a series.[37] It truly follows the Pahari painting tradition of making many single pages of narrative stories from the classical texts.[38] The Kishangarh Shukadeva painting does not belong to such Rajput painting traditions, and it rather seems like an independent type of painting. Thus, we need to discover the meaning of this particular scene in Kishangarh.

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[36] *Ibid.*

[37] Pratapaditya Pal, *Painted Poems: Rajput Paintings from the Ramesh and Urmil Kapoor Collection* (Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena; Mapin Publishing, 2004), 82.

[38] B. N. Goswamy and Eberhard Fischer, "Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India" *Artibus Asiae. Supplementum*, vol. 38, (1992), 244-245.

Scholars have sought to interpret this image of Shukadeva and Parikshit in Kishangarh in various manners. Some scholars have tried to explain the uniqueness due to the patron, Savant Singh. Mohinder Randhawa and Doris Randhawa, early scholars of Kishangarh paintings, argue that the *Bhagavata Purana* paintings in Kishangarh often illustrate Savant Singh's poetry.[39] They open up the possibility that the *Bhagavata Purana* paintings in Kishangarh, including those of Shukadeva, do not always faithfully reflect the story. They propose that this inconsistency with the *Bhagavata Purana* text may stem from the influence of Savant Singh's poetry, as seen in other Kishangarh paintings. Although they do not specify which *Bhagavata Purana* painting is based on Savant Singh's poetry, I believe they considered the Shukadeva paintings as one example due to their clear subject matter from the *Bhagavata Purana*. Their conjecture could be proper based on the other examples of Kishangarh paintings that are related to Savant Singh's poetry.

Heidi Pauwels, a scholar of Savant Singh's poetry, also argues the significance of the *Bhagavata Purana* in the Kishangarh court. This leads Pauwels to suggest that the Shukadeva painting was inspired by the production of numerous copies of the *Bhagavata Purana* text in Kishangarh.[40] Furthermore, Pauwels develops Randhawa's argument that the Kishangarh paintings illustrate Savant Singh's poetry. To explain the Shukadeva paintings, Pauwels suggests that the poetry of Savant Singh and his courtiers used the motives from the *Bhagavata Purana* to praise for Lord Krishna.[41] In Savant Singh's poetry, the narrator leading the poetry session is named Shukadeva, which leads to Pauwels' argument that it shows the importance of the role of Shukadeva as the narrator. Along with the development of literature in Kishangarh, Pauwels suggests that painters established a narrator figure type,

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[39] Mohinder Siṃh Randhawa and Doris Schreiner Randhawa. *Kishangarh Painting* (Bombay: Vakils Feffer and Simons, 1980), 11.
[40] Heidi Pauwels, *Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century India: Poetry and Paintings from Kishangarh* (Berlin: EB-Verlag), 186-189.
[41] Pauwels, *Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century India*, 187.

"Shukadeva," reflecting the poetry of Savant Singh. Also, Pauwels contends that the co-occurrence of the *Bhagavata Purana* characters in both the visual and text mediums substantiates the linkage between them.[42] To illustrate the details, Pauwels cites a part of a poem in a *Bhagavata Purana* version written by Govind Prabhu, a member of this Kishangarh poetry group. Prabhu's poem mentions the sage Narada and Brahma's four sons (*Sanakadikas*), who appear in the assembly of Shukadeva and Parikshit. In other words, the *Bhagavata Purana* was frequently used as inspiration for poetic compositions within Savant Singh's intimate circle of courtiers.

Pauwels claims that the reproduction of the Shukadeva paintings was due to the continuing importance of the *Bhagavata Purana* even after the death of Savant Singh.[43] Savant Singh wrote vernacular versions of the *Bhagavata Purana*, and his stepmother was also a fervent devotee of Krishna worship, and also left a vernacular rendition of the *Bhagavata Purana*. In Pauwels' view, the repetitive occurrence of Shukadeva paintings can be attributed to the religious devotion and the active propagation of the *Bhagavata Purana*. As a result, Kishangarh courtiers started to depict the Shukadeva painting and increasingly focused on this theme, and Pauwels believes that later iterations of Shukadeva paintings followed this established Kishangarh format for depicting the *Bhagavata Purana*.[44]

However, we can consider several aspects in addition to Pauwels' interpretation of the Shukadeva painting in the Kishangarh painting tradition. Pauwels' argument can expand the meaning of the Shukadeva painting beyond Savant Singh's poems by focusing on the absence of Krishna. The fact that the *Bhagavata Purana* texts were produced at the Kishangarh court after 1740, coupled with the continued reproduction of Shukadeva paintings even after Savant Singh's death, suggests the possibility that an additional layer of meaning might have

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[42] *Ibid.*
[43] Pauwels, *Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century India*, 189.
[44] *Ibid.*

emerged from the *Bhagavata Purana* in Kishangarh during this period. Moreover, this prevalence of the *Bhagavata Purana* suggests that the courtiers of Kishangarh likely reached a consensus on the meaning of the *Bhagavata Purana* after the 1740s. This implies that Savant Singh might not have been the sole patron inspiring the emergence of Shukadeva painting. Different emphases between the traditional *Bhagavata Purana* that focuses on Krishna's episodes and the Kishangarh versions in which narrators play a major role in paintings should be discussed in this context. Thus, instead of solely focusing on the relationship between Savant Singh and the painters, it is important to consider how the *Bhagavata Purana* was adapted and disseminated within the Kishangarh court. This suggests that the absence of Krishna should be discussed not only in the context of Savant Singh, but also within the broader context of Kishangarh literature.

Second, there is a need to stylistically analyze the Shukadeva paintings. If the Shukadeva painting reflects the text and its atmosphere, how does the painting depict the figures and the background? Although Pauwels notes that Kishangarh painters were of Mughal origin, there is a dearth of information on the compositions and methods of depicting figures. The pictorial significance of the Shukadeva painting has not been entirely discussed yet.

2.3. *Bhagavata Purana* Literature in Eighteenth-century Kishangarh

Before the stylistic analysis of the Shukadeva paintings, we need to understand the context of the prevalence of the *Bhagavata Purana*. In 1748, when Savant Singh succeeded his father, the subcontinent was in political turmoil. Apart from the kingdoms of Rajasthan, local dynasties such as Awadh and Hyderabad were now virtually independent, and the Maratha armies from western India constantly threatened the Mughals. Furthermore, when the invasion of Nadir Shah from Persia in 1739 devastated Delhi, the city lost its vitality and

wealth to Nadir Shah.[45] Following the Persian invasion, the Mughals endured severe loss

defending military operations led by Durrani of Afghanistan.[46]

When Savant Singh was about to be enthroned he was also challenged by his brother,

Bahadur Singh (r. 1748-1781), which resulted in a civil war.[47] Due to the death of his closest

ally, Muhammad Shah of the Mughal Empire, and the unrest throughout northern India,

Savant Singh was unable to secure military assistance from the Mughals or other Rajput

kingdoms. He had no choice but to pay for the Maratha army to come to his assistance, and

Savant Singh and his son were endlessly engaged in the succession wars among Rajput

kingdoms.[48] The war devastated the country. However, after eight years of conflict, the two

brothers of Kishangarh reconciled and consented to divide the kingdom peacefully.

Moreover, Savant Singh abdicated his throne in favor of his son, and the kingdom was

reunited by Bahadur Singh after Savant Singh's son died without heirs.[49] This decision

prevented further havoc and the complete collapse of the kingdom.

I start my interpretation of the Shukadeva painting with this chaotic political climate

in mind. Savant Singh's version of the *Bhagavata Purana* emerged in 1742, collecting poetry

of Kishangarh poets and his own and titling it as "Spotlight on the manner of a full recitation

of the Holy *Bhagavata Purana*" (*Shrimad-Bhagavat-parayan-vidhi-praksh*).[50] Pauwels

suggests that rather than narrating the episodes of the *Bhagavata Purana*, this version was

composed for particular "occasion[s] and read at the outset and at the conclusion of the

rite."[51] It looks probable that the poems were composed for actual religious gatherings in

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[45] Dickinson and Khandalavala, *Kishangarh Paintings*, 8.
[46] Dickinson and Khandalavala, *Kishangarh Paintings*, 10-11.
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] Pauwels, *Mobilizing Krishna's World*, 22-25.
[49] Khan, *The Kishangarh School of Indian Art*, 71-72.
[50] The authors are Savant Singh (Nagaridas in pen name), Purohit Brajlal, Vijairam, Kalha Panna (Prannath in pen name), Sanarhya Hiralal, Binaicand, Brijnath Bhatt, Munshi Kanhiram, and Rasik Bihari. Pauwels, *Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century India*, 73-74.
[51] *Ibid.*

Kishangarh.[52] The first verse begins by mentioning the Kali Yuga, an age characterized by severe moral decay, and invites guests with suggestions of preventing the decadence through praising Krishna.

> In the depths of dark Kali Yuga, there is no reprieve,
>
> Bad company corrupts the mind from mon till night.
>
> So now with kirtana, a sacrifice of Brahma's creation,
>
> A start is made for taking joy and bringing joy [for Kali Yuga's cessation].
>
> Let us not waste time, this is the priority, the task at hand.
>
> So ponder in your minds and follow my leads in words.
>
> Take part in tenfold worship (sadhana), in gathering of saints,
>
> Come join us to sing and tell of Krishna's tale.[53]

According to this version of Savant Singh's *Bhagavata Purana*, Savant Singh urges the guests to join in the poetry session, and sets themes before poets' writing.[54] As the first verse above proposes, Savant Singh compiled poems that could heal the decayed age following the methods of the *Bhagavata Purana*.[55] I believe that the aspiration to stop worldly corruption transcends the boundaries of poetic expression. Savant Singh's stepmother Braj Kumvari Bankavati ordered and wrote her vernacular version of the *Bhagavata Purana*, the *Brajdasi Bhagavat*, from 1749 to 1755.[56] Heidi Pauwels quotes the queen's comments that the *Brajdasi Bhagavat* was written with the wish to settle the fraternal

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[52]   Imre Bangha, "Courtly and Religious communities as Centres of Literary Activity in Eighteenth-Century India: Anandghan's Contacts with the princely court of Kishangarh-Rupnagar and with the Math of Nimbāraka SamPradāy in Salemabad," (August 4, 2006), 10. This article is uploaded on author's academia.edu page without noting publisher's name. https://www.academia.edu/71575918/Courtly_and_Religious_communities_as_Centres_of_Literary_Activity_in_Eighteenth _Century_India_A_nandghan_s_Contacts_with_the_princely_court_of_Kishangarh_Rupnagar_and_with_the_Mat_h_of_the _Nimba_rka_Samprada_y_in_Salemabad

[53] Pauwels, *Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century India*, 74-75.

[54] Pauwels, *Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century India*, 75.

[55] *Ibid.*

[56] Pauwels, *Mobilizing Krishna's World*, 190.

war in Kishangarh.[57] If the story of the *Bhagavata Purana* contained such yearning of peace, it would be safe to assume that the interpretation of the Shukadeva painting requires the understanding of Kishangarh politics connected with the *Bhagavata Purana*. As Parikshit sought Krishna's world through Shukadeva's preaching, Savant Singh and the queen might have yearned to escape from reality and take refuge in Krishna. Although we can imagine that there may be some undiscovered paintings depicting other scenes of the *Bhagavata Purana*, I believe that these two character's images are intentionally chosen to draw an analogy between the real world and the story of the *Bhagavata Purana* understood by contemporary audiences of Kishangarh.[58]

Pauwels' analysis on Savant Singh's *Garland of Rama's Romance* provides valuable insight placing it in line with the *Brajdasi Bhagavat*. Pauwels notes that the *Garland of Rama's Romance*, composed during Savant Singh's exile seeking for alliances in north India, served as a "healing" narrative that emphasized the passionate love between Rama and Sita, rather than the heroic actions of Rama.[59] This poem making plays an important role in understanding the worldview at the Kishangarh court. Kishangarh poets appropriated literature to perceive and explain the real world. Pauwels delves into why Savant Singh wrote a *Ramayana* story which "ceased to be a *Ramayana*."[60] Savant Singh omits key moments, i.e., Sita's abduction or Sita's trial, which are necessary for the narrative to explain the separation between Sita and Rama. Rather, the epic is retold focusing on the love between them.[61] Pauwels explains Savant Singh's departure from tradition as a way for him to

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[57] *Ibid.*
[58] To build upon Pauwels' idea on the Shukadeva painting, it is important to note that Savant Singh was not the only patron and producer of the paintings. While Savant Singh was an important figure in the context of Kishangarh art, it is possible that the emergence of Shukadeva painting may be closely tied to the work of Savant Singh's mother. However, I do not aim to identify who is the patron of the Shukadeva painting in this thesis. Given the participation of many Kishangarh poets in Savant Singh's *Bhagavata Purana* version, I believe the process through which a shared literary vision was recognized and conveyed in the Kishangarh court is of greater importance. In other words, I concentrate on artistic production in Kishangarh closely linked to the social climate at the time of mid-eighteenth-century.
[59] Pauwels, *Mobilizing Krishna's World*, 189.
[60] Pauwels, *Mobilizing Krishna's World*, 184.
[61] Pauwels, *Mobilizing Krishna's World*, 175, in the *Garland of Rama's Romance* verse 15.

reinterpret and reshape his current situation, while using conventions he already knew. This approach to art production should not be limited to the literature genre but extended toward the production of visual art.

From this perspective, Pauwels looks at Kishangarh paintings depicting the *Ramayana*. However, there are only a few paintings that depict Rama's story, and most of them were made after Savant Singh's death. Pauwels believes that the limited number of *Ramayana* paintings (fig. 16) was due to Savant Singh's inability to maintain an atelier.[62] While it is true that painters were not active during the conflict in Kishangarh, there is a significant difference in the number of *Ramayana* paintings compared to those of Shukadeva paintings. Given the number of participants in the writing of the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavata Purana*, it is plausible that the *Bhagavata Purana* was more widely recognized, thereby increasing its potential for patronage from other courtiers. While considering the intention of the patrons is important, it is also crucial to acknowledge the other participants involved in the production of such art. These contributors produced images that resonated with the audience, particularly in the case of the widely accepted depiction of Shukadeva and Parikshit in Kishangarh. While it is not clear whether Savant Singh or Braj Kumvari Bankavati supported the making of the Shukadeva painting, there were other participants engaged in Kishangarh art production. They are the painters of Kishangarh.

The next chapter delves into the role that Kishangarh painters played in the making of the Shukadeva painting. These early eighteenth-century Kishangarh painters acquired their skills in the Mughal Empire and established the Kishangarh style. However, they needed to communicate with their patrons and the audience of such paintings, reflecting the worldview of the Kishangarh court. To better understand the Shukadeva painting, I will investigate the demands laid on the painters.

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[62] Pauwels, *Mobilizing Krishna's World*, 191.

3. The Painters of Kishangarh, 1719-1748

The making of art is an intricate exchange between the artist's aptitude and the intention of the patron. Artists are confined by their artistic techniques to depict a specified subject matter. Patron-requested themes are thus visualized through the prism of the artist's learned capabilities, implying that artistically portraying a certain theme demands the selection of a pictorial form that enables its best representation. This artistic choice involves a complex compositional decision-making process, allowing artists to articulate subject matters within their painterly abilities, while simultaneously ensuring that the produced work remains intelligible to its intended audience. Consequently, artists confront the task of synthesizing a painting that aligns with both the patron's expectation and the wider audience, all the while staying true to their individual talents.

In this chapter, I explore the background of the painters of Kishangarh to shed light on the production of Shukadeva paintings. In the previous chapters, I argued that the production of Shukadeva paintings was closely linked to their patronage, and that the Shukadeva paintings emerged from the fraternal war within Kishangarh. I consider whether this social climate in Kishangarh's artistic production could be applied to painting as well as poetry, using the example of Savant Singh. I do not clarify in this chapter who produced the Shukadeva paintings. Instead, I will look at the painters who played a major role in establishing Kishangarh painting in the eighteenth-century. In doing so, I will delve into the painterly abilities of the Kishangarh painters and what they emphasized in their representations of Shukadeva.

3.1. Painters from the Mughal Empire and Establishment of Kishangarh Style

Many scholars have noted that the paintings of Kishangarh are stylistically closely related to Mughal paintings. For example, Milo Beach has found inscriptions of the Mughal regnal year on the verso of Savant Singh's portrait (fig. 17).[63] According to Milo Beach, this reveals a connection between the painters of Kishangarh and the Mughals, as Hindu reign dates were usually written on paintings produced in Rajput kingdoms.[64] In addition to this textual evidence, Beach assumes that early eighteenth-century paintings from Kishangarh are visually reminiscent of Mughal paintings of the previous century.[65] In Fig. 17, the prince Savant Singh is standing on the court terrace with a river behind him and hills covered with trees in the distance. Beach compares this Kishangarh painting with a Mughal painting about a century before, which depicts Mughal lovers on the terrace. The two paintings have similar compositions, techniques, and moods.[66] Savant Singh's portrait not only has similarity in the terrace and river background, but also conveys a romantic mood between the couple. While the Mughal painting overtly depicts the romance of the couple, Savant Singh looks at a woman in a window covered with a screen. Although this painting appears to be a conventional portrait of a raja, it can also be understood to convey a romantic mood by covering the female figure within a reddish window shade.

When we analyze such Kishangarh paintings and their relationships with Mughal paintings in the early eighteenth-century, we should consider the painters' backgrounds. Apart from the fact that patrons like Savant Singh were familiar with the Mughal courtly culture, Kishangarh painters of the eighteenth-century, Bhavani Das, Dalchand, and Nihal

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[63] Beach, *Mughal and Rajput Painting*, 183.
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] *Ibid.*
[66] *Ibid.*

Chand, also had close relations to the Mughal court. Bhavani Das and Dalchand worked for

Aurangzeb before the Mughal succession wars.[67] In their early studies of Kishangarh

paintings, Dickinson and Khandalavala noted that these painters were accustomed to Mughal

visual culture and were able to express the patrons' emotions through deep communication

with their patrons.[68] In addition, Nihal Chand, who is considered to have established the

Kishangarh figure type, is known to have had a great-grandfather who was Kishangarh raja

Man Singh's (r. 1658-1706) minister (*divan*) from Delhi.[69] It is not certain when Nihal

Chand began working as a painter in Kishangarh. However, judging from his family, it can

be inferred that he was familiar with the Mughal courtly culture and painterly conventions.

These three painters are important figures who shaped "the Kishangarh school" of painting.

The earliest active painter among the three was Bhavani Das. Although the exact

date of birth and death is not known to us, his career started around 1700.[70] His inscribed

works indicate that he left several Mughal paintings around 1700 to 1715. Especially *A group

of Muslim divines* is inscribed with the fact that Bhavani Das "was Mughal emperor

Aurangzeb's painter" and "he died in the time of emperor Ahmad Shah," which means he

began his career before the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 and died between 1748 and 1754.[71]

However, while he painted the Mughal imperial family and Aurangzeb's hunting scene, he

might have worked in the Lahore atelier owned by the prince Muhammad Mu'azzam, who

later became Bahadur Shah I (r. 1707-1712). As the Mughal imperial atelier had been

already disbanded by Aurangzeb, Bhavani Das and his son Dalchand probably settled in

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[67] Crill, *Marwar Painting*, 66; Navina Haidar, "Radha in Kishangarh Painting: Cultural, Literary and Artistic Aspects" in *A Celebration of Love: The Romantic Heroine in the Indian Arts*, ed. Harsha V. Dehejia (New Delhi: Lustre Press, 2004), 532.
[68] Dickinson and Khandalavala, *Kishangarh Paintings*, 14.
[69] *Ibid*.; Mohinder and Doris Randhawa. *Kishangarh Painting*, 11.
[70] Toby Falk assumes that Bhavani Das' active years can be datable to late seventeenth-century. He compares Bhavani Das' signed work in the Binney collection with the late seventeenth-century Mughal painting in the Nour collection, and assumes that the facial expression of the latter could be attributable to Bhavani Das. Unfortunately, the paintings indicated by him cannot be confirmed in this paper. Toby Falk, "The Kishangarh Artist Bhavani Das," *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 52, no. 1/2. 1992. n.p.
[71] Navina Haidar, "Bhavani Das" in *Masters of Indian Painting II : 1650-1900*, ed. Milo C. Beach, Eberhard Fischer, B.N. Goswamy (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2011), 532-535.

Lahore seeking for patronage.[72] After Bahadur Shah was enthroned, both father and son came to Delhi to work with their royal patron until their move to the Rajasthan kingdoms.[73]

This relationship with royal patronage may have affected Bhavani Das and Dalchand to travel out of Delhi. Bhavani Das migrated to Kishangarh in 1719, at the end of the Mughal succession war after the death of emperor Aurangzeb.[74] Marriage relationships between Kishangarh princesses and the Mughals appear to have enabled him to settle in Kishangarh. When Mughal politics became unstable after 1707, Bahadur Shah was sided by his nephew Raj Singh (r.1706-1748), the then ruler of Kishangarh.[75] Bhavani Das made Savant Singh's portrait (fig. 18) in the Mughal style in the 1710s, which shows his relationship with Savant Singh and the Kishangarh royal family when they both served in the Mughal court for the emperor, and this might have allowed Bhavani Das to move to Kishangarh. Kishangarh royal documents (*bahis*) record that Bhavani Das was paid 90 rupees monthly, which was an amount almost three times higher than other artists.[76] Bhavani Das was highly regarded in Kishangarh for his abilities, which likely reflected his experience working in the Mughal atelier and the relationship with his patron.

Bhavani Das' work is commonly divided into his Mughal period from the 1700s to 1719, and the Kishangarh period from 1719 onward. When serving the Mughals, he painted portraits of the reception hall (*darbar*) and learned the pictorial style of the Mughal atelier during the reign of Shah Jahan. He knew how to convey the hierarchical order and lineage, by formally arranging the assembly of the royal family or saints seated in a "pyramidal composition."[77] In addition, Bhavani Das could produce lively paintings capturing a certain

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[72] John Richards explains that emperor Aurangzeb's orientation to Islamic political ideology and strict adherence to Sharia standards led to the dissolution of the Mughal ateliers. John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1995), 172-173.
[73] Terance McInerney. "Dalchand" in *Masters of Indian Painting II: 1650-1900*, ed. Milo C. Beach, Eberhard Fischer, B.N. Goswamy (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2011), 566.
[74] Khan, *The Kishangarh School of Indian Art*, 120.
[75] Haidar, "Bhavani Das," 538.
[76] Khan, *The Kishangarh School of Indian Art*, 282.
[77] Haidar, "Bhavani Das," 535.

moment as well as emphasizing the emperor's dignity. In his work *Aurangzeb at a royal hunt* (fig. 19), Aurangzeb sits on a palanquin, and beside him one attendant sends a signal using a fan while attendants greet the emperor. In the bottom, shooters line up in a row in the right, and other servants hold ropes to keep antelopes from jumping away, and the painting also captures the moment of the horseman in the center stopping a white horse. The figures have highly detailed and individualized faces, and a tall rock hill surrounds this scene as a backdrop to the events taking place. In the distance, a rich parade is marching in line. While the emperor's army raises dignity, the emperor is located higher than any other servants in the painting. Although the emperor is also depicted in a realistic manner that reveals his aging, the hunt was a popular subject for the Mughals to display the competence of a ruler who could control nature.[78] Bhavani Das satisfies this purpose in the pictorial composition by showing the authority of the emperor as one who is served by his multiple attendants and can control the massive army.

The pictorial features of Bhavani Das in his Mughal period did not cease after his moving to Kishangarh. A posthumous portrait of Kishangarh raja Sahas Mal (r. 1615-1618) (fig. 20) produced around 1725 has much in common with *Aurangzeb at a royal hunt*. The attendants stand stiffly facing their raja to his left and right, but the foreground scene is not static at all. A hunter in the bottom left dissects a bird with other corpses of birds laid in the ground, while other hunters hold dead birds with dangling wings. Troops move toward the city located in the upper left corner (fig. 21). This portrait of Sahas Mal features the green colors reminiscent of Aurangzeb's hunt, as well as curving hillocks with small figures, but one more group of small figures is notable in the middle plane of the painting. The raja's attendants stand around the white horse that may belong to the raja, and to the left and right

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[78] Lisa Balabanilar, *Imperial Identity in the Mughal Empire: Memory and Dyanstic Politics in Early Modern South and Central Asia* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 84-85.

of this assembly each person is capturing and killing birds (fig. 22). This composition of Sahas Mal's portrait that divides the painting in three parts shares the same composition with the VAM Shukadeva painting, apart from the difference that middle plane is compartmentalized by streams. It is unclear whether the Sahas Mal painting was intended to juxtapose temporal sequences of the hunting scene, but the painter could convey the hierarchical order through the unity of the subject, i.e. the hunt. In addition, the depiction of Sahas Mal is worth observing. Sahas Mal stands in a slightly elongated and exaggerated manner, and his face is depicted with arched eyebrows and long eyes slanting upwards. The falcon on his right hand shows him as a falconry enthusiast who has successfully completed hunting. Unlike the attendants that surround him, Sahas Mal is shown in an idealized manner. It might be an inevitable choice for a painter to depict the king as a stylized figure, since he was painting a posthumous portrait, or a portrait most likely based on one during his lifetime.

The pictorial composition and the portrait of Sahas Mal introduced by Bhavani Das may imply his knowledge of courtly life and identity. When Bhavani Das was in the Mughal court, he was skilled at depicting genealogical subjects, bringing together figures who could not have existed contemporaneously and distinguishing them by their costumes and facial portrayals.[79] This was also one of the important themes in Mughal portraits of emperors.[80] He was a well-trained painter who could represent the lineage of the Mughals and royal connections with the Timurid dynasty, which had been an important subject in making of the Mughal dynasty. Although Sahas Mal's portrait does not indicate a royal assembly, Bhavani

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[79] Haidar, "Bhavani Das," 535-536.
[80] Mughal emperors are distinguishable through their established personal characters. Humayun wears a Persian-style turban, and Akbar is usually depicted in a three-quarter profile in contrast to his son Jahangir in a profile. Probably during the later period of Jahangir's reign, the iconography of Timur and his Mughal descendants started to be established. The identity of Mughal, which originated from 'Mongol', was closely related to Timur. In a painting signed by Hashim, Timur is seated on a throne and surrounded by Babur, Humayun, Akbar and Jahangir. Shah Jahan particularly tried to establish his imperial genealogy from Timur through portraits, and he concentrated on setting direct connections with him. Shah Jahan's painters depicted several imaginary assemblies and portraits of Mughal emperors with Timur handing over the crown to Shah Jahan. J.P. Losty asserts that Bhavani Das portrays the imperial family with earlier established style which might be created in Jahangir and Shah Jahan's period. Emily Hannam, *Eastern Encounters: Four Centuries of Paintings and Manuscripts from the Indian Subcontinent* (London: Royal Collection Trust, 2018), 112-114; J. P. Losty and Malini Roy, *Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire* (London: British Library, 2012), 113-114, 150.

Das was able to create an attire appropriate to Sahas Mal who was known as a passionate lover of falconry.

Kishangarh patrons may have emulated the Mughal emperor's appearance and presented themselves in the traditional portrait style of the Mughal Empire. Increased production of portraiture in Rajput kingdoms can be one reason to utilize the Mughal painting style. Since the late seventeenth-century, the Rajput painters recorded the portrait of the ruler and the court scene and it became a major theme in Rajput paintings.[81] The painters documented royal festivals or processions, sometimes emphasizing royal prowess or religious events. In Kishangarh, painters depicted a fearless Savant Singh during a hunt, or the devout raja Raj Singh entering a temple.[82] The increasing production of royal portraits coincided with the move of the Mughal artists to Rajasthan, such as Bhavani Das and Dalchand.

Tracing Dalchand's trajectory, we can also understand how the painter positioned his patrons in their portraits. Although we do not know why Dalchand left the Mughal empire, he moved to Jodhpur in 1719, where he left several portraits of Abhai Singh (r. 1724-1749), the ruler of Jodhpur. In *Abhai Singh Watching a Dance Performance* (fig. 23), Dalchand depicts the raja in a Mughal style, seated on a bejeweled throne surrounded by many attendants. According to Kavita Singh, Dalchand's painting bears similarities to a painting from Muhammad Shah's Mughal court in terms of the composition of the figures.[83] In both paintings, the raja and Muhammad Shah sit at the center of the painting, and the female attendants are in almost the same place and in comparable postures. Also, the two paintings depict similar architectural settings and objects, such as the dagger and food laid in front of the rulers. Singh concludes that Dalchand's painting intentionally used the Mughal style. This appropriation of

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[81] Beach, *Mughal and Rajput Painting*, 117-119; Rosemary Crill, "The Rajput Court," 137.
[82] The painting could not be presented in this thesis, but a few paintings about this subject can be found in Khan's book. Khan, *The Kishangarh School of Indian Art*, 192-198.
[83] Kavita Singh, "A Knowing Look Appropriation and Subversion of the Mughal Idiom in Rajput Paintings of the Eighteenth Century" in *Indian Painting: Themes, Histories, Interpretations Essays in Honour of B. N. Goswamy* (Ocean, New Jersey: Grantha Corporation, 2013), 170.

the Mughal style by a Rajput kingdom can be regarded as a threat to the emperor's authority, as it depicts Abhai Singh as equal to the Mughal emperor by placing him within a similar context.

Dalchand left Jodhpur and joined the Kishangarh atelier around 1728.[84] After his arrival in Kishangarh, he painted a portrait that is at odds with the one he had painted in Jodhpur. The paintings he produced around the 1730s are striking in their depiction of the Mughal emperor and their relationship with Raj Singh of Kishangarh (fig. 24). In this painting, Muhammad Shah is shown on the court terrace, seated on the throne, and the Devanagari inscription identifies Raj Singh, standing next to him, as the ruler of Kishangarh. Compared to other Rajput kings, Raj Singh stands closest to the emperor, which seems to emphasize the Mughal connection with Kishangarh. This depiction clearly differs from the portrayal of Abhai Singh.[85] The painting depicts a procession in the distance on a smaller scale, with the Mughal Emperor seated on the throne, as in Bhavani Das' painting. Thus, we can argue that when the painters paint the same subject, they repeat the composition and adjust a few details.

However, I suggest that the painters faced a new challenge as the subject of the paintings shifted to focus on new requests of the patron, i.e., to depict a mood of love. While maintaining stylistic features of traditional Mughal portraiture, these two Mughal-trained painters may have introduced modifications requested by his court patrons in Kishangarh. For example, *A Lady Awaiting Her Lover* painted around 1725, is attributed to Bhavani Das or a follower.[86] The painting follows the composition of Bhavani Das' iconic portraiture style, with high ridges rising beyond a figure in the foreground, and a procession in the distance. Dalchand's *A Lady Standing on the Terrace* (fig. 25) is almost identical, apart from in the

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[84] However, the reason of the move is not clear. McInerney, "Dalchand," 571-572.
[85] Although Kishangarh was not a powerful kingdom among Rajput kingdoms, Raj Singh precedes Jai Singh of Jaipur, who was more significant than him. McInerney, "Dalchand," 573-575.
[86] See Navina Haidar, "Radha in Kishangarh Painting," 125. This thesis could not include this painting due to its low level of reproduction.

posture of the female figure. Both paintings depict an idealized woman in the foreground, with an equestrian figure in the middle distance. The man riding a white horse toward the woman is wearing orange clothes that contrast with the green hills. This noble man, or possibly the raja, seems to be a lover of the woman waiting on the terrace.[87] The two paintings follow the composition of Mughal portraits; however, they evoke the mood between the lovers. In other words, the Mughal composition used to depict an emperor and his authority was transformed into a romantic scene.

Thus, I argue that Bhavani Das and Dalchand were capable of imbuing new requirements of patrons, i.e., romantic nuances, in their Mughal style and compositions. Their Kishangarh court portraits embody the individualistic traits and the royal lineage of Kishangarh, while also encapsulating their affiliation with the Mughal stylistic techniques. Moreover, these artists orchestrated a shift in meanings by innovatively situating the female figures on the terrace in Dalchand's compositions. They infused a romantic mood to the figure placed in the foreground and made the audience imagine the relation with the figure in the background.

3.2. Responding to Poetry and Literary Changes in Paintings

The change found in paintings with identical compositions yet different subject matters, i.e. from emperors to lovers, can be compared to changes found in contemporary poetry. The lovers in Kishangarh paintings gradually began to reflect religious themes, and this can be linked to changes in poetic literature at the Kishangarh court. It was not just the subject matter of Kishangarh poetry that had changed. Savant Singh also used *rekhta*, an old Urdu language to describe the love for God in his poetry.[88] The emergence of this new

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[87] McInerney, "Dalchand," 575.
[88] Bangha, "Courtly and Religious communities as Centres of Literary Activity in Eighteenth-Century India," 6-7.

literary medium was usually used to express the one-sided love commonly found in Persian and Urdu ghazal traditions.[89] In fact, the subject of Krishna was not restricted to the Hindus, and even the emperor Muhammad Shah also wrote poetry to praise Krishna.[90] Such *rekhta* poetic style that was popular among the Muslims was often understood in the context of *bhakti* literature. *Rekhta* poetry was one of the efficient methods to express the love between Krishna and Radha both within the Kishangarh court and Mughal court.[91]

However, Savant Singh did not simply copy the Persian poetic style but produced an eclectic style. The example of *rekhta* poetry can be seen in the *Padamuktavali,* a collection of poems. In this collection produced in 1742, Savant Singh quoted a few poems of the Urdu poet Vali (1667?-1707) and juxtaposed his poetry with other *bhakti* literature. In addition, Savant Singh used Persian vocabulary rather than Sanskrit to express the devotional love in his poetry.[92] In other words, Savant Singh translates the passionate love of God found in the *rekhta* poems into love for Krishna. However, Savant Singh could flexibly remove the martyred image caused by passionate love found in *rekhta* poetry style.[93]

Just as the format of poetry could be used freely to emphasize certain themes, it is not surprising that the painters of Kishangarh chose Mughal pictorial forms to create paintings of different subject matters. Although the subject matter of paintings had changed, it did not necessarily mean a stylistic change as well. We could say that patrons of Kishangarh were

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[89] The ghazal is a poetic genre prevalent in the Deccan region. It is believed that ghazals began to spread in north India when the Mughal Empire conquered the Deccan. After Shah Jahan executed successful campaigns at the Deccan, the ghazal was embraced in the Mughal court. Vali, who was active from the late seventeenth century to the early eighteenth century and inspired Savant Singh's poem writing, is recognized as a poet who bridged the gap between the literature of the Deccan region in the seventeenth century and eighteenth century north Indian literature. Carla Petievich, "Poetry of the Declining Mughals: The 'Shahr Āshob'," *Journal of South Asian Literature,* vol. 25, no. 1 (Winter, Spring, 1990): 99; Sunil Sharma, "The City of Beauties in Indo-Persian Poetic Landscape," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 78.

[90] "My Lord has many passions, I surrender to his many passions/ Everywhere you make merry in many forms: in every form is a shade of God/ You are the darling, you are the Lord, you are the servant, and the Master/ Muhammad Shah: as long as I live, I shall sing the praise of Krishna." Translated by Pauwels. Pauwels, *Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century India*, 39.

[91] Heidi Pauwels, "Literary Moments of Exchange in the 18th Century: The New Urdu Vogue Meets Krishna Bhakti." In *Indo-Muslim Cultures in Transition,* ed. Alka Patel and Karen Leonard, 61-85 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 72-73.

[92] *Ibid.*

[93] Pauwels, "Literary Moments of Exchange in the 18th Century," 74.

interested in painting portraits like those of the Mughal court, but gradually the subject matter changed.[94] Painters were demanded to paint subjects about *bhakti,* just like the changes found in poetry.[95] The love of Krishna and Radha became a major subject, and love scenes at court were often painted. This romantic mood became dominant in Kishangarh, and we can find this trend in the paintings of female figures by Bhavani Das and Dalchand. I believe that the portrait of Savant Singh that we saw at the beginning of this chapter is no longer simply a depiction of a court figure. As injecting the mood of love became important to painters, the painters depicted a woman in the building, which results in Savant Singh's portrait functioning more than a representation of a person. Unlike artists of other Rajasthani kingdoms who painted secular portraits, the artists of Kishangarh made depictions of love inseparably linked to royal symbols. Navina Haidar's remark that the development of a *bhakti* idiom in the mid-eighteenth century was unusual in comparison to other Rajasthani princely states is worth considering in this light.[96]

A Love on a Boat (fig. 11) by Nihal Chand*,* estimated to have been painted between 1731 and 1735, shows how Kishangarh painting endeavored to depict *bhakti* poetry utilizing the Mughal style.[97] The composition of Sahas Mal's portraiture needs to be considered in comparison to the paintings of Nihal Chand, who learned painting from Bhavani Das. In *A Love on a Boat*, Nihal Chand divided the painting into three parts, like Sahas Mal's portrait, to depict a love scene between Radha and Krishna. However, what makes this painting different from the earlier portrait is that it uses this composition to illustrate Savant Singh's poem *Bihara Candrika*. A few selected verses of this poem are thought to be inscribed in the reverse page of the painting, thus there must be a relationship between the painting and

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[94] Haidar, "Radha in Krishna Painting," 125-126.
[95] Bangha, "Courtly and Religious communities as Centres of Literary Activity in Eighteenth-Century India," 13.
[96] Navina Haidar, "Kishangarh School of Painting," PhD diss., (University of Oxford, 1995), 56. Recited from Bangha, "Courtly and Religious communities as Centres of Literary Activity in Eighteenth-Century India," 13.
[97] Given that Savant Singh's poem Bihara Candrika was written in about 1731, Navina Haidar dates the painting between 1731 and 1735. Haidar, "Radha in Kishangarh Painting," 122-123.

poem.[98] Nihal Chand utilized the composition of the Mughal royal portraiture to depict

Savant Singh's poem; as a consequence the royal portraiture composition is now used for a

different subject matter.

Heidi Pauwels believes that the verses of the poem can be matched to the painting to

some extent. Pauwels divides Savant Singh's *Bihara Candrika* into three parts.[99] Verses 5-18

are reflected in the top of the painting where Krishna plays his flute and calls to the *gopis* at

Govardhan (fig. 26), and by verses 19-23 Radha and the women are gathered near the river,

singing and dancing. Later, they go to the Yamuna River to enjoy boating, and Krishna and

Radha are depicted with the women in verses 24-43 (fig. 27). It follows a detailed description

in the poem, e.g., Radha draped in a diaphanous white gown.[100] Finally, verses 44 through

48, while not a perfect match for the lower part of the painting, are interpreted as Radha and

Krishna making love in a secret place.[101]

The painting follows the sequence of the poem by using the Mughal composition seen

in Sahas Mal's portrait. Krishna and Radha are gathered in the hilly garden with gopis, and

then they move to the middle depicted sitting on the boat, and lastly only two figures leave

the boat to the romantic meeting place.[102] While the background of portraits of the emperor

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[98] The reverse page of this painting could not be confirmed as the National Museum in Delhi has not allowed scholars to inspect the reverse pages. Heidi Pauwels assumes that while Dickinson and Khandalavala offers some translations, it may not be the exact verses written in the backside. Pauwels, *Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century India*, 160-161; Dickinson and Khandalavala, *Kishangarh Paintings*, 36.
[99] Dickinson and Khandalavala explained the painting can be divided into two. However, that is because they did not notice the detail at the very top of the painting. Dickinson and Khandalavala, *Kishangarh Paintings*, 36.
[100] Pauwels, *Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century India*, 160-162.
[101] Pauwels, *Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century India*, 160-162.
[102] This is also same to Dickinson and Khandalavala's "freely translated" *Bihara Candrika.* Here is the *Bihara Candrika* translation:

And when the sun was setting in the west, the lovers sailed along the Jamuna stream
To music from the *sakhis* mingling with the murmuring of each wavelet's crest
And the dipping of a single oar. By lotus banks the long canoe its burden bore
Past marble palaces and temples gleaming white and low green hills athwart a crimson sky betimes its keel caressed the shore where rose a *kunj* of beauty unsurpassed
Half clad with lengthening shadows of the night. And as he aided her alight
He led her dep into the darkling grove there love alone can find its way
And nought can mar this bliss till dawn of beauteous limbs entwined.

See Dickinson and Khandalavala, *Kishangarh Paintings*, 36.

or raja was to emphasize their authority or the figures in the foreground, *A Love on a Boat* filled the background with additional meanings, i.e., the narrative of the poem. Thus, an analysis of the painting with the *Bihara Candrika* reveals a new momentum of painters' appropriation of style to meet the demand of the Kishangarh court patron.

3.3. Adapting Artistic Conventions and the Making of Shukadeva Paintings

In this section, I aim to suggest the date for the VAM Shukadeva painting through comparisons with the compositions found in Kishangarh paintings. First, we can infer that the painters of the VAM Shukadeva painting adapted the three-part composition found in Bhavani Das' paintings as analyzed in Chapter 2. The city in the left-hand corner of the VAM painting mirrors the placement of the city in the left-hand corner of Sahas Mal portrait, albeit without the court procession. In the middle ground, Parikshit appears on a small scale, similar to the Sahas Mal portrait. Although the painting does not necessarily convey the impression of an imperial portrait, Parikshit appears several times. Moreover, this image of Parikshit on a white horse overlaps with the equestrian figure in the middle ground of *A Lady Standing on the Terrace* (fig. 25). When comparing the two paintings, both exhibit similarities in that the image of the figure in the middle ground implies a connection with the figures in the foreground. However, the overall composition of the Shukadeva painting follows the poetic sequence of *A Love on a Boat*. As we have seen in Nihal Chand's paintings, this compositional representation could depict the narrative of a poem by placing the same figure multiple times on a single canvas. Just as Krishna and Radha appear multiple times in *A Love on a Boat*, the painting depicts Parikshit in several scenes of the *Bhagavata Purana*.

In many ways, the VAM Shukadeva painting is close to the Mughal convention. The figures and background are depicted in a naturalistic style and perspective and captures the moment of conversation. Particularly the painter emphasized the importance of the sermon

scene, in comparison to the composition juxtaposing several scenes normally used in Rajput painting of the *Bhagavata Purana*.[103] The foreground figure is more important, much like the structure of the portrait by Bhavani Das. The narrative does not play a central role; rather, the assembly of Shukadeva, Parikshit, and saints dominates the theme and mood with additional narratives of the previous events pushed to the background.

In addition to the similarities in the composition of the Shukadeva painting to that of Bhavani Das and Dalchand, the forms of the figures in the painting bear resemblance to those depicted by the two artists. In contrast to Nihal Chand's portrayal of the figures, the saints in the foreground of the Shukadeva painting are reminiscent of Bhavani Das paintings of the 1720s. The figures are sufficiently recognizable through their faces that they are not the same person. To be specific, the saints that surround Shukadeva and Parikshit in the painting shows similar style to the court figures surrounding Sahas Mal, in contrary to the way they depict the central figure. Shukadeva and Parikshit, as well as Parashurama and Narada, differ from the surrounding saints in the way their faces are depicted. They do not have fully stylized faces like Nihal Chand's figures, but that does not mean that they are not represented with an entirely natural appearance. This is possibly an early example of Kishangarh painters' stylization of the human form, with the idealized representation of these figures.

I estimate that the first appearance of Shukadeva paintings dates back to approximately between 1740 and 1750. While it is possible that this painting was part of a series of *Bhagavata Purana* paintings, I believe it is more likely that they are not. Similar to other works that depict a single poem, this painting was most likely created to emphasize only the episode of Parikshit and Shukadeva. Including the VAM painting, the use of such compositions can be seen after 1730, and thematic choices can be aligned with the *Bhagavata Purana* writings in the 1740s. Also, as it shows the figural depiction of immigrant painters from the Mughal Empire, we can

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[103] We have seen this example in fig. 14.

assume that it was painted before 1750. During the fraternal war in Kishangarh, the royal court ceased patronage of paintings, Bhavani Das died, and the figural forms seen in this Shukadeva painting became less common in Kishangarh.

I also argue that the Shukadeva paintings are result of the hybridity seen at Kishangarh. While it is important to understand the context of an artist's work, and that they are connected to a wider artistic tradition, the Shukadeva painting is not entirely a "Mughal" style painting. Unlike most Mughal manuscript paintings, the Shukadeva painting is illustrated horizontally, the composition commonly used in Rajput paintings to depict Krishna's narrative. Such paintings allow us to imagine how Kishangarh painters appropriated different styles. Painting the same subject can convey different meanings, and painters often intervene in such works based on their own style. While the patron might ask for scenes from the *Bhagavata Purana* that had nothing to do with the Mughal Empire, the painter had to select a style for the painting based on his prior knowledge, whether it be that he was trained either in a Mughal imperial atelier or by a Mughal immigrant painter. The Kishangarh painters, therefore, reinvented a way to paint the poetry of Kishangarh in a Mughal way, even if the painter did mix forms found in Mughal and Rajput sources.

4. Locating the Image of Shukadeva and Parikshit in Eighteenth-century North India

We have seen how the painter's agency can be found in the production of Shukadeva paintings. In the 1730s, paintings were produced in response to literary trends, and painters depicted poetry using their own pictorial traditions rather than faithfully following a patron's text. While Kishangarh paintings may appear to be a straightforward importation of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Mughal paintings by painters from the Mughal empire, this was not the case, and I have argued that they altered the structure of Mughal paintings to create Shukadeva paintings for their new patrons.

However, the background of the patron and the painter still leaves the question of why Shukadeva and Parikshit were chosen as subject matters, and why the scene of this meeting was repeatedly painted in the same format at Kishangarh. It remains challenging to discover why the painters did not depict other Krishna-related subject matters. A comparison with other Kishangarh paintings that illustrate poetry makes clear that the Shukadeva painting was produced repeatedly, thus making it a unique instance. A question can be raised about the background of this painting's production: Shukadeva paintings can be perceived as scenes chosen for specific purposes by patrons rather than painted as part of the *Bhagavata Purana*. Nevertheless, I suggest that its meaning was not confined to personal experience but encompassed broader historic implications.

I suggest that the two figures symbolize the complex moods of the society concerned with the political crisis of Kishangarh. Based on historical records, my approach is that the political circumstance at the time of Savant Singh's ascension was akin to facing a metaphorical demise: the Mughal emperor was losing power and the empire decentralized, and the capital Delhi faced tremendous upheaval due to Persian and Afghan invasions. The same was true for the Rajput kingdoms. The Marathas were increasing their military power in

the west of India and gradually intervened in the politics of the Rajput kingdoms. As the Marathas had little to gain from Kishangarh through military campaigns, Kishangarh did not suffer much from invasions, but Savant Singh had been in conflict with his brother since the early 1740s, which eventually led to the outbreak of a civil war in 1748.

In this chapter, I aim to interpret Shukadeva paintings and reassess Kishangarh paintings by enriching the existing view that politics and art are interconnected. I argue that the tendency to reflect the contemporary political crisis in art was widespread in eighteenth-century north India. In this context, I raise similarities with the development of the *shahrashob*, a literary genre that portrays a destroyed city of this period in north India. Literary trends in north India changed in 1739. Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah was no longer an active patron of courtly culture, and poets began to write about societal decline. Given that Kishangarh poets such as Savant Singh frequented the Mughal court and participated in Mughal cultural activities, they must have faced this social change and responded accordingly.

The *shahrashob* is a literary genre that describes the beauty and energy of a city.[104] This genre first appeared in South Asia during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Nuruddin Muhammad Zuhuri (d. 1616), a Persian immigrant, is credited with writing the first influential *shahrashob* poem.[105] At this time, *shahrashob* poetry described urban spaces and the characters one might encounter there, but its primary purpose seems to have been to eulogize the patron's city. After Zuhuri, poets of the time of emperor Shah Jahan described the magnificent buildings patronized by the emperor and extolled the beauty of the city.[106]

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[104] Sharma, "The City of Beauties in Indo-Persian Poetic Landscape," 73-74.
[105] Sharma, "The City of Beauties in Indo-Persian Poetic Landscape," 74.
[106] Sharma, "The City of Beauties in Indo-Persian Poetic Landscape," 75.

However, Urdu literary trends of the eighteenth century reflect a political climate of despair and destruction of social hierarchy. Eighteenth-century *shahrashob* poetry frequently featured nostalgic references to the destroyed city of Delhi. Petievich argues that the rise of the *shahrashob* genre in north India was due to the sacking of Delhi by Nadir Shah.[107] Among other poets, Mirza Rafi Sauda (1713-1781) and Mir Taqi Mir (1724-1810) were prominent poets who contributed to the *shahrashob* chronicling the decline of Delhi.[108] Sauda was patronized by the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah, who also patronized many poets in Awadh.[109] These Urdu poets were able to thrive because the Mughal court also actively patronized Urdu literature, and the *shahrashob* genre flourished even after the cease of Mughal patronage.[110] Petievich values this *shahrashob* as a social document of the unwritten chaos in the Mughal Empire after 1739.[111] A typical *shahrashob* of Mir Taqi Mir describes the poverty found in the urban and rural landscape.

> Livelihood has become vexatious for all:
>
> The greengrocers lament and the grain-merchants bicker:
>
> And don't even ask the condition of the soldiers--.
>
> One sells his sword and the other his shield;
>
> Emperor and Wazir, all are destitute.[112]

At first glance, the *shahrashob* genre seems very far removed from the poetry of Savant Singh. However, I believe that contemporary Mughal and Kishangarh poets shared a

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[107] Petievich, "Poetry of the Declining Mughals," 100.

[108] Sharma, "The City of Beauties in Indo-Persian Poetic Landscape," 78.

[109] Patrons subsidized poets, and when patron-poet relationships broke down, it was usually when stipends were not paid, as the growing reputation of the poets they patronized would bring social recognition to the patrons themselves. Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam. *Three Mughal Poets* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), 7.

[110] Sunil Sharma, "James Skinner and the Poetic Climate of Late Mughal Delhi" in *Princes and Painters in Mughal Delhi, 1707-1857*, ed. William Darlymple and Yuthika Sharma (New York: Asia Society Museum, 2012), 33-34.

[111] Petievich, "Poetry of the Declining Mughals," 103.

[112] Mir Taqi Mir, *Shikayat-e Shahr ka Mah*, Unpublished, hand-written copy in private collection of Fritz Lehmann, History Department, University of British Columbia, verse 16. Quoted in Petievich, "Poetry of the Declining Mughals," 103. Petievich's translation.

common literary world. Pauwels suggests that Savant Singh was a poet who extolled the virtues of Krishna rather than utilizing the *shahrashob* genre of his contemporaries.[113] Indeed, Savant Singh was engaged in depicting Krishna's world in *braj bhasha*. However, with the widespread use of the *rekhta* style at the Mughal court, Savant Singh, as well as Kishangarh poets with connections to the Mughal Empire, must have been familiar with this genre. The challenge was how to reflect the cultural exchanges between Delhi and Kishangarh in the art production of Kishangarh. We have seen the example of this artistic response in the previous chapter analyzing the Urdu poetry by Savant Singh. As briefly discussed in Chapter 3, Savant Singh adopted features of Urdu literature, particularly those of Vali.[114] Savant Singh shares expressive features identifiable in Vali poetry and even borrows passages to depict Krishna devotion, placing Vali's poetry within the tradition of *bhakti* literature.[115] Savant Singh was skilled at combining the north Indian poetry tradition into his own regional identity as a Krishna worshipper.

Kishangarh literature shared the north Indian poetic worldview, making it reasonable to perceive poetry as a mirror of political dynamics. Considering the increased popularity of *shahrashob* genre, a new challenge in the north Indian literary world dragged Kishangarh poets to write poems reflecting the 1740s. While devotional love poems were found within the north Indian literary world primarily in the 1730s, the 1740s literary scenes transitioned towards the *shahrashob* genre, which aimed to articulate political turmoil rather than romantic love. Kishangarh poets responded to these poetic shifts within the north Indian literary world. For instance, Savant Singh wrote the *Ramcaritmala* which implies a dispute of succession to the throne by using epic stories relevant to Hindu devotion. By understanding a literary context, Savant Singh responded to political dynamics as a north Indian poet.

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[113] Pauwels, *Mobilizing Krishna's World*, 28.
[114] See pages in Chapter 3 of this thesis regarding Savant Singh's poems depicting Krishna.
[115] See Pauwels, *Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century India*, 88-89.

Although the motif of love continuously appeared in Kishangarh literature, the emergence of Shukadeva and Parikshit should be examined in a wider relational framework of north Indian poetry.

I suggest that the *Bhagavata Purana* in Kishangarh was not rewritten to convey the episodes of Krishna, but to invent a new form of poetry following the north Indian poetry tradition. The subject matter of Shukadeva and Parikshit was universally understood in the Hindu poetry tradition, thus there was no need to provide a specific context. In light of choosing the subject, it is no coincidence that the *Bhagavata Purana* was compiled and rewritten by Savant Singh and Bankavati when the *shahrashob* genre began to rise after 1739. In other words, an adaptation of literary trends in Kishangarh court made the audience "read" the context that the two figures of Shukadeva and Parikshit imply in the *Bhagavata Purana*. These make us focus on the role of narrators. Shukadeva and Parikshit overlapped with the poets of Kishangarh who wrote the *Bhagavata Purana*.

Thus, the production of the *Bhagavata Purana* was transformed due to the new interpretation of eighteenth-century north Indian poetic tradition in Kishangarh. The contents of Urdu poetry was subject to social change, and the *shahrashob* was a genre that realistically reflected north Indian circumstance. The *Bhagavata Purana* could not ignore the changes in Urdu poetry either. The poets of Kishangarh who were in the north Indian literary tradition needed to reflect the social context in their own way. If Urdu poetry demanded a change in poetic mood according to the loss of its main patron and broken social foundations, Kishangarh poetry required to interpret these social changes from their own perspective. If Parikshit faced his mortality in the Kali Yuga, Shukadeva was a narrator who could teach us how to respond to the new world. The depiction of these two figures could imply all of these contemporary changes and reactions.

The repetitive depictions of Shukadeva and Parikshit as subject matters of paintings reflect an important thematic shift from directly featuring Krishna to a different narrative. Therefore, the production of the *Bhagavata Purana* in Kishangarh during the 1740s should be considered as the poets' response to the historical context. These *Bhagavata Puranas* focused on ritual arrangement and were produced with a reflection on the historical context from a contemporary perspective. If the *shahrashob* pointed out the abnormality of social conditions, the poets of Kishangarh responded by writing poetry in similar circumstances. However, they did not depict the longing for past glories, such as these poems eulogizing the Mughal Empire of the seventeenth-century. The Kishangarh poems describe religious festivities of the *Bhagavata Purana* were providing a means to stop the chaos of the Kali Yuga. However, this is their worldview, their way of looking at reality. They chose this method of Krishna devotion as their way of interpreting the world, to determine how they view reality.

The Berlin Shukadeva painting (fig. 2) is an extension of this particular worldview. In the painting, Shukadeva is seated on the bank of the Ganges welcomed by a crowd of people in the city. The composition of the painting is the same as the VAM Shukadeva painting, but Parikshit is not the main character. It is not even perceivable whether Parikshit is present, and the bank of the river is so densely populated that the number of ascetics is greater than courtiers. Then, what does this painting centered on Shukadeva mean? Not long after the civil war at Kishangarh, Savant Singh abdicated his throne to his son and left for Vrindaban as part of voluntary exile. Although the war in Kishangarh was over, the kingdom still faced danger caused by the Afghans and Maratha clans. I believe this painting is a closer reflection of Savant Singh's personal situation. There are points where Shukadeva can be identified with Savant Singh. Just as Shukadeva is a pure character who is not of the world, Savant Singh wanted to abandon his power and live his life as a poet. The idea is that he wanted to be the

narrator of his own story such as the ascetic Shukadeva, rather than a poet figure who recites poems in the court assembly. While we cannot be sure that the Berlin version depicts such real events of Savant Singh, I argue that it clearly utilizes the composition of the VAM Shukadeva painting. Savant Singh renounced his throne in 1757, and we need to shed light on the painting in the context of real politics.

The discourse of Shukadeva and Parikshit describes what a human being should do in the face of death. Earlier interpretations of the Shukadeva paintings emphasized the development of Kishangarh poetry and the Krishna devotion of Savant Singh. These interpretations were not different from those of other Kishangarh paintings depicting Radha and Krishna, frequently appearing in the Kishangarh background. Many studies have explored which religious sect was influential to understand the intention of such paintings. While such approaches shed light on certain aspects of the paintings, I have argued that we need to look beyond such religious affiliation. The making of the *Bhagavata Purana* in Kishangarh was a vehicle for adapting north Indian literary trends, rather than merely depicting Krishna devotion, and painters of Kishangarh successfully adapted the Mughal pictorial style to fit into the Kishangarh poetry. This process of art-making should not only be examined in the Kishangarh context, but also could be extended to north India as a whole. The Shukadeva paintings can be a starting point to reflect on art production in north India beyond its regional distinctiveness.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to analyze the Shukadeva paintings in the context of the contemporary north Indian political landscape. Despite the repetition of the same type of painting, traditional analysis has focused on the background of the patron, leading to the allocation of Shukadeva paintings within the context of the individual patron, Savant Singh. Therefore, I began my thesis to broaden from this perspective, as I believed that the repeated depiction of the subject matter allows an additional understanding. Such added meanings becomes evident when this particular type of painting is compared to the *Bhagavata Purana* paintings of contemporaneous or earlier periods. I examined Pauwels' argument of Savant Singh's poetry, i.e., the tendency of the patron was the main reason for the painting to be different from those of the Mughal Empire. However, understanding the painting as a mere representation of Savant Singh's poetry or his religion has its limitations. Hence, I aimed to reveal the painters' understanding of the Mughal style and their reasons for placing Shukadeva at the center of the painting. I tried to show that painters do not just paint what their patrons request. The painters' understanding of the Mughal style allowed them to use Mughal court compositions in their paintings of Shukadeva. I explored Bhavani Das' Mughal-era portraits and those painted in Kishangarh, and found that compositional devices intended to reveal royal authority in portraits of Mughals were used in Kishangarh to depict mood of love and poetry after the 1730s. This could be applied in Shukadeva's paintings to reveal an inner narrative. Finally, considering the historical context of the 1740s north India, the image of Shukdaeva and Parikshit projects a response to the political and social circumstances in north India, comparable to the rise of the *shahrashob* literary genre in north India. Literature of Kishangarh also narrated the decline of the city, and poets of Kishangarh left poems that were stylistically similar to *shahrashob* poetry, but with completely different themes. Where north Indian Urdu poets might have lamented the decline of the capital,

Kishangarh courtiers replaced figures on the verge of death in the Kali Yuga. And instead of longing for the glory of the Mughal Empire, Kishangarh poets presented images of Shukadeva and Parikshit as scenes of hope for an idealized world of Krishna. The painters of Kishangarh understood this north Indian context. Thus, the Shukadeva painting reflects the decline of the Mughal Empire as well as the Kishangarh.

While I investigated the production of the Shukadeva painting, it is necessary to contextualize this within the broader spectrum of Kishangarh art. My next goal is to identify and assemble paintings that mirror the political ambiance of eighteenth-century Kishangarh. However, I am aware that it would be not enough to assert that every painting encapsulates the socio-political milieu as does the Shukadeva painting. Some paintings are intimately tied to Kishangarh's poetic traditions, while others predominantly portray the love between Radha and Krishna. Nonetheless, my approach to interpreting Shukadeva paintings remains relevant, even after the exile of Savant Singh. Moreover, the Shukadeva painting is not limited to Kishangarh; they also appear in Mewar in the early nineteenth-century (fig. 28). In Mewar, the emergence of Shukadeva paintings occurred in a period characterized by heightened political tensions created by the Marathas and the British.[116] Could it be possible to align the paintings of Mewar with the Kishangarh tradition? This thesis hopes to shed light on the painting production in north India and serve as a milestone for further research. By understanding the pictorial exchanges in India since the eighteenth-century, we can expand our understanding of Indian painting traditions.

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[116] I believe that the production of Shukadeva paintings in Mewar during the political crisis reflects similar historical contexts. Just as the Kishangarh painters infused their political circumstance into paintings of Parikshit and Shukadeva, Mewar artists may have used an identical type to represent their declining kingdoms. This will be argued in my future studies. Molly Aitken, *The Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2010), 265-269, 278-279.

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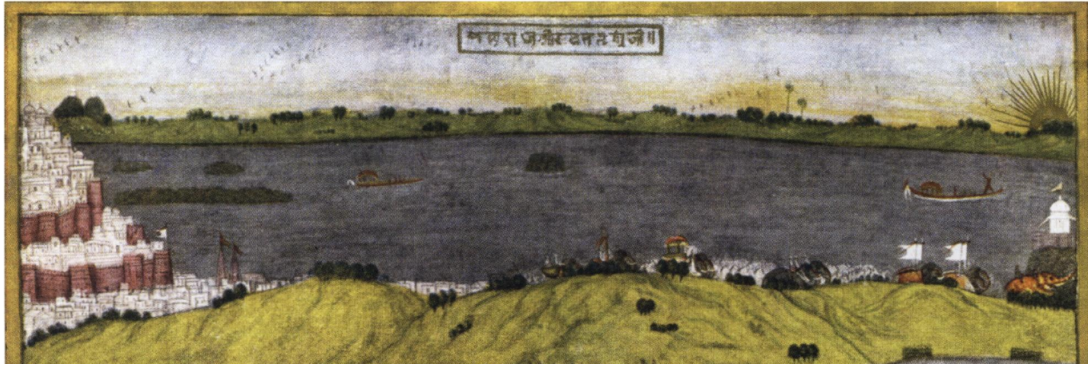
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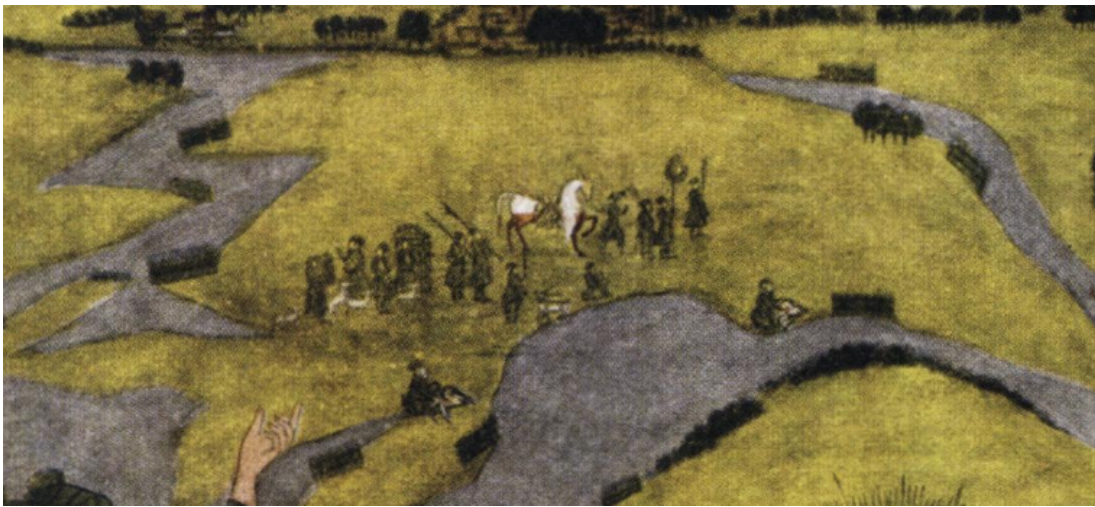
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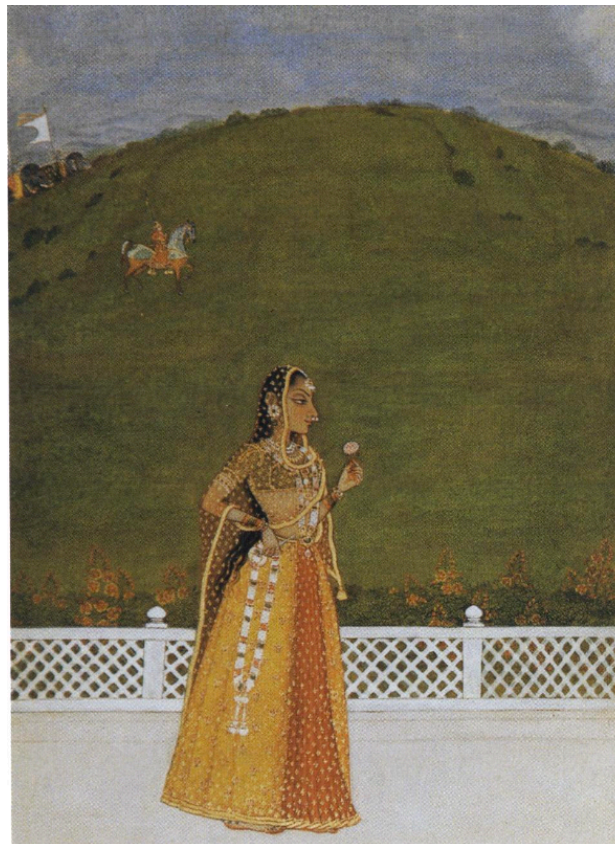

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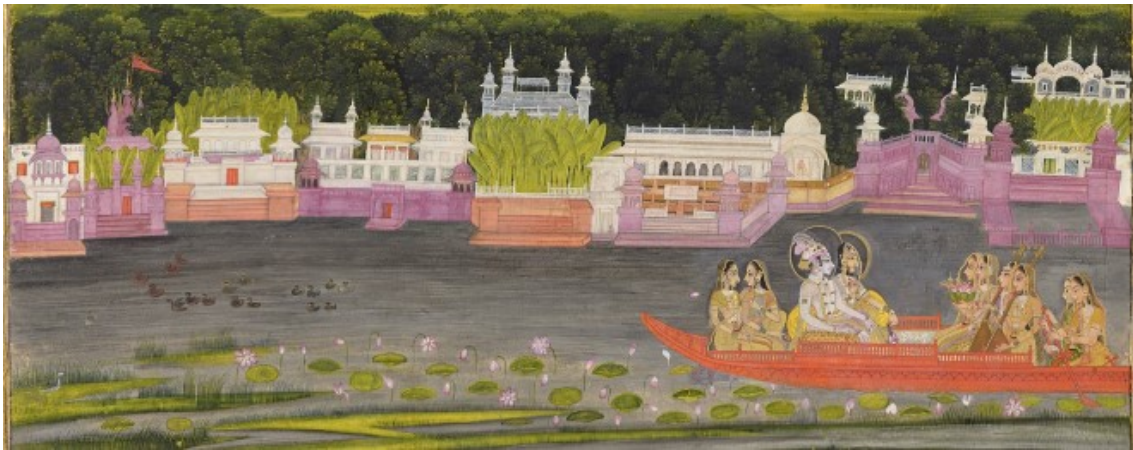
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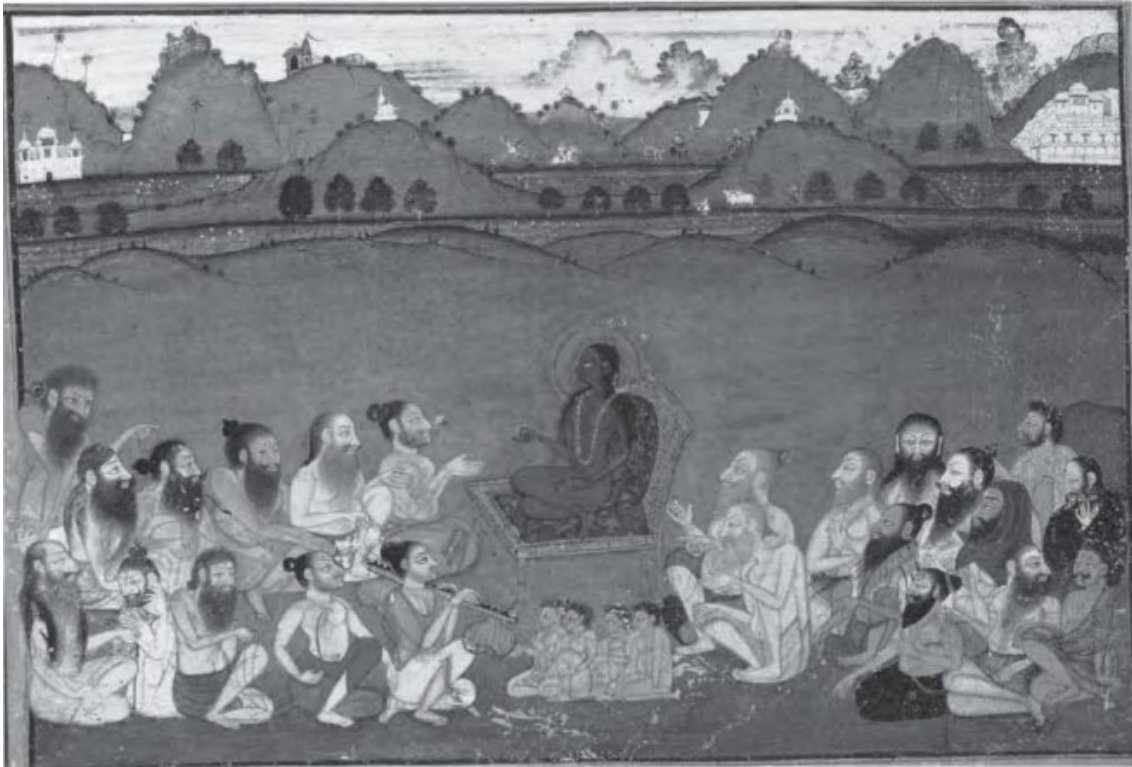

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회화적 반복과 반응:
18세기 키샹가르에서 슈카데바와 파리크시트의 이미지

이 논문은 18 세기 인도 북서부 키샹가르 왕국에서 슈카데바와 파리크시트의 이미지를 그린 회화를 분석한다. 당시 키샹가르에서는 『바가바타 푸라나』의 화자인 슈카데바와 파리크시트가 함께 묘사된 그림이 다수 제작된 것을 볼 수 있는데, 이 논문에서는 이러한 그림을 통해 후원자와 화가가 예술 작품 제작에 참여한 과정을 고찰한다.

 선행연구는 『바가바타 푸라나』의 두 화자를 묘사하는 키샹가르 특유의 회화 작품이 발달한 이유를 키샹가르 시문학 발전에서 찾는다. 이러한 주장에 덧붙여서 이 논문은 1740년대 샤흐라숍 장르의 유행과 같은 문학적 변화와 정치뿐만 아니라 무굴 제국 예술가들 간의 연결도 그러한 그림의 발달에 기여했다고 주장한다. 무굴 제국에서 키샹가르로 이주한 화가들은 무굴 제국의 회화 양식을 키샹가르 회화에 적용하기도 했는데, 바바니 다스가 대표적인 화가라고 할 수 있다. 이때 화가들은 후원자들의 문학에 반응하였고, 그들이 알고 있는 회화적 전통을 선택하고 주제를 해석하였다. 우리는 이러한 과정을 통해 그들의 주체적인 예술 행위를 파악해볼 수 있다. 유사한 맥락에서 1740년대 『바가바타 푸라나』와 관련된 주제가 키샹가르 문학에서 등장하는데, 북인도의 정치적 혼란과 문학적 변화가 일어나면서 이 역시 키샹가르의 시인들이 동시대 문학적 주제에 반응한 것이었다. 키샹가르 화가들은 문학적 경향과 나란하게 회화를 제작하기 위해서 슈카데바와 파리크시트의 이미지를 선택하였을 뿐만 아니라 회화적 구도를 반복함으로써 그 주제에 성공적으로 반응하였고, 키샹가르에서 다른 지역과 구분되는 독특한 바가바타 푸라나 회화가 등장하게 되었다.