

All That Glitters...

The golden illustrated
Ramayana of Banaras

DISCOVER MAP



In this pack, we look at a book made in **18th century Banaras** (also known as Varanasi), a city in Uttar Pradesh.

Do you know where Uttar Pradesh is? Find it in this map of India.

This story book was really interesting because it contained writing on one side and paintings illustrating the episode on the other.

THINK

Have you seen a similar storytelling format elsewhere?

What comes to mind?



This book narrates a story of two kingdoms, a kidnapping, monkeys with magical powers and adventures across an ocean!

Can you guess which story it might be?

This painting from the book may give you a hint.

The story is the *Ramayana* and features a prince named *Rama* who fights a battle to rescue his wife *Sita* kidnapped by another king *Ravana*.

In this particular painting, you see *Rama*, his brother *Lakshmana* and *Sita* in the forest in conversation with sages.





Image: Uploaded by theindianportrait on Wikimedia Commons, distributed under a CC-BY 2.0 license.

This is the king of Banaras, **Udit Narayan Singh**, who commissioned the book project. It was locally called the *Kanchana Chitra Ramayana* (KCR for short).

Kanchana = Gold in Sanskrit/Hindi
Chitra = Painting in Sanskrit/Hindi

So the name literally means *the story of Rama with paintings in gold*. True to its name, all the paintings in this book use real gold!

CONNECT

Grab your pack of water or acrylic colours and read about its composition. Do you think the gold paint used in KCR was made the same way as your gold paint? Learn more about the making of traditional gold paint [here](#).

REFLECT

For the longest time, gold has been symbolic of royalty and affluence.

What makes a mineral so valuable? How does it continue to stay valuable?

Can you think of anything else in our times that is symbolic of wealth, pomp or status? It could be a material substance or something more abstract.





The most popular version of Rama's story is that ascribed to Valmiki. Over centuries, many more versions emerged in multiple languages across the subcontinent.

The one used in KCR is that of saint Tulsidas who recited the story of Rama to the people of Banaras.

EXTEND

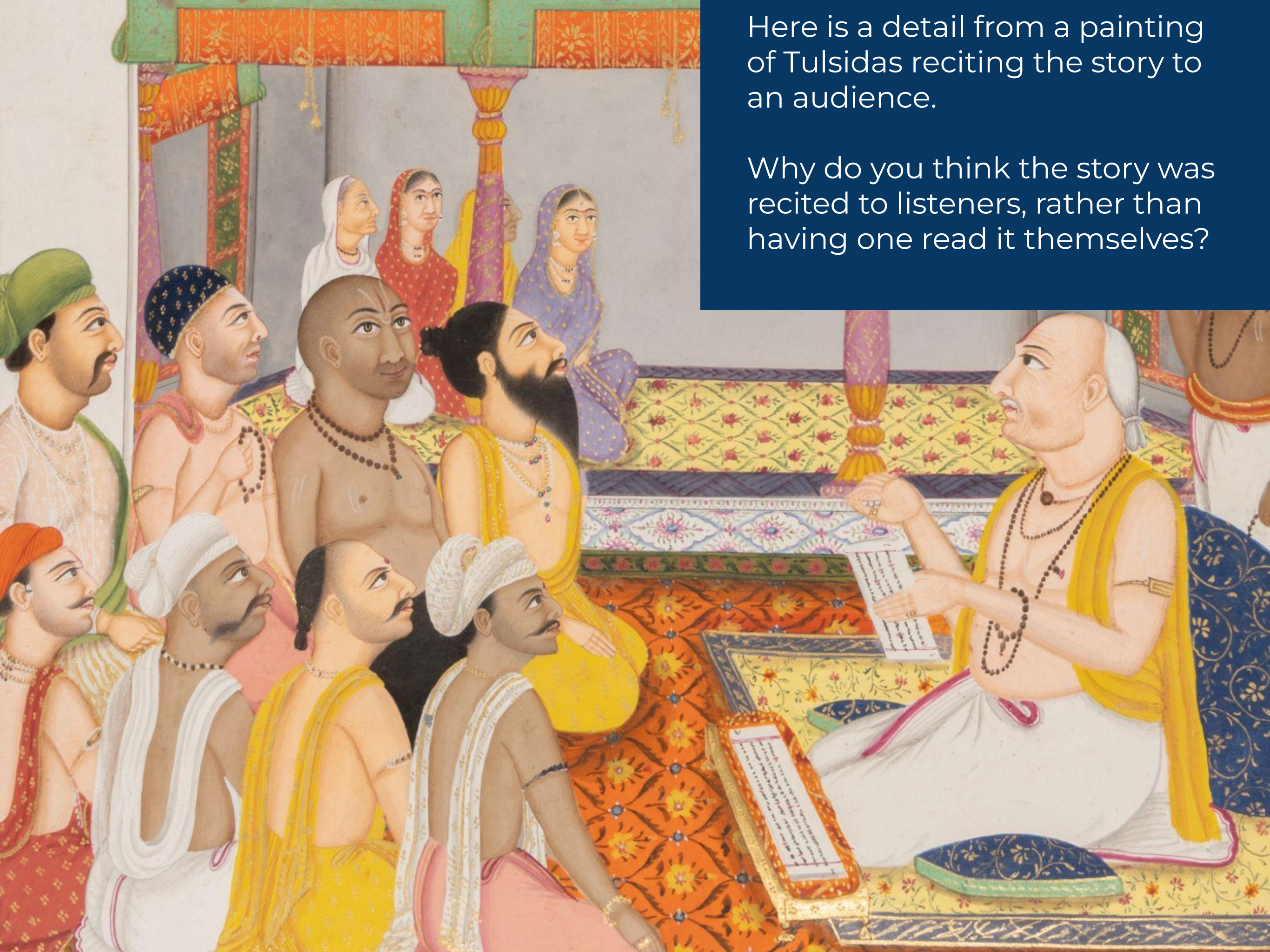
Can you think of stories in our time that have many versions or adaptations?

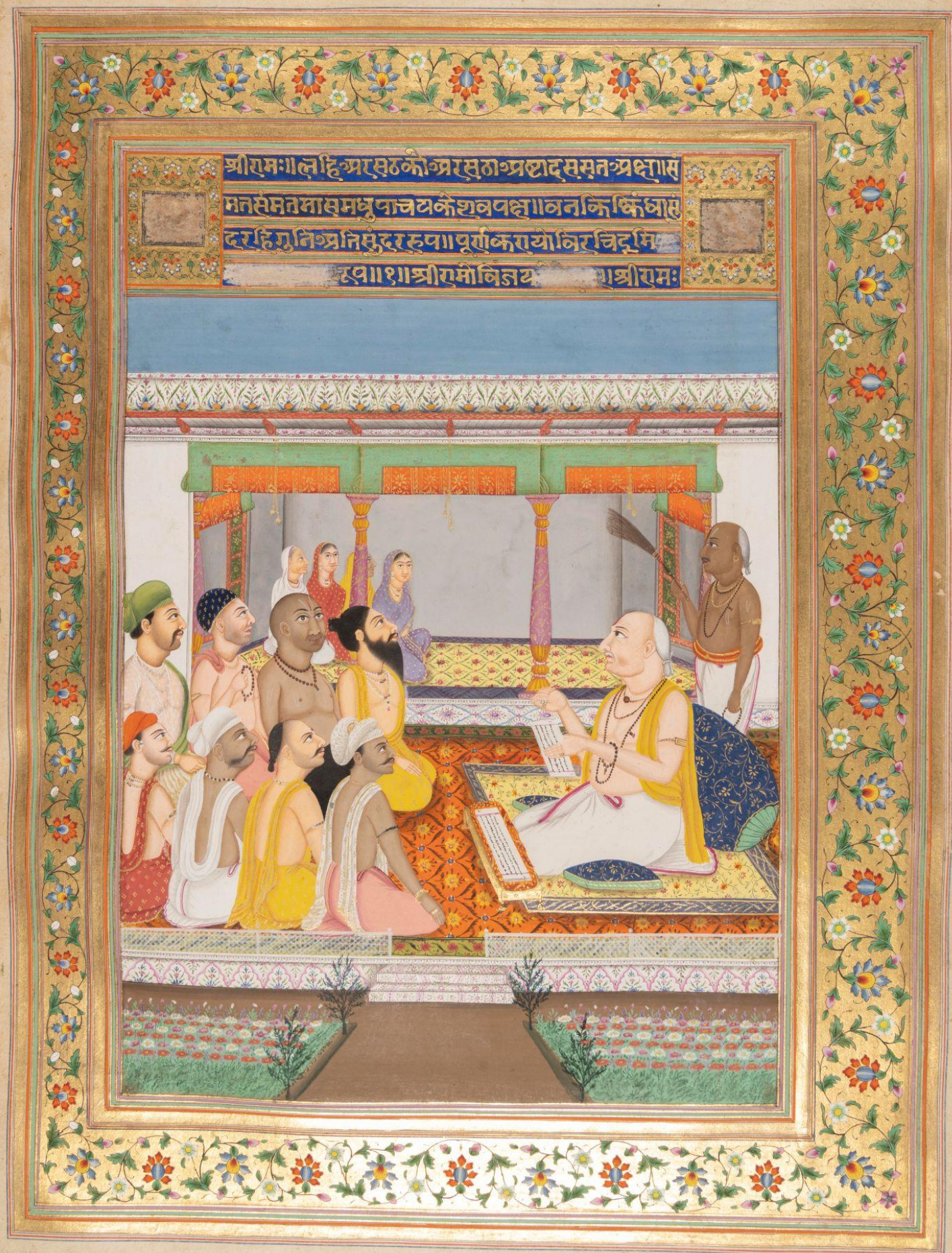
Think about movies and sitcoms, or even plays and musicals.

What makes one version more popular than the other?

Here is a detail from a painting of Tulsidas reciting the story to an audience.

Why do you think the story was recited to listeners, rather than having one read it themselves?





This is the complete painting.

LOOK CLOSELY.

Do you notice text on the top half? Can you identify the language and script of it?

What else do you get to know about Tulsidas by looking closely.

The script is *Devanagari* and the language is *Awadhi*, spoken locally in Banaras. Can you guess why Tulsidas's story uses a local language?

All the paintings in this book have floral or geometric borders such as this one. As you continue, try and spot differences in the borders each time you see one!

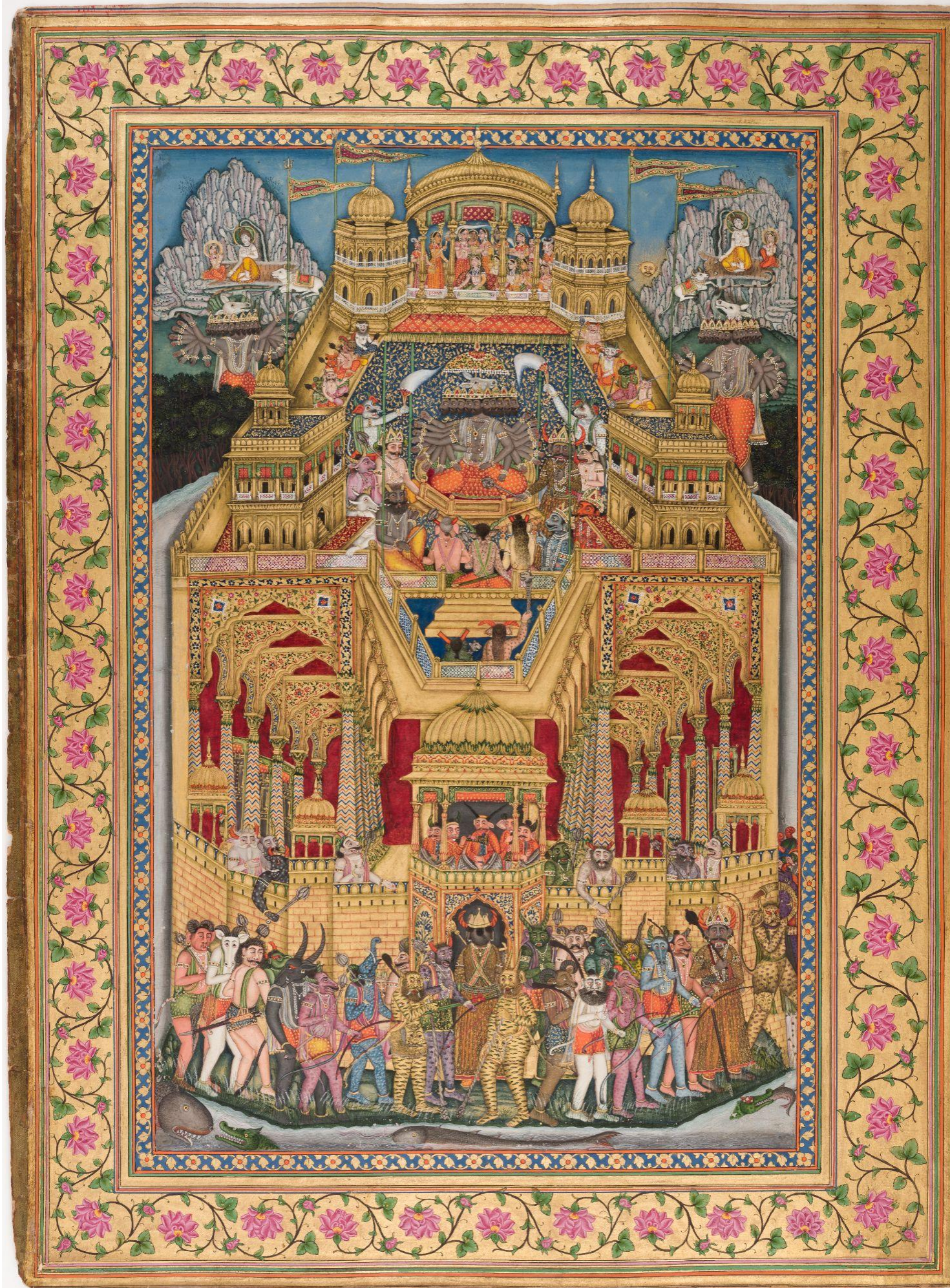
Now going back to the golden paintings of KCR, this one has lots of gold paint and lots of details.

LOOK CLOSELY

Can you find these characters in it?

- A ten-headed, twenty armed figure.
(This is *Ravana*, the king of Lanka. How many times can you spot him?)
- A white-bodied figure wearing yellow lower garments.
(This is the god *Shiva*)
- A bull next to Shiva
(This is *Nandi*, *Shiva's* mount)

Can you guess the location depicted here?



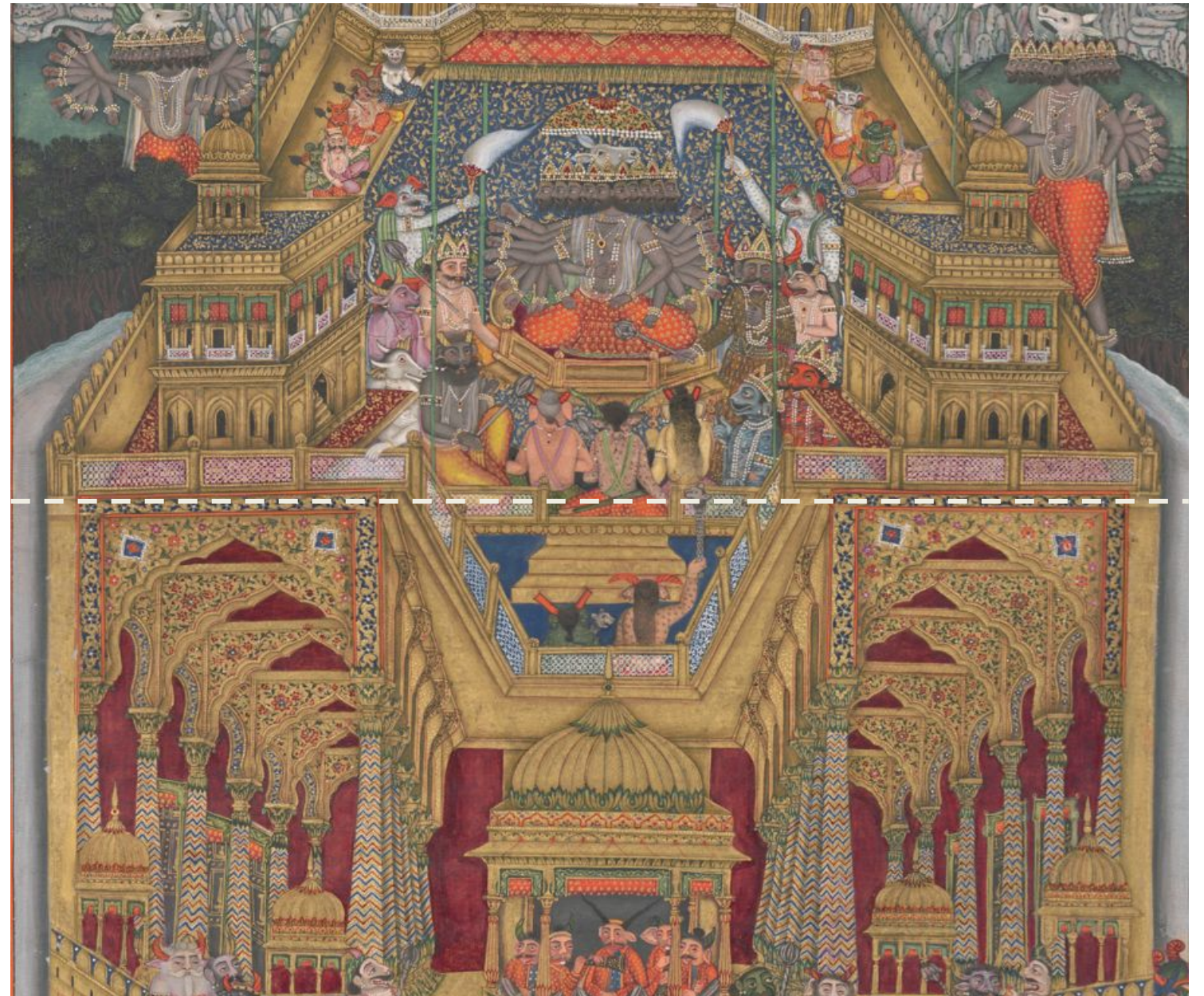
Here is a detail of the same painting. It shows Ravana's palace, which legend has it, was made of gold!

Notice anything unique about the building?

Trace the lines with your index finger on the top section.

Now do the same with the bottom section. What do you notice?

To help you section, we have added a dotted line.



This was a technique used by artists of the time, called **multiple perspectives**, where the surface is broken up into many points of view, as you see in the building.

CREATE.

Try a multiple perspectives drawing exercise yourself. For this, you will need a **paper**, some **colours** and **pens** and a **building** to observe.



First, fold the paper once vertically and once horizontally. Open it up so you have a grid to work with.

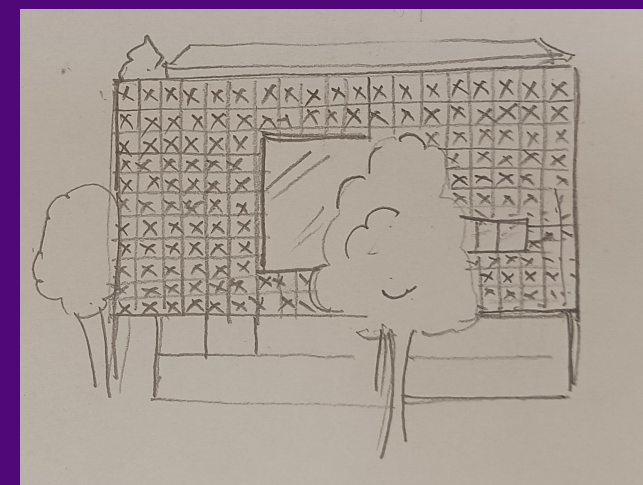
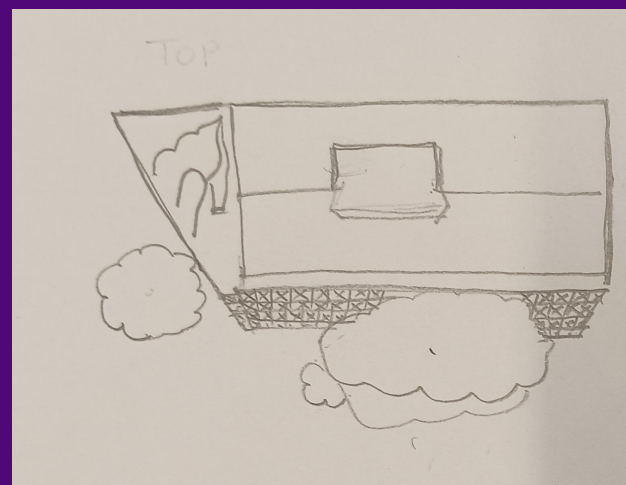
On the top left corner of each square, write “top”, “bottom”, “left” and “right” respectively.



Pick the nearest building and draw one side of it on each square. If you cannot reach any side, draw an imagined version. Once done, try connecting all squares through imagined architecture, to make it all look seamless.

WHAT WE MADE!

Here is what some of the views of MAP look like!





Another trick used by the artists was to break up the surface into multiple parts, to fit many episodes in one frame. Here is an example.

LOOK CLOSELY.

- How many parts is the surface broken into?
- What is used to break it?
- How many times do you see the blue figure of Rama?
- How many huts made with leaves do you spot?
- Do you see one similarity and one difference between two of these huts?

*Here landscape (the blue-grey river and the pinkish stones) is used to break the surface. Each part depicts a new episode - Rama, Sita and Lakshmana meeting sages, their hut being made and the trio living in the hut.

LOOK CLOSELY

How many times do you see the figure wearing a red skirt?

What about the blue chubby baby?

Do you see any other figure or element repeated?

As the artists broke up a surface and fit multiple episodes, they could also paint one character multiple times to progress the story. This is known as **continuous narration**.

Can you think of any other medium today that uses the same technique?





IMAGINE

Did you notice how the front facade of this building is missing? It is like opening a doll house to peep in and observe all tiny details!

Unlike the previous painting, this one uses architecture to break up the space into sections or episodes.

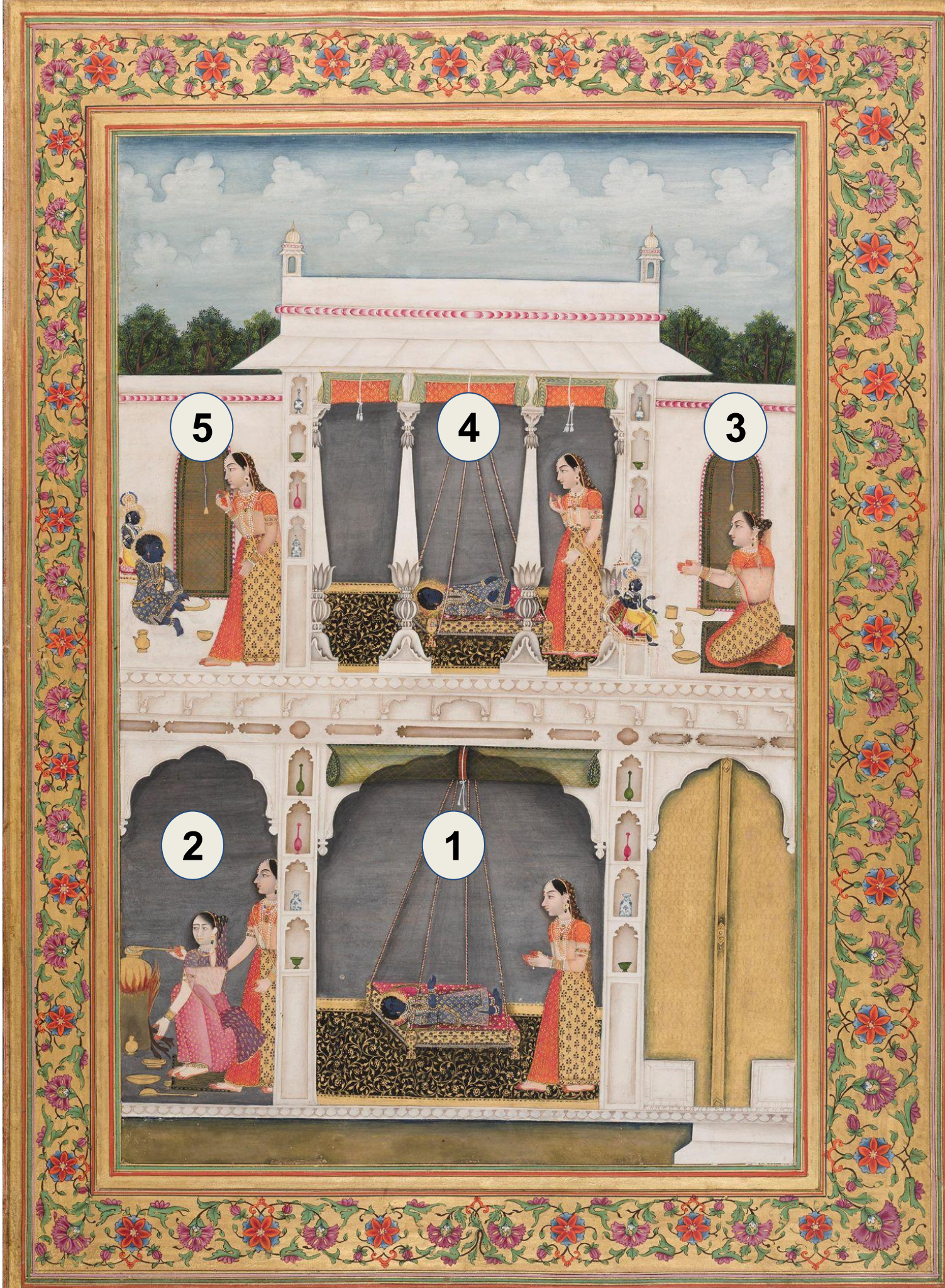
Can you imagine which section follows what?

What might be the story of this painting? Can you imagine one and give the characters dialogues?

Go to the next page to know the story!

- 1) Rama's mother, Kaushalya, has put baby Rama to sleep.
- 2) Kaushalya goes to check on food being made for the gods.
- 3) She offers it to the blue idol.
- 4) She checks on sleeping Rama again.
- 5) When Kaushalya goes back to worship, she sees baby Rama eating the food offered to the gods!

This episode from the Ramcharitmanas is about Rama's divinity and his awareness of it early on.



By now, you have noticed a lot of the cool tricks used by courtly artists to tell a story.

Check out our **downloadable extra** to illustrate a story using all these tricks and more!



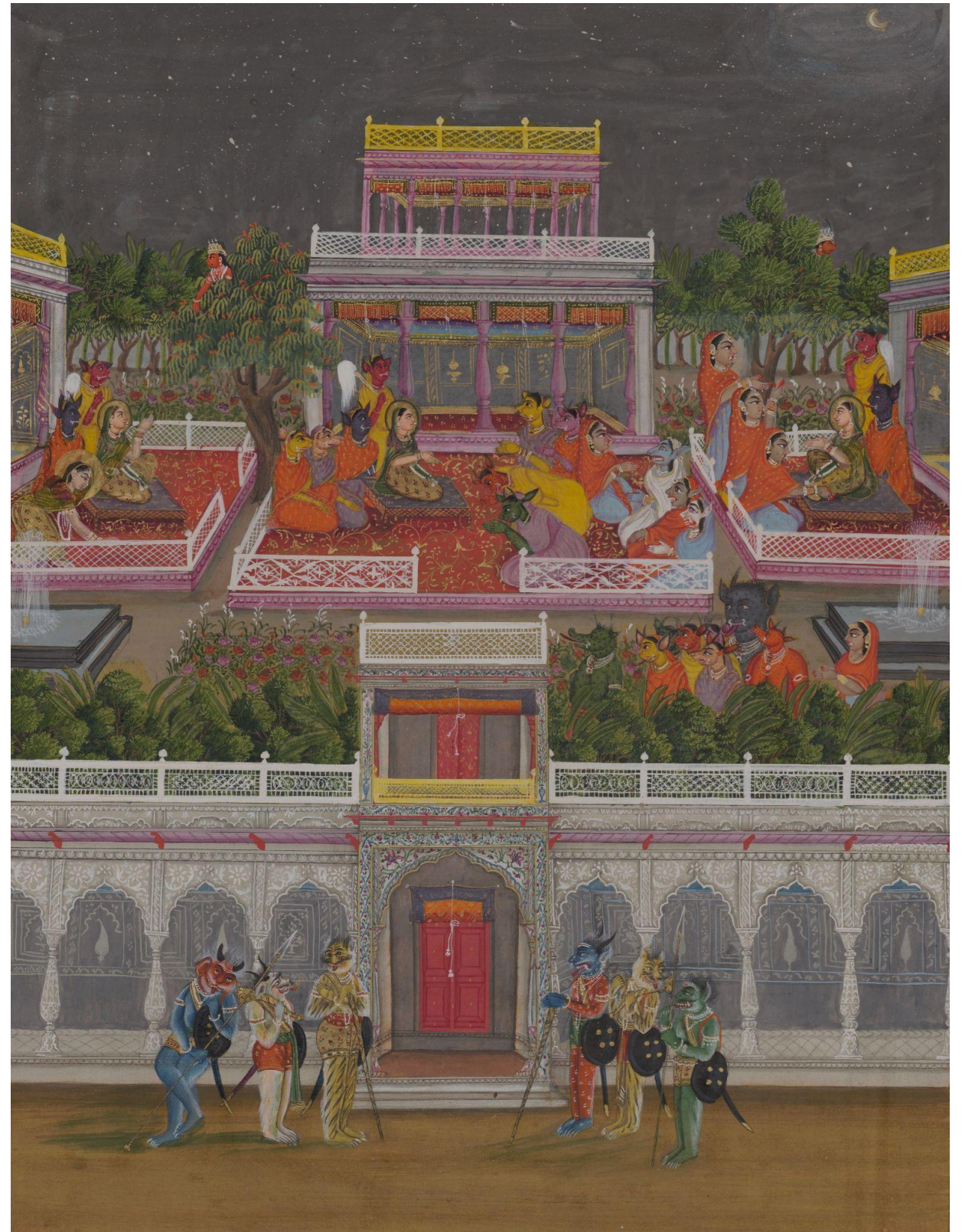
The paintings in this book can also be called miniature paintings or Indian courtly paintings.

ART SPEAK!

Paintings made in the many royal courts of India from the 9th to around the 18th century are broadly called **miniatures***.

Despite the name, they are not all tiny and can vary in size. However, they are known especially for their intricate details – often very very tiny or miniature details. They're also known for the use of natural ingredients to make colours, brushes and paper.

*The word miniature means very small.
It's commonly used in shortened form – mini.





The paintings of the KCR are bigger than a regular A4 printing paper but the details in each of them are minute.

Take this painting as an example. It is also used in the cover page of this pack.

Among the garden around and beyond the building, we found a tiny Hanuman lurking around and a moon to suggest a well-lit night sky.

What interesting details do you notice?

For this mega book project, many-many artists from the courts of Delhi, Jaipur, Awadh and Faizabad, among others, were invited to Banaras by Udit Narayan.





They stayed in Banaras and worked for 18 long years! Each artist brought their own training and styles to the project and when the book was finally complete, it also became an encyclopedia of courtly painting styles!

EXTEND.

Think of creative pursuits or vocations today that work around collaboration. Are there any positive outcomes of this structure?



There are many cool things about the KCR. This detail gives one a hint about another unique idea that brings the story together. Can you take a guess about what it might be?



LOOK CLOSELY

- How many imaginary creatures do you see?
- What makes you think they are imaginary?
- What do you think they are doing?

These are the mythical figures *Kaka Bhushundi* (half crow - half man) and *Garuda* (half eagle - half man).

Kaka Bhushundi was a sage and also the narrator of the story, WITHIN the story that Tulsidas created. The index finger that *Kaka* is pointing suggests him as the one talking, while *Garuda* listens.



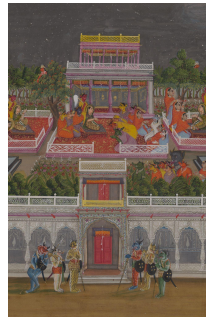
Did you notice these two in the painting? Shiva and Parvati also feature in the manuscript where Shiva takes over as the narrator, while Kaka catches a breath.

Like multiple episodes and the many perspectives featured in the paintings, this story has many narrators too.

Check out our **Colouring Sheet** downloadable to meet them again and have fun colouring!



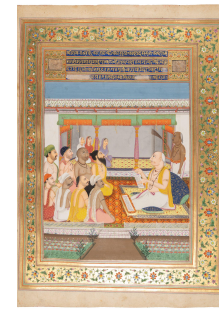
Portrait of a royal woman, c.1884
Attributed to Raj Rupan
Opaque watercolour
and gold leaf on paper
H. 25.5 cm, W. 17.6 cm
PTG.01161



Untitled, c. 1814
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque color, ink and gold on paper
H. 47.6 cm, W. 35.7 cm
PTG.02352



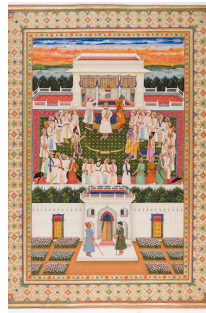
Ravana's Palace, c. 1808
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque colour, ink and gold on paper
H. 47.6 cm, W. 35.7 cm
RR 68 Ra.La.80, Private Collection



Shiva Describes Earthly Blessings to
Parvati, c. 1814
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque colour, ink and gold on paper
H. 47.6 cm, W. 35.7 cm
PTG.02228



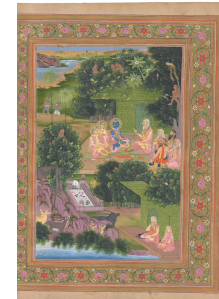
Rama Soothes Parashurama, c. 1808
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque colour, ink and gold on paper
H. 47.6 cm, W. 35.7 cm
RR 59 Ra.Ba.123, Private Collection



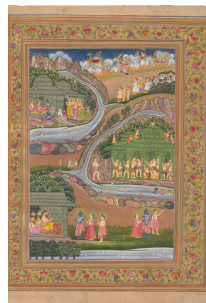
Rama Reveals His Divinity to
Kaushalya, c. 1808
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque color, ink and gold on paper
H. 47.6 cm, W. 35.7 cm



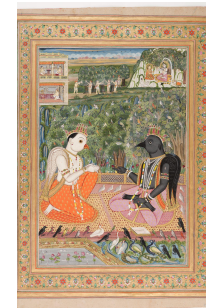
The exils meet Valmiki, c. 1811
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque colour, ink and gold on paper
H. 47.6 cm, W. 35.7 cm
RR 170 Ra.Ay.58, Private Collection



The exils meet Valmiki, c. 1811
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque colour, ink and gold on paper
H. 47.6 cm, W. 35.7 cm
RR 170 Ra.Ay.58, Private Collection



The exiles set up residence, c. 1811
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque colour, ink and gold on paper
H. 47.6 cm, W. 35.7 cm
RR 171 Ra.Ay.59, Private Collection



Kaka Bhushundi & Garuda, c. 1814
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque color, ink and gold on paper
H. 47.6 cm, W. 35.7 cm
PTG.02322



MAP

Museum of Art
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