The Mewar Rāmāyaṇa manuscripts
By J.P. Losty

The Rāmāyaṇa

The Rāmāyaṇa or Story of Rāma is one of the two ancient Sanskrit epics of India and is traditionally attributed to the authorship of the sage Vālmīki. It is a tale of exile, struggle, loss and redemption that had assumed roughly the present shape of the central five books by the middle of the first millennium B.C. Rāma, prince of Ayodhyā, through his heroic feat of breaking the bow of the god Śiva, won the hand of the beautiful princess Sītā, but was exiled with her and his brother Lakṣmaṇa for fourteen years through the plotting of his stepmother. After many peaceful years in the forest, Sītā was carried off by the demon Rāvaṇa, King of Laṅkā, and Rāma gathered an army of monkeys and bears to search for her. The allies attacked Laṅkā, killed Rāvaṇa and rescued Sītā. In order to prove her chastity, Sītā underwent the fire ordeal, and was vindicated by the gods and restored to her husband. After the couple’s triumphant return to Ayodhyā, Rāma’s righteous rule (Rām-rājya) inaugurated a golden age for all mankind.

During the next millennium the original five books became conflated into their present size of seven books and 24,000 verses, mainly through the addition of outer supplementary books. In addition to narrating the story of Rāma’s birth and childhood, and of Rāma and Sītā’s relationship after her rescue, these books also add a cosmic dimension to this ancient tale of the perennial battle between good and evil. The evil Rāvaṇa, himself semi-divine, had previously extracted a boon from the god Brahmā that made him invincible to all gods and divine beings — he had not thought it necessary to obtain protection against mere men or animals. In order to destroy him, Viṣṇu the Preserver god, who periodically comes to earth to intervene in the affairs of the world when the balance between good and evil has been upset, had to be born as a man and his only help could come from animals. Rāma, the perfect man, thereby became identified as an avatar of Viṣṇu, the seventh in the series of ten major avatars and the most important after Kṛṣṇa. What had originated as an oral epic of local northern significance shifted to encompass the whole of India and Sri Lanka, and Rāma’s struggle to rescue his wife became a metaphor for the destruction of evil and the final triumph of good.

The seventh and last book tells the history of Rāvaṇa and the demons, and many of the key myths of Hinduism, before resuming the story with Rāma’s repudiation of Sītā on account of the gossip about her time spent in Rāvaṇa’s palace. Rāma abandoned her in the hermitage of Vālmīki in the forest where she gave birth to twin
sons Lava and Kuśa. The boys grew up and met their father when chanting to him Vālmīki’s newly composed epic about his deeds. He realised who they were but his attempts at reconciliation with Sītā were frustrated. She prayed to the Earth Goddess to receive her if she had never thought of any man but Rāma, and she was swallowed up by the Earth. Rāma finally remembered his original divine status and resolved to resume his place in heaven as Viṣṇu. After leaving his kingdom to his twin sons he, his brothers and many of their helpers in the epic struggle entered the waters of the river Sarayū outside Ayodhyā and thereby ascended to heaven.

Vālmīki’s work is more than an epic; it is also considered the first Sanskrit poem, the ādi-kāvya, since, he tells us, his words when moved by pity (śoka) at the fall of an amorous krauñca (love-bird) to a hunter’s arrow, fell naturally into a new verse-form (śloka). Moved by this death, he then went on to narrate the whole pitiful tale of Rāma and Sītā in this newly created metre. The epic’s poetic stature and marvellous story have moved India’s writers over two millennia to emulate Vālmīki. The story of Rāma was constantly retold in poetic versions by some of India’s greatest writers both in Sanskrit and the regional languages. It is also one of the staples of dramatic traditions, in court drama, and in dance-dramas and puppet or shadow-puppet theatres. In northern India the annual Rām-līla or ‘Rāma-play’ is performed at the great autumn festival of Dasehra to celebrate with Rāma and Sītā the eventual triumph of light over darkness. Bards still tour the towns and villages of India to recite and improvise on the vernacular versions, often with the help of painted scrolls or painted story boxes. The story was carved in frieze form on the plinths of temples and numerous illustrated manuscripts of it survive from the sixteenth century onwards.

Nor is the story confined to the Indian sub-continent. At a very early date (mid-first millennium B.C.) a version of it is found in the Daśaratha Jātaka, one of the jātakas or stories about the previous births of the Buddha which form part of the Buddhist Hinayana canon. The Theravada version in Pāḷi travelled to Sri Lanka while a lost Sanskrit version of the jātaka from one of the other Hinayana schools was translated into Chinese in the first millennium A.D. and forms part of the Chinese Buddhist canon. In all these versions the story is transformed into a vehicle for lauding various Buddhist ideals. Independent versions also exist in Tibetan and Khotanese known from manuscripts found in the cave library at Dunhuang that conform more to the Indian original. The story travelled in the first millennium A.D. both in its original version and in its Buddhist version to the various Hindu or Buddhist kingdoms of South-east Asia, along with many other features of Indian culture. Reliefs of the story were carved on temple walls in Java and Cambodia. Even after the coming of Islam, versions of the tale were written in Javanese and Malay and the story was retold through the drama, the dance and the shadow puppet-theatre, while it remained central to the life of Hindu Bali. The story was adopted wholeheartedly in Thailand, whose
old capital Ayutthya, founded in 1347, was modelled on Ayodhyā, while various new versions were composed, often by royal authors, since at least the fifteenth century. New versions of the story were also written as poems and dramas in Burmese, Thai, Cambodian, and Laotian. All of these versions change parts of the story significantly to reflect their different customs and cultures, as well as to emphasise Rāma’s Buddhist virtues.

The extraordinary prowess of the monkeys who helped Rāma made people credit them with supernatural powers. They were thought of as sons of the gods. Of all the monkeys who helped Rāma recover Sītā, it was the son of the Wind-god, the faithful and resourceful Hanumān, of immense strength and agility, who took most hold in the popular imagination. He became the archetype of the faithful friend and metal and stone images of him are common. Paintings of him standing respectfully before Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā or proudly leading a regal Rāma on horseback encapsulate the whole story of the Rāmāyaṇa. He is often found alone in popular art, carrying the mountain of magic herbs, or wrestling with Rāvaṇa, or bearing Rāma and Sītā on his heart. In India he remained wise, heroic and indeed saintly, but in South-east Asia where he is also the most popular character in the story, he became representative of all the freer aspects of life. In the South-east Asian versions Hanumān’s adventures are considerably elaborated: while crossing over the bridge to Laṅkā he took time off to dally with the Fish-Princess in the ocean and the result was a son, a monkey with the tail of a fish.

Rāma and Sītā are two names that are entwined together in Indian life. Their story of an ideal marriage, of Rāma as the heroic husband who moves mountains to rescue his wife, and of Sītā as his faithful partner, constant in adversity, has struck deep into the Indian psyche. Their presence imparts blessings and fertility on every marriage, while their conjoined name ‘Sītā-Rāma’ is one of the most common of Indian personal names. Rāma became the ideal both of manhood and of kingship, in his devotion to duty, in his self-command under intense suffering, and in his conception of righteous kingship. Hindu temples were decorated with relief panels illustrating the story. Such carvings on temples under royal patronage consciously evoked Rāma, the ruler of Ayodhyā in mankind’s golden age, and were used both in India and in South-east Asia to confer divine legitimacy on their patron’s rule. In later centuries in south India textiles painted or printed in many registers with the details of Rāma’s story were used instead of carved relief panels. Other textiles concentrating on the epic struggle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa were exported to the Muslim sultanates of Indonesia to be used in court ceremonies as symbols of royal legitimacy.

The Hindu doctrine of avatars was developed to explain divine intervention in the affairs of the world when the balance between good and evil had been upset. To
Vālmīki, Rāma was the perfect man; it is the two later books of the epic which explain the theological implications of Rāma as the seventh avatar of Viṣṇu. The appeal of the story of Rāma and Sītā is thus twofold: an intensely human story, it is also the means of redemption for the world and, through devotion to God made manifest, for the individual. The pious Hindu hopes to die with the name Rāma upon his lips, while the very recitation of the name in spoken or written form accumulates merit. Images of Rāma were therefore made for worship and enshrined in temples. As Rāma was an ideal king as well as a god, several rulers, for example Rājā Jagat Siṅgh of Kulu (r. 1637–72) in the Panjab Hills, dedicated their state to the god Raghuṇāthjī or Rāma and he and his successors ruled as vicegerents of the god.

**Mewar and its Rāṇās**

It was not, however, for reasons of personal or state piety that Rāṇā Jagat Siṅgh of Mewar (r. 1628–52) commissioned his lavishly illustrated Rāmāyaṇa manuscripts towards the end of his reign. The Mewar Rāṇās ruled their state as vicegerents of Ekliṅgjī, a form of the god Śiva, while their personal devotions like most of the rulers of Rajasthan were paid to Kṛṣṇa in one or other of his forms. Mewar in southern Rajasthan comprises a more fertile plain to the east and a more arid region to the west where it is divided by the Aravalli Hills that cut across Rajasthan. Mewar and Gwalior, to the north-east of Rajasthan, were the two leading centres of Hindu culture in north India in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, but were destined to be overrun by the armies of the Muslim Mughals. The Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) was intent on subjecting as much as possible of northern India and the adjacent north-western territories to his rule; his empire at its height stretched from Afghanistan to Assam and from Sind to Orissa. Even the princes of Rajasthan who had managed to maintain a precarious independence since the first Muslim invasions of India in the late twelfth century were forced into submission.

Only Mewar refused to submit to Akbar, even after the capture and sack of its capital Chittaur in 1568. The court of Mewar had first retreated to Lake Pichola in a valley in a spur of the Aravallis, where Rāṇā Udai Siṅgh (r. ca.1540–72) had founded a more easily defensible city named after himself and had begun building a palace in 1567. Driven eventually from Udaipur also, his son Pratāp Siṅgh (r. 1572–97) took refuge in the small village of Chavand in the southern part of the kingdom. When Akbar’s son Jahāngīr (r. 1605–27) renewed the assault on Mewar early in his reign, even Chavand was taken in 1609 and Pratāp Siṅgh’s son Amar Siṅgh (r. 1597–1620) became little more than a bandit chief in the hills before finally bowing to the inevitable and surrendering to Prince Khurram, the future Emperor Shāh Jahān (r. 1628–58), at Gogunda in February 1615. He was received with kindness and, unlike all other
Rajput chiefs, neither his personal attendance at the Mughal court nor the giving of his daughters to the imperial zenana were required. Military service as a commander in the Mughal army was also not exacted from him, although it was from his sons and chiefs. Both his son Karaṇ Singh (r. 1620–28) and grandson Jagat Singh (r. 1628–52) attended the Mughal court, although as a consequence they were deemed at the Mewar court to have lost precedence to those who did not perform such service at the imperial capital. This was one reason therefore why the Rāṇās of Mewar regarded themselves as superior to all the other chiefs of Rajasthan, who to a large extent went along with their claims even allowing their Mewari wives precedence over all their other wives. The other reason was their illustrious descent, for the Sisodiyā princes of Mewar claimed descent from the Sun and numbered among their ancestors Rāma himself.

From 1615, therefore, Amar Singh was able to return to Udaipur and to restart work on the palace begun by his grandfather and, after his death, the work was carried on by his son Karaṇ Singh. Walls, halls, courtyards and pleasure pavilions rose rapidly upon one another around the bluff on the east side of the Pichola lake until, by the mid-seventeenth century, the palace had assumed much of the appearance it has today (fig. 1). Only the pavilions and garden crowning the northern end of the palace remained to be added early in the next century. Karaṇ Singh seems to have been too preoccupied with his building work to have much time for commissioning paintings and manuscripts and it was left to his son and successor Jagat Singh to begin to restock the Royal Library destroyed in 1568 with the Mughal sack of Chittaur. After commissioning some smaller illustrated texts at the beginning of his reign, in the 1640s he turned his attention to the large religious and epic texts of Hinduism, of which the manuscripts of the Rāmāyaṇa are the crowning achievement.
Painting in Mewar

Although we can be certain that the walls of all the Rajput palaces were decorated with wall paintings in the mediaeval period, scarcely any have survived. All that survives of Hindu painting from this period is manuscript painting and with very few exceptions (cloth scrolls for example) all are of the loose-leaf format known as *pothī*, a Hindi term derived from the Sanskrit *pustaka*, meaning ‘book’. The earliest writing material used in India consisted of prepared palm-leaves and the shape of such manuscripts was necessarily very wide but not very high. Even when paper reached the plains of India in the fourteenth century, traditional manuscripts made of this new material imitated the shape of palm-leaf manuscripts. Sheets of paper were made or cut so that they were always wider than they were high. The leaves were written upon parallel to the long side and were consulted by turning them over along the long axis, so that on the verso the text would be upside down in relation to that on its recto but the right way up in relation to the next recto.

Mewar was a major centre for the production of such *pothī* manuscripts with illustrations in the sixteenth century, both of religious texts such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (now dispersed) and of devotional poems such as Jayadeva’s *Gītagovinda* (CSMVS Museum, Mumbai), both texts dealing with the exploits of Viṣṇu’s other major avatar Kṛṣṇa. Their illustrative style is one-dimensional and the rhythmically lively figures in profile confront each other amidst flowering trees or within schematic renderings of architecture, all brightly coloured against a dark background. The latter is often divided into two by a wavy white line with a lighter blue element above suggesting that the line marks a horizon, but while the upper part may indeed represent the sky, the lower part does not represent a receding landscape leading back to it. At this stage this is simply a bicoloured non-representational background. The paintings normally occupy most of one side of the page. The text if from a small series of verses was written along the top and if from a large work on the back of the folio. It would seem to have been the intention to illustrate every verse of the former type and as much as possible of the latter, the ideal being a type of illustrated manuscript in which the text was superfluous and the narrative was carried along by the illustrations.

Chavand is in southern Mewar and was temporarily out of the reach of the Mughal armies. There, in 1605, was produced a series of paintings illustrating the verses of a *Rāgamālā*, verses that attempt to describe the musical modes or *rāgas* and whose imagery was interpreted by artists in their compositions. This is a loose-leaf, almost square, series of 42 painted pages, with the text inscribed at the top. Its format indicates awareness of similar loose-leaf series done for other Rajput patrons responding to the upright format of contemporary Mughal book production. The artist
of the Chavand series named as Nisaraṭī (Naṣīr al-Dīn) was obviously a Muslim. He continued the tradition of placing his figures against a dark ground often divided into two by the wavy white line. His figures remained silhouetted in stark outlines against the ground, but their lines were somewhat softened from the angularity of the earlier sets. He also introduced for the first time a rocky landscape screened by trees, a compositional format much employed by later artists.

When Chavand was finally overrun by the Mughals in 1609 Rāṇa Pratāp Siṅgh’s son Amar Siṅgh surrendered to Prince Khurram in February 1615. Both his son and grandson, Karaṇ Siṅgh, who was born in 1584, and Jagat Siṅgh, who was born in 1605, were made to attend the Mughal court. In due course both princes became familiar with the habits of the Mughals. Khurram took Karaṇ Siṅgh back to the Mughal court then at Ajmer, where the Emperor Jahāngīr remarks in his memoirs that he loaded him with presents valued at 200,000 rupees and made him a grandee of the empire with a mansab of 5,000 horse. He must also have become fairly intimate with Khurram, as he went with him on his first great military expedition to the Deccan in 1616, and with him had rejoined Jahāngīr in Mandu a year later when Khurram was given the title of Shāh Jahān.

The young Jagat Siṅgh had paid his first visit to Jahāngīr at Ajmer in July 1615, staying until February 1616, and made a considerable impression on Jahāngīr who records in his memoirs that ‘Kunwar Karaṇ’s ten-year-old son Jagat Siṅgh came to pay homage and deliver a letter from his father and grandfather, Amar Siṅgh. Traces of nobility and aristocratic lineage were visible in his countenance. I won him over by giving him a robe of honour.’ Jagat Siṅgh’s further spells of duty at the Mughal court can be traced in Jahāngīr’s memoirs between September 1616 and May 1623, when the court was at Ajmer or Agra, while he also served in the army in the Deccan.

Karaṇ Siṅgh and Jagat Siṅgh were clearly familiar with the habits of the Mughals. Jahāngīr had thought it politic to impress Karaṇ Siṅgh by showering presents on the young warrior, whose whole life had been spent fighting the Mughals and who knew nothing of palaces and the arts of peace. An artist was at hand to record the reception of Khurram at Ajmer in 1615 when he brought with him Karaṇ Siṅgh, the son of the defeated Rāṇā, and his presence at court is recorded in various paintings. Karaṇ Siṅgh must have sat for an artist for his likeness to have been taken and, as Jahāngīr was so anxious to impress the young prince, he would surely have been shown the finished painting. Perhaps even Akbar’s great manuscript of the Rāmāyaṇa completed in 1588 was brought to Ajmer or to Mandu to impress the Sisodiya princes with Jahāngīr’s knowledge of their ancestry, while Jagat Siṅgh of course may have seen it at Agra. Unlike his father, who never seems to have gone farther north than Ajmer, Jagat Siṅgh would have known Agra. What the effect of his first sight of Jahāngīr at Ajmer
and the magnificence of the Mughals must have been on this ten year old boy, who had been born and had lived for all of his young life as a rebel in the barren hills of Mewar, can easily be imagined.

Jagat Siṅgh must have come to know of the illustrated manuscripts glorifying the histories of the ancestors of the Mughals: Genghis Khān, Timur, Bābur and Akbar. The germ of the idea of producing a Rāmāyaṇa manuscript on a similarly epic scale as a kind of family history of his own ancestors may then have been implanted in Jagat Siṅgh’s mind at an early date, as a Rajput rejoinder to their alien overlords by invoking Rāma’s righteous rule. For paradoxical as it might seem, the earliest known illustrated manuscripts of the Rāmāyaṇa are all Mughal. Akbar had ordered this text as well as the other Hindu epic, the Mahābhārata, to be translated into Persian to increase understanding between his Muslim and Hindu subjects and the first illustrated version was presented to him in 1588. Another imperial version is known from 1594 that was owned by Akbar’s mother Hamīda Bānū Begum, who had the manuscript brought to her on her deathbed. It has been plausibly suggested that she felt a particular affinity with the sufferings of Sītā, for she and her husband Humāyūn were driven into exile by rebellions in 1540 and endured great hardship in crossing the deserts of Rajasthan and Sind, where she gave birth to Akbar in 1542. Two further Mughal versions are associated with Mughal noblemen. There must, however, have been an earlier iconographic tradition of illustrating the Rāmāyaṇa for Mughal artists, many of them Hindus, to draw upon, as many details in the first imperial Mughal version such as the crowns and dress of Rāma and his brothers are derived from mediaeval Indian exemplars. Earlier Rajput examples must have perished in the storming of Hindu strongholds such as Gwalior and Chittaur by the Mughals. Akbar’s great Rāmāyaṇa manuscript now in Jaipur has not unfortunately been published sufficiently for it to be possible for meaningful comparisons to be drawn either with other Mughal versions or with later Rajput ones.

The earliest surviving Rajput Rāmāyaṇa comes from a court in central India from c. 1635–40 in the extremely simple but expressive Malwa style, with which Jagat Siṅgh is unlikely to have been acquainted. Even if he had been, it could only have served to reinforce his understanding of the difficulties in immediately setting about so immense a project. Not only would it be hard to recruit enough artists to illustrate it on a comparable or superior scale to that of the Mughal version, but he would also have realised that Mewar painting was simply not at that stage a sophisticated enough vehicle. It was fortunate, therefore, that one artist then appeared — Sāhib Dīn — who was able to render the story in a way that realised Jagat Siṅgh’s vision of rivalling the Mughal version in complexity, but it was to be twenty years before Sāhib Dīn reached the necessary level of artistic sophistication to be able to achieve it.
Between the Chavand Rāgamālā of 1605 and the next dated document of Mewar painting, another Rāgamālā of 1628 by Sāhib Dīn, there is little evidence of painting activity at the Mewar court. Karaṇ Siṅgh was busy with the completion of the new palace at Udaipur. Some paintings in the so-called ‘Popular Mughal’ style seem to have been made by visiting artists in Mewar at this time. Popular Mughal painting is a broken down version of the imperial style that accommodated the ‘silhouette’ tradition of Rajput painting to the high ‘bird’s eye’ viewpoint of the Mughal style. Manuscripts and paintings in this tradition, as well as some imperial-quality works, may well have started being collected during the last few years of Amar Siṅgh’s reign and during that of Karaṇ Siṅgh. Some works in a more obviously Mewar style can be attributed to this period also. Both Karaṇ Siṅgh and Jagat Siṅgh would have been given portraits of Jahāngīr. There are at least two near-contemporary portraits of the Emperor by Mewar artists based on a Mughal portrait of the Emperor seated (fig. 2), here adapted to Rajput taste with handmaidens fanning him. A dispersed Rasamañjarī of 1620-25 (fig. 3) is indicative of the sort of work being done in the court studio in which the Mewar style has been influenced in its approaches to landscape and architecture by Popular Mughal work and in its bands of scrollwork by Malwa painting (Rajput work from central India). The text is concerned with the description and classification of nāyikās and nāyakas (heroines and heroes in a literary genre) and it has been suggested that the hero of the series is possibly based on the appearance of Karaṇ Siṅgh. As compared with the earlier — almost square pages of the Chavand Rāgamālā, the Rasamañjarī has now adopted a rectangular upright format with the relevant panel of text at the top of each page similar to other sets produced for Rajput patrons.
(Fig. 2) The Mughal Emperor Jahāngīr (1605-27) with female attendants. Mewar; studio of Sāhib Din, 1630-35. Add.Or.5578

(Fig. 3) The heroine’s friend advises her to meet her lover at his house since it is so hot out of doors in the summer. Page from the Rasamañjarī of Bhānudattā. Mewar, 1620-25. Add.Or.5576
Jagat Siṅgh’s patronage

On his accession in 1628, Jagat Siṅgh turned his attention to the restocking of the Royal Library which had been destroyed in the Mughal sack of Chittaur in 1568. In the first part of his reign he had his artists and scribes concentrate on the smaller poetical texts. With the first of these documents, Sāhib Dīn’s Rāgamālā of 1628, we enter a different visual world to the earlier Rasamañjarī. There is no direct evidence as to the artist’s origins, artistic or otherwise, but his Muslim name (originally Shihāb al-Dīn) need not necessarily mean a non-Mewar origin, for his predecessor Nisaratī, the artist of the Chavand set of 1605, was also a Muslim. In this early work he is no more influenced by Mughal composition and colouring than was Nisaratī. It is a strictly horizontal world, but with schematic flat architecture replacing the dark backgrounds and an attempt at rendering a horizon by sometimes converting the lower half of the divided background into a ground but without recession. Registers, two or more horizontal bands, are employed to break up the static compositions and to suggest that some characters are nearer the picture plane than others. What impresses most, however, is Sāhib Dīn’s brilliantly assured rendering of the human form, still in the silhouette of the earlier styles but drawn with greater clarity and purpose. This is a stylization that laid down the ground rules for the way that all Mewari artists henceforth drew the human figure.

With his next works, a Gītagovinda of 1629 and another of the 1630s, as well as two Rasikapriyās of the early 1630s, now widely dispersed, Sāhib Dīn began to spread his wings. The former is one of the last great classics of Sanskrit poetry and treats the burgeoning love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as a metaphor for the longing of the soul for union with the divine. The latter is a masterpiece of mediaeval Hindi literature that elaborates on the traditional classifications of nāyaka and nāyikā using the divine lovers as models (fig. 4). Faced with the complexities of storytelling and of illustrating poetic moods and conceits as opposed to the simplicity of illustrating the musical modes, Sāhib Dīn began to search for compositional methods that better allowed this. He took the basic elements of early seventeenth-century Mewar painting and interpreted them within the broader context of the Mughal tradition, in particular by raising the outlook to the so-called ‘bird’s-eye’ viewpoint, which was the usual perspective in Persian and Mughal manuscript narrative painting. This allowed him to dispose his characters around the page and to give depth to his compositions. The traditional flat background plane of colour could thus easily be transformed into a landscape by incorporating elements such as hills, rocks, water and trees, culminating in an actual horizon. Such naturalism had long been foreign to Rajput painting. Of course Rajput art did not attempt any kind of naturalistic rendition of landscape or architecture as did the Mughal style, but instead favoured conceptual models to which were applied
its brilliant palette of colours. At first fairly tentatively using screens of trees to divide up the picture space without much suggestion of depth, with growing boldness in the latest parts of the Rāsikapriyā series, he abandoned these props and used natural divisions in the landscape instead. What is clear from his interpretation of these sometimes difficult texts is his increasing ability to find visual equivalences to literary conceits.

(Fig. 4) The ‘Stubborn Heroine’ who resists her lover advances yet bewails her loneliness when the time is right for love. Page from the Rāsikapriyā of Keśavadāsa. By Sāhib Dīn, Mewar, 1630-35. Add.Or.5634

At some stage in his career Sāhib Dīn must have been exposed to Mughal influence, either through seeing Popular Mughal work in Udaipur or possibly when in the suite of Jagat Siṅgh in attendance on Jahāngīr. There are several conventions seen in Mughal court scenes which find an echo in Sāhib Dīn’s work, such as the appearance of Rāvaṇa at the jharokhā window in his palace in Laṅkā and the consequent salutes of his assembled courtiers below, which suggest that the artist may have visited Agra. The jharokhā was originally the window in the palace wall at which the emperors would appear daily to be seen by their subjects and the term was then applied to the throne platform installed at the back of the Mughal audience halls where the Emperor would appear enthroned in daily durbar high above his assembled courtiers and officials. Although an imperial painting showing Jahāngīr at the jharokhā was once in the Mewar royal collections, we have no knowledge of when it arrived there. Whatever the artistic
influence on Sāhib Dīn, his work associates the Mughal emperors with the demon Rāvaṇa, a theme that is also found in the other books of the Rāmāyaṇa illustrated by different artists.

All the various sets of Mewar paintings from 1628 onwards are associated with Sāhib Dīn until we reach a dearth in the late 1630s. There is no reason to suppose that much has been lost, as many of these sets remained in the Mewar Royal Library until comparatively recently. From the beginning of his reign Jagat Siṅgh had Sāhib Dīn and his studio artists produce a sufficient body of work through which they gained much-needed experience in narrative and poetical illustration using mostly smaller texts. If, as we suggest here, Jagat Siṅgh was working towards a long-term goal of having the epic Rāmāyaṇa illustrated on the very grandest scale in a way that would rival Akbar’s version, he then tried to expand his artists’ powers by commissioning in the 1640s a series of much larger religious and epic texts. This involved both experimenting with the various ways of illustrating such manuscripts and expanding the studio in order to accommodate the increased workload.

The first result of this expansion is a manuscript of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the principle text dealing with the exploits of Kṛṣṇa, that was finished in 1648 and is now in Pune. For such a sacred text it was decided to revert to the traditional shape of Indian pothī manuscripts, i.e. with the width being roughly twice the size of the height. Since no manuscripts had been produced in Mewar in this format in living memory, it was clearly a challenge for artists used to the upright format of the earlier Mewar productions to design compositions filling these wide pages. Most of the paintings are in Sāhib Dīn’s manner but are in fact routine studio works that occupy a half or a quarter of the page. Clearly their artists had no idea how to fill a whole wide page. This was perhaps an experiment in learning how to produce a large manuscript with many hundreds of paintings. Sāhib Dīn himself seems to have been responsible for only a small number of the full-page paintings, in which mountains, trees, heavenly beings and animals co-exist in harmony. Sāhib Dīn could not personally paint all the paintings, but he was not, it would seem told to direct the whole work or to do most of the drawing or to supervise the work of the lesser artists. Only such overall control would make it possible for a whole large manuscript to have a unity of conception and approach. This, as we shall see, was the way the Rāmāyaṇa manuscripts were produced. Ācārya Jasvant, the scribe of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa manuscript, would have brought this experience to his new position as the royal librarian who commissioned the earlier of the Rāmāyaṇa volumes.

Out of the over 400 paintings in Jagat Siṅgh’s Rāmāyaṇa, there are 158 that can be attributed to Sāhib Dīn in the second and sixth books. As head of the studio he would have imposed his conceptions on to his artistic helpers by undertaking the drawing and
thereafter supervising the other artists as they laid in the colours, finished all the details and burnished the result. Although he was exceptionally sensitive to literary and poetical ideas and no doubt was also advised as to the content and meaning of the \textit{Rāmāyaṇa} by Ācārya Jasvant and perhaps other pandits assisting in the project, he nonetheless had to find visual expression for all the events in the text and to combine them into various sequences in a continuous narrative flow. There was, as we have seen, no earlier illustrated manuscript on hand to assist with the iconography or the compositions, since any earlier versions had perished in Chittaur in 1568. The draughtsmanship alone for such a work would have occupied a considerable number of years. Clearly if Sāhib Dīn had been given the task of preparing all seven of the books of the epic on the scale envisaged, then the project would not have been completed in Jagat Siṅgh’s lifetime. Even though, in the event, the studio was expanded to include another two master artists and their helpers, nonetheless Jagat Siṅgh was dead before it was finished.

\textbf{Reflections of seventeenth-century Mewar}

Although the epic is set in ancient times, all of Jagat Siṅgh’s artists depict their contemporary world of the mid-seventeenth century in costume and architecture. Sāhib Dīn prefers to give Ayodhyā a fairly simple palace, never more than two storeys, with public and private rooms appearing to be scattered around one or more courtyards. While he may have thought such simple architecture more fitting for the epic period of the story, it does not accord with Vālmīki’s text, which instead describes Ayodhyā as a city of towering gem-studded ‘skyscraper’ palaces. Indeed Sāhib Dīn’s architecture seems more typical of the Mughal palaces than it does of Mewar’s. Rāṇās Amar Siṅgh and Karaṇ Siṅgh had been building up a mighty multi-storeyed edifice on the banks of the Pichola lake. There a massive terrace leads to the fairly plain basement storey, while the architectural embellishment gets more elaborate the higher up it is, culminating in a fantastic roofline punctuated by domes, balconies and canopies. The King of Kiṣkindhā lives in a similar towering multi-storeyed Rajput palace of the seventeenth century, clearly influenced by the Udaipur palace.

In Manohar’s and Sāhib Dīn’s books we are given a more direct insight into the palace world of the seventeenth century. Both artists depict the chambers of the palace with the columns and brackets very like those in the earliest such chambers in the lower storeys of the Udaipur palace. Both likewise envisage the palace at Ayodhyā to be a series of separate individual buildings more like those of the Mughals than the contemporary palace at Udaipur, although Manohar sometimes gives us a glimpse of that type of multi-storeyed structure. What goes on within the walls of Ayodhyā is
depicted in such a way that we can visualise it happening in Udaipur, which is reborn as Ayodhyā when excited people line the bazaars to witness great events. The rich textiles, costumes and vessels seen in the Ayodhyā scenes would have been in daily use in the palace. The rituals following the death of Daśaratha and the consecrations of first Bharata and then Rāma would have likewise been seen in Udaipur following the death of Jagat Singh in 1652. The various royal progressions and encampment scenes would have been seen in any royal progress in Rajasthan in the seventeenth century.

Towards the end of his reign Jagat Siṅgh began to repair the fortifications of the ancient capital Chittaur, an act that was explicitly forbidden by the Mughals after they had sacked it in 1568. Perhaps because of his friendship with Jagat Siṅgh’s father, Shāh Jahān did not enact retribution for his act of insubordination until early in the reign of his son Rāj Siṅgh. Nonetheless this quarrel may have suggested to Sāhib Dīn, perhaps prompted by Jagat Siṅgh, the idea of using contemporary regal practice to link Rāvaṇa explicitly with the Mughals, and Rāma implicitly with Jagat Siṅgh. We can see this where Rāvaṇa takes a ceremonial bath before the final confrontation with Rāma within a bathing tent formed of red qanāts. Such imperial red tent screens were the prerogative of the Mughal emperors in India, although Mewar’s Rāṇās had known of them and used them ever since capturing some from the first Mughal Emperor Babur in 1527. Various paintings in the Yuddhakāṇḍa show Rāvaṇa appearing at his palace window like Jahāngīr or Shāh Jahān at the jharokhā balcony, while the demons below make the acknowledgement and salute characteristic of the Mughal courtiers in such a position. The artist of the Uttarakāṇḍa likewise sometimes dressed his demons in Mughal costume with right-tying jāmās and turbans and their faces in three-quarter profile. Of course Sāhib Dīn in particular is too sophisticated an artist just to make crude political points. He is also concerned to present Rāvaṇa as a warrior doing his duty. The bath prior to a battle is a Rajput convention not present in the Rāmāyaṇa text. It is particularly appropriate when the warrior believes he is about to die, as when the defenders of Chittaur three times over the centuries sallied out to die in battle at the hands of their Muslim besiegers while the women left behind committed themselves to the flames.

While Manohar dresses his princes in court scenes in contemporary costume of jāmā and turban, Sāhib Dīn is more particular. Rāma wears before his exile a prince’s costume of a chakdar jāmā, a gown with four hanging points. By the mid-seventeenth century it was distinctly old-fashioned, but it links him with the way the heroes in the earlier manuscripts from Mewar as well as previous Rāṇās were depicted. No one else, not even Daśaratha, wears this type of garment. He and his court wear contemporary costume. The queens and their ladies, and of course Sītā before her exile, all wear the Rajasthani costume of ghāghrā (skirt), colī (bodice) and orhnī
(veil), as well as appropriate mourning garments after Daśaratha’s death. The only anachronism in costume is the wearing of **mukuṭa** (crowns) by Daśaratha and the princes, who should be wearing turbans. Such crowns were worn by divinities and by the kings of Buddhist and Hindu India and were traditional in depictions of ancient Indian princes in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century manuscripts whether Rajput or Mughal. Even Rāma, however, begins to wind a turban around his head prior to his consecration, perhaps to suggest a link with his descendant Jagat Siṅgh, whose features, it has been suggested, might have been used by Sāhib Dīn for those of the mature Rāma. In Book 4, the monkey kings wear an elaborately brocaded half-length **jāmā** (gown) tied with a **paṭkā** (cummerbund), while the queen is attired in similarly rich materials in Rajasthani costume. The chief courtiers wear the same type of male costume but less rich.

**The Rāmāyaṇa manuscripts**

The Mewar *Rāmāyaṇa* manuscripts are among the most important documents of seventeenth-century Indian painting. The two finest books of Jagat Siṅgh’s *Rāmāyaṇa*, the Ayodhyākāṇḍa and the Yuddhakāṇḍa, show both a command of detail and an overall grasp of narrative and compositional structure that have never been surpassed in Rajput painting. The other books, while not quite on this exalted level, contribute their own individual styles to this rich mix. Despite its incomplete and disparate character, this *Rāmāyaṇa* remains one of the greatest monuments of seventeenth-century Indian art and one of the greatest of all Indian manuscripts. Its seven books are particularly important for the fact that, unlike most such other loose-leaf manuscripts, they have not been dispersed as individual paintings into various collections but remain largely intact. The huge scale of the project allowed the artists to focus on telling an epic story on the grandest scale. The cumulative aesthetic effect of a closely detailed narrative sequence in Rajput art is an experience that hitherto only a very small number of interested scholars have ever been able to see.

The seven books of Jagat Siṅgh’s *Rāmāyaṇa* are each illustrated on the grandest scale, with the paintings occupying the whole page. As was the case with the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, for a sacred text it was decided to revert to the traditional shape of Indian *pothi* manuscripts. The size of the folios differs slightly between the various books but is generally about 21 cm high by 38 cm wide. The paintings occupy the whole page, normally within red and yellow frames, but sometimes leaving a narrow unpainted edge: within their frames they measure about 19 by 35 cm. The seven books are in three different styles of contemporary Mewar painting: Book 1, the *Bālakāṇḍa* or Book of Childhood, originally with 112 folios and 78 paintings, is attributed in the colophon to the master Manohar. The paintings from this book are divided mostly
between the CSMVS Museum and a private collection, both in Mumbai, while two were in the Baroda Museum (one is currently misplaced). Book 2, the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* or Book of Ayodhyā, with 129 folios and 68 paintings, now British Library Add. MS 15296(1), and Book 6, the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* or Book of Battles, with 206 folios and 90 paintings, now BL Add. MS 15297(1), are in the style of the studio master Sāhib Dīn. Book 6 is the only one that is attributed to him in the colophon and it is his masterpiece, one of the greatest achievements of seventeenth-century Indian art. Book 7, the *Uttarakāṇḍa* or Last Book, with 114 folios and 94 paintings, now BL Add. MS 15297(2), is in a style related to that of Manohar and is probably in part attributable to him. Also in this style but probably by a different hand is Book 3, the *Aranyakāṇḍa* or Book of the Forest, with 72 folios and 36 paintings, that alone remained in Udaipur, but is now housed in the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute in Jodhpur. Book 4, the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* or Book of Kiṣkindhā, with 88 folios and 34 paintings, now BL Add. MS 15296(2), and the remains of Book 5, the *Sundarakāṇḍa* or Book of Beauty, represented by an album of 18 paintings in the former India Office collections, now BL IO San 3621, are in an anonymous style heavily influenced by painting from the Deccan. The number of known illustrations in the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Rāṇā Jagat Siṅgh amounts to a total of 414 paintings out of originally about 450. Indeed, despite the steps that Rāṇā Jagat Siṅgh had previously taken to prepare his studio for this undertaking in the years of peace following Rāṇā Amar Siṅgh’s capitulation to the Mughal Emperor Jahāngīr in 1615, the sheer scale of his *Rāmāyaṇa* is staggering in its ambition for any Rajput kingdom. This is especially remarkable for one that had been at war with the Mughal invader since Akbar’s accession to the throne in 1556 and that had fought continuous battles without the help of the other Rajput clans till 1615. The energies and finances of the Mewar rulers and people had been engaged for a period of well over fifty years in war alone, and not in patronage or the pursuit of the arts.

The scribe of all the seventeenth-century volumes with colophons of the Mewar *Rāmāyaṇa* is a Jain scribe, Mahātmā Hīrāṇanda. The *Bālakāṇḍa* was commissioned by Ācārya Jasvant and finished on 2 December 1649 with the artist Manohar being responsible for the paintings. In the colophon of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* we read that it was likewise commissioned by Ācārya Jasvant, this time for the library of Rāṇā Jagat Singh, and that it was finished on 25 November 1650. The next book to be finished was the *Aranyakāṇḍa* which was commissioned by Jasvant and finished on 8 October 1651, while Rāṇā Jagat Singh was reigning victoriously over Chittaur in Mewar. Next came the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*. Hīrāṇanda writes that he finished it on 25 August 1652 in the Dharmaghoṣa Gaccha in Udaipur in the victorious reign of Rāṇā Jagat Siṅgh, while the artist Sāhib Dīn was responsible for the paintings. No commissioner or patron is mentioned. The colophon of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* tells us that the scribe finished it on 28 May 1653 in the Sūrāṇa Gaccha in Udaipur and that the work was commissioned by
Vyāsa Jayadeva, during the victorious reign of Rāṇa Rāj Siṅgh. The Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa was the last to be completed in Udaipur on 3 September 1653, again commissioned by Vyāsa Jayadeva under the victorious umbrella of Rāṇa Rāj Siṅgh reigning over Chittaur in Mewar. The scribe writes that he completed books in different gacchas. Gacchas normally represent lines of descent of Jain monks, but Hīrāṇanda seems to be suggesting that these gacchas also had physical presences in Udaipur in which he wrote the manuscript — monks cannot normally change their gaccha, but both the Dharmaghoṣa and Sūrāṇa gacchas are fairly small religious entities within the Jain community.

Jagat Siṅgh died in October 1652 and his son and successor Rāj Siṅgh (r. 1652–80) was much less interested in painting and manuscript production. The change of commissioner, i.e. the head of the Royal Library, in the new reign suggests that Rāj Siṅgh found the pace of work too slow and wanted the whole process speeded up. The Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa bears evidence of hasty and erroneous collation and often lacks canto colophons, while some of the paintings lack finish. The Uttarakāṇḍa is more correct as to the text but the paintings, especially towards the end of the volume, are hastily finished. It is impossible to be sure about what happened with the Sundarakāṇḍa, as only eighteen paintings survive. They each have relevant text on the verso, indeed the final painting (on the original folio 141) contains the text of the end of the book and the beginnings of a colophon that would have been concluded on the next page, but some of the paintings appear to be somewhat later. The work may not have been sufficiently far advanced when Jagat Siṅgh died and his successor simply abandoned it.

Jain scribes were among the most conservative in India and in several of the books we find many of the spaces and dots associated with the earlier manuscript traditions. The text is written in western Devānāgarī script in black ink, with colophons marking the end of each canto written in red as well as the concluding colophon, on large sheets of Indian paper, slightly burnished and light beige in colour. The text is generally arranged in panels formed by a framework of three red vertical lines on each side and sometimes two at the top and bottom, although some of the different volumes are clearly not completely finished and lack the upper and lower lines. The number of lines varies considerably, depending on the relative density of narrative illustration. In the centre of most folios of the Ayodhyākāṇḍa and Aranyakāṇḍa, recto and verso, and beginning two-thirds of the way through the Bālakāṇḍa, is a blank diamond five lines high, empty but for four isolated ākṣaras or syllables, while at the beginning and the end there can be as many as five of these. In the opening folios these ākṣaras are outlined in red to form a Greek cross. There are also sometimes large red spots, marking the site of earlier foliation methods, on the versos. The Bālakāṇḍa begins with a half-page picture as if carrying on the tradition of the 1648 Bhāgavata Purāṇa,
with another at folio 5, before it begins the tradition of full-page paintings that runs throughout the entire set.

Internal evidence suggests the following sequence of composition of the various books in the manuscript. The very large number of paintings must have taken several years to complete, even in the three or more royal studios to which the work was given. At an early stage the librarian, first Jasvant and then Vyāsa Jayadeva, must have sat down with the head of each studio to outline what was required in the way of density of illustration. Either the librarians or specially appointed pandits must have been with the artists most of the time during the initial drawing stages to explain the text and decide on the episodes to be illustrated. There would have been no manuscript text at this stage to guide them of course, even if the artists could have read the Sanskrit verses. The master artists would have sketched in each subject on the pages and then handed them over to assistants to lay the ground over his under-drawings. In the Uttrakāṇḍa in particular, there are inscriptions in Rajasthani visible through the paint layers, with indications of colouring or the names of the subjects to give the artists some clues, as many of the episodes of this book are obscure and had possibly never been illustrated before. Such inscriptions would seem to indicate that the artists could read them. Either the master or his assistants would then begin the laborious process of colouring in the drawings – laying down layer after layer of paint, each layer burnished through the back of the page, until the whole painting was finished. In course of preparation the paintings were numbered either at the top, in red, sometimes twice, on the originally much wider blank margins, or in the case of those books where the painted frames extended to the edge of the folios, on the verso.

The finished pictures were then taken to the scribe and their reverse sides, as well as both sides of all the unillustrated folios, were marked up with the red lines on each side framing the text. This stage actually must have been done while the scribe was writing, as the number of lines on the back of the painted folios varies according to whether the episode is heavily illustrated or not. Red framing lines were then added also at the top and bottom of the text in some but not all of the books. Since all the lines of the red frames, including those in the earlier books at the top and bottom, were ruled before the text was written between them (the writing sometimes goes over the red lines), the scribe must have had a good idea of the number of lines needed on each side in advance, another indication that all the paintings were already finished. The black Devanāgarī foliation, always on the folio’s verso in Indian manuscripts and here at the bottom right corner, was then added. Since this foliation is on the same side as the paintings in the earlier books, the paintings were originally intended to be on the versos, but the case is not so obvious in the later books where the original foliation had been added to both rectos and versos. During the course of the inlaying of the folios of the four British Library volumes into heavier pages in the nineteenth
century, all the painted sides were treated as rectos. At some stage unspecified all the folios were slightly trimmed, thereby removing parts of the red numbers of the paintings and, occasionally, some of the black ink foliation as well. While generally speaking the text keeps pace with the paintings, sometimes it does not, as for instance at the beginning of Book 6, where the first six paintings occur on folios 2-7, while the text takes until folio 22 (end of chapter 14) to reach the same place in the narrative. The opening sequence of this book is the only time that the narrative in the paintings gets so far in advance of that in the text. This is yet one more indication that all the paintings were produced in advance of the text’s being written.

The history of the Rāmāyaṇa manuscripts

The manuscripts of the Mewar Rāmāyaṇa now in London (apart from IO San 3621) were given by Rāṇā Bhim Siṅgh of Mewar (r. 1778–1828) to Colonel James Tod (1782–1835), who was from 1818 the first British Political Agent to the Western Rajput courts, and by him to the royal bibliophile, the Duke of Sussex (1773–1843), some time after his return to England in 1823. They were purchased by the British Museum at the sale of the Bibliotheca Sussexiana by the Pall Mall bookseller Robert Harding Evans on 2 August 1844. Another manuscript of Book 1 of the Rāmāyaṇa, a Bālakāṇḍa produced for Rāṇā Saṅgrām Siṅgh in 1712, was also given to Tod and acquired by the British Museum at the same times (now BL Add. MS 15295) and treated similarly to the four earlier volumes as detailed below. It is not clear how the remains of the Sundarakāṇḍa (IO San 3621) left India, or indeed what has happened to the rest of it, but it was acquired by the then India Office Library in 1912 in the form of a bound volume of 18 paintings. It is not known when the Bālakāṇḍa (now mostly in Mumbai) left the Royal Library in Udaipur and its history is obscure before it was offered for sale in Mumbai in the early 1950s. The Aranyakāṇḍa remained in the Royal Library in Udaipur and is recorded in the catalogue of that collection published in 1943, until the contents of the Saraswati Bhandar were transferred to the custody of the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute in 1962.

Pasted on to the opening flyleaf of the Bālakāṇḍa of 1712 are the engraved bookplate of the Duke of Sussex and a handwritten notice referring to this and the earlier Rāmāyaṇa volumes from Mewar: ‘Rāma-yana, an Epic Romance in Sanscrit, one of the principal Brahminical Pooranas, containing the traditional legends of the Hindoo Mythology. Written on separate leaves [glazed paper] in number about 700 on the reverse of the greater part of which are [beautiful] water-coloured paintings illustrating the text. 15 ½ by 8 ¾ ins. In 3 Bundles. No 384.’ This notice is copied from its description as no. 384 in Evans’ sale catalogue (with significant omissions in brackets) of the manuscripts in the Duke of Sussex’s collection. Below that pasted
The original foliation of the surviving volumes varies. Books 1, 2 and 4 have the pictures mostly on the versos but of the others, Books 3, 5 and 7 have the original
nāgarī foliation on the rectos. Book 6 has foliation on both the rectos and the versos but the original foliation seems to be that on the verso, indicating the pictures were intended to be on the rectos. When the four Sussex volumes reached the British Museum, however, all the paintings were treated as rectos and foliated accordingly in the western manuscript tradition. These foliations have been retained here in the descriptions of the individual paintings of the volumes; it should also be noted that discrepancies have crept into the foliation of some of the volumes where some folios with just a painting and no text and no original foliation were included in the British Museum sequence, so that the original foliation and the library foliation no longer coincide.

When consulted by A. G. von Schlegel for his edition of the Rāmāyaṇa published in 1829, the London manuscripts were still in Tod’s collection. There is accordingly no trace of the Rāmāyaṇa manuscripts in the first volume of the catalogue of the Duke of Sussex’s collection also published that same year, while the subsequent second volume notices only editions of the Bible. Nor is there any mention of the manuscript in Tod’s published writings, although in the anonymous ‘Memoir of the Author’, included in Tod’s posthumously published Travels in Western India, there are mentioned some of the important manuscripts which Tod collected or had copied and which are now in the library of the Royal Asiatic Society in London.

James Tod (1782–1835) was one of the more remarkable of the East India Company’s officials. After a year at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, he arrived in Calcutta in August 1799 for initial training and on 29 May 1800 was made Lieutenant in the 14th Bengal Native Infantry. He soon was able to journey into the heart of India, when in 1805 he was attached to the escort to the Resident at the court of Daulat Rao Sindhia, then the chief power in northern India. Sindhia’s court was peripatetic and was then in Mewar; it did not finally settle at Gwalior until 1812. In 1813 Tod was promoted to Captain and took command of the Resident’s escort, and in 1815 he became Assistant to the Resident, thereby transferring to the Political side. During this time he was constantly surveying or collecting topographical information about western India. At the conclusion of the Third Maratha War the Rajput states of Rajasthan ‘were invited to accept the protective alliance of the British’ and in 1818 Tod was appointed by the Governor-General Political Agent to the Western Rajput states. He remained in Rajasthan based in Udaipur for the rest of his time in India and proved remarkably successful in helping to restore the region’s peace and prosperity after the depredations of the previous century. He continued to collect Sanskrit and Hindi manuscripts, drawings, paintings and objects concerned with the history of Rajasthan. He and Rāṇā Bhim Singh of Mewar seem to have been on the friendliest of terms and he made free use of the Rāṇā’s library. Tod retired in June 1822, officially for reasons of ill-health, and travelled to Mumbai by the circuitous route described in
Travels in Western India, published after his death (1839). Tod left Mumbai for England in February 1823 and never returned to India. The rest of his life was mostly spent in arranging and publishing the immense mass of materials accumulated during his Indian career, which bore fruit in his magnum opus his Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan (1829–32).

Tod served as Librarian (1823–31) to the newly founded Royal Asiatic Society in London and donated most of his 160 or so Indian manuscripts to that institution beginning in 1824. His residual collection composed mostly of drawings and miniatures, together with the last twelve Indian manuscripts and thirteen folio volumes of his translations from Rajasthani bardic epics, was presented by his executors in November 1851. No doubt Tod would have liked to have presented this royal manuscript to the King, but George IV had recently given his father’s great library of printed books to the British Museum, while the royal manuscript collection had been given earlier. Augustus, Duke of Sussex, one of the younger sons of King George III, was one of the most cultured men of his age and seemed an appropriate substitute. He was elected President of the Society of Arts in 1816 and held that post for the rest of his life. He was also President of the Royal Society between 1830 and 1838. According to the New Dictionary of National Biography, ‘In the latter capacity he gave brilliant receptions in his apartments at Kensington Palace, but the resulting expense induced him to resign the Presidentship, as he preferred spending the money on his library. This collection, over 50,000 volumes strong, included about 1000 editions of the Bible, and many ancient manuscripts.’

Although much of the great Rāmāyaṇa manuscript had been in the British Museum since 1844, it cannot be said that much notice was taken of it until some 50 years ago. It is described as to its text in the catalogue of the Sanskrit manuscripts in the British Museum published in 1902. No notice was taken of its paintings, however, largely on account of the general incomprehension of Rajput painting in the West, despite the labours of Dr A.K. Coomaraswamy, until one painting from Book 2 was published in Douglas Barrett and Basil Gray’s Indian Painting in 1963, shortly after the first publication of the volume in Mumbai by Dr Moti Chandra in 1955–57. Different scholars have now worked on the volumes, trying to evaluate its various styles and also its compositional and narrative structure though much work remains to be done. In 2008 J.P. Losty published The Ramayana: Love and Valour in India’s Great Epic accompanying an exhibition of the disbound paintings in the British Library which included a large number of paintings for the interested reader. With this web-based resource including both text and paintings, it is now possible to appreciate fully the cumulative aesthetic effect of such a detailed narrative technique. It is hoped that scholars will also be able to trace the relationship between text and paintings that has never before been possible.
Further reading

For history and art of Mewar


For the Rāmāyaṇa in general


For the Mewar Rāmāyaṇa manuscripts


For James Tod and his collections

