



Museums of India

The City Palace Museum Udaipur

Paintings of Mewar Court Life

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lake, is delineated with a free and lively hand, but with close attention to architectural detail. Stabled horses and servants fetching and carrying appear in an inner courtyard.

The portraiture of the principal figures including the Jethi group is of good quality and was evidently executed by Sangram Singh's (unidentified) leading artist. As in many other large Udaipur compositions, the minor figures are the work of assistants (compare, for example, the royal musicians seated by the flowery parterre on the left with the more crudely painted group of *naqqara* (drum) and *shelmai*-players in the foreground). The picture presumably dates from before the death of Rathor Durga Das in 1718. It probably served as the model for a very similar, but somewhat inferior, painting of Sangram Singh watching the Jethis, now in the Shiv Niwas Palace collection at Udaipur.

1. Published: Vashistha, *Mewar*, fig. 47, pp.28-29; Andhare, *Chronology*, pl.102, p.95, with inaccurate description; also listed in the Arts Council catalogue *In the Image of Man*, eds. Michell et al., no.215, but not in fact included in that exhibition.
2. G.N.Sharma, *Social Life*, p.135.
3. Tod, *Annals*, II, pp.751-52; III, pp.1617-18.
4. Cimino et al., *Life at Court*, no. 41.



2 and details (overleaf)

Maharana Sangram Singh at the Gangaur boat procession
Udaipur, c.1715-20.¹

Numbered 2/103 on the reverse, with a valuation (Rs. 300) and a 13-line inscription describing the scene (Appendix, no. 2).
31 x 31 ins.

While Dassehra (no. 3) was the most important annual festival for Rajput men, Gangaur was the principal women's festival. At Udaipur it was celebrated with greater splendour than at any other court, and visitors would travel great distances to witness the *tamasha*. This New Year festival in honour of Gauri, goddess of fruitfulness and abundance, took place near the beginning of the spring month of Chaitra. Images of the goddess and her consort Shiva were taken by the women from their shrines in each *zenana* and carried down to the lakeside for symbolic ablutions and worship with songs and a circular dance². According to Col. Tod, who attended the festival in c.1820,

"...Every turret and balcony is crowded with spectators, from the palace to the water's edge; and the ample flight of marble steps which intervene from the Tripolia, or triple

portal, to the boats, is a dense mass of females in variegated robes, whose scarfs but half conceal their ebon tresses adorned with the rose and the jessamine. A more imposing or more exhilarating sight cannot be imagined than the entire population of a city thus assembled for the purpose of rejoicing; the countenance of every individual, from the prince to the peasant, dressed in smiles."³

The Maharana, with his nobles, ministers and attendants, watched these festivities seated in their barges and boats moored beside the *ghat* (nos. 62 and 66). After the goddess had been returned in procession to the palace, they would then be rowed around the northern banks of the Pichola lake, visiting other images of Gauri. Meanwhile a grand firework display over the lake brought the evening to a close.

Both the bearing of Gauri images by the women and the concluding boat procession are depicted in the present painting. The Maharana, with gold nimbus, is seen three times, enthroned on the foredeck of the royal barge in its progress round the lake. The nobles, wearing yellow or saffron *jamas*, who attend the Maharana are Chauhan Nathji, Maharaja Umed Singh,



Jhala Daulat Singh and Rathor Kishan Das, while Mayaji and Ram Singh hold chowries; seated to the rear are the attendants Lalji and Rugoji, the musicians (*kalavant*) Kanji and Chand, the female singer Jandi(?) and the drummer Piro. Riding in the second barge are Maharaja Takhat Singh (seen twice with folded hands as he converses with the Maharana across the water), Tuar Kishan Singh, Pancholi Kishan Das and Pancholi Devi Chand. The other boats contain Rao Surtan Singh and Raja Kirat Singh; Baba Sangram Singh and Pancholi Bihari Das; and Ravat Kesri Singh, Rathor Pratap Singh, Ravat Sarangdevji, Ranavat Agar Singh, Ranavat Ratan Singh and Saktavat Syam Singh.

On the left of the picture the procession has passed the Mohan Mandir, one of the smaller lake palaces⁴, lit with oil-lamps. Below, the houses, *havelis* and temples of the town are shown in jumbled multiple perspective, with a dense, colourful crowd of women thronging the vertical main street, many of them carrying images of Gauri and her consort. On the right, the royal and second barges are seen again, adjacent to a more shadowy assembly of women by a temple, with their Gauri image placed at the water's edge. Around the shore to the right, rockets and other fireworks are being set off. In the centre of the lake, which is strewn with floating oil-lamps, the royal flotilla makes its return journey past a lakeside *haveli* illuminated against the dark background by the blazing torch held by an attendant in a small boat.

With its skilfully contrived composition and adaptation of the townscape, its wealth of incidental detail and its atmospheric flirtation with the European device of chiaroscuro, this evocation of the night of Gangaur is one of the most impressive pictures of Sangram Singh's reign.

1. Published: Vashistha, *Mewar*, pl. 46 (detail) and p.30, with a discrepancy in dating between text and plate caption; Andhare, 'Mewar Painters', fig. 6 and *idem*, *Chronology*, pl. 105 and p.96, with incorrect captions and dating; listed in *In the Image of Man*, eds. Michell et al., no. 303, but not in fact included in that exhibition.
2. Tod, *Annals*, I, pp.665-68; Shyamaldas, *Vir Vinod*, I, pp.120-23, with a still more detailed description. For later depictions or photographs of the celebrations at the Tripolia (or Gangaur) Ghat, see nos. 62 and 66 below, and Introduction, fig. 5 above; also Cimino et al., *Life at Court*, no. 37 and col. pl.; Allen and Dwivedi, *Lives of the Indian princes*, pp.284-85; Gahlot, *Rajputane ka Itihas*, p.162, and *Times of India Annual*, 1955, p.55. A large painting of Maharana Shambhu Singh (1861-74) and others in boats on the lake at Gangaur is in the Shambhu Niwas palace collection.
3. Tod, *loc. cit.*, p.667. See also no. 62 below, for the artist Val Prinsep's account of the festival half a century later.
4. Cf. Tillotson, *The Rajput Palaces*, fig. 141.