



Utka Nayika with a Deer and Peacock

Kangra, India, c. 1800-1850

Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper

19cm high, 13.8cm wide

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The subject of this miniature is a *nayika*, one of a series of eight heroines categorised in Indian literature since at least the first century. Though the Sanskrit word 'nayika' is often translated as 'heroine', the women typically represent emotional states in relation to the *nayak* (hero). This is an *utka nayika*, or *virahotkanṭhitā*, a woman who yearns for an absent lover. She is typically represented at night or in a storm, symbolic of her internal conflict and darkness. Peacocks are frequently included (see, for example, a 1760 leaf in the LA County Museum of Arts, accession no. [M.72.88.7](#) and an 1840 painting in the Victoria & Albert Museum, accession no. [IS.125-1960](#)), as representatives of the absent lover. Deer also feature frequently (see, for example, a leaf in the Harvard Art Museums, accession no. [1971.131](#)).

Though the mood of the miniature is sombre, the *nayika*'s vibrant orange dress and the use of gold leaf to create the effect of the sun shining behind the clouds, hints at a brighter future.

The painting is in the Pahari style, originating in Himachal Pradesh. A Pahari Ragini miniature attributed to Sajnu, c. 1820 is in the Royal Collections Trust (accession no. [RCIN 1005127](#)). A gazelle in the foreground is depicted very similarly to the one in the present miniature. The heroine shares certain facial features, and is dressed in similar orange robes with gold trim. A miniature of the Vipralabda

Nayika or 'the Deceived Heroine' in the Harvard Art Museums (accession no. [1974.110](#)), is of similar style and has a near-identical border and mount, suggesting they may be from the same album.

n.b. accession nos are clickable links