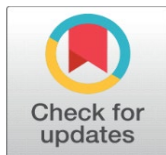
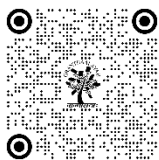


INDIAN ART IN CONTEXT: MANUSCRIPT PAINTINGS OF BAL-GOPAL-STUTI

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to re-discover the glorious manuscript of *Bal-Gopal-Stuti* which depicts the tales of Krishna based on the hymns attributed to Bilvamangala. Illustrating of the manuscript of *Bal-Gopal-Stuti* probably began in the early fifteenth century. *Bal-Gopal-Stuti* is an esteemed literary masterpiece written in Sanskrit devoted to the Hindu God *Krishna*. Since its composition around thirteenth- fourteenth century. *Bilvamangala's* poems have continued to be popular among the devotees of *Krishna*. Indian art is the outcome of a fusion of several traditions and is still evolving. Indian paintings can be divided into two categories: murals and miniatures. Apparently, miniature paintings, which drew inspiration and source material from the rich legacy of mural and fresco painting, have been known since the seventh or eighth century. Because of their short width and length, the new painting materials limited the scale of the works to miniatures.

Keywords: *Bal-Gopal-Stuti*, Manuscript Painting, Miniature, Bilvamangala

1. INTRODUCTION

Literary records that had a direct influence on the art of painting seem to demonstrate that painting, both secular and religious, was regarded as an important form of artistic expression and was practised from very early periods. This urge for expression has existed in many forms since prehistoric times, and it is a very basic prerequisite for human life. Painting is one of those art forms with which any person may be familiar with in some manner. Indian art is the outcome of a fusion of several traditions and is still evolving. Indian paintings can be divided into two categories: murals and miniatures. Murals, such as those seen in the Ajanta Caves and the Kailash Nath Temple, are large works of art painted on substantial constructions-walls and ceilings.

Around the seventh century, artist resorted to small forms of paintings defined as miniature paintings. Over time, a wonderful universe of art formed on this little canvas, revealing more than the immensity of its territory, including spiritualism, cosmological vision, notion of the Divine, its traditions, ethos, vigour of assimilation, the men and women, their lives, and the aroma of its soil. This method of realising an experience on a canvas of a few inches in length and breadth is uniquely Indian, as India has always strived to find herself, her creative endeavours, thoughts, and vision through her varied art forms.

The transfer from wall space to a tiny size canvas significantly determines the formation of this art genre, although an Indian miniature does not discover itself alone in a shift from one medium to another, or in a divergence from or innovation in its canvas size. Indian miniature is incredibly inventive in its approach, yet it is also highly traditional. Indian aesthetics has a rich and long tradition than western aesthetics. Indian art and culture have been inexplicably interwoven and Indian history can be traced out from the evolution of Indian art. [Arathy \(2019\)](#)

Apparently, from around seventh- eighth century miniature paintings, which had the inspiration and source from the glorious tradition of mural and fresco paintings have been known. The new painting mediums restricted the paintings to a miniature size by their narrow width and length. Miniature paintings were created on perishable tiny mediums like palm-leaves, bark of trees, cloth, metal plates, ivory, paper, leather, and canvas.

Three pairs of painted wooden covers of Buddhist manuscripts, two copies of the *Samghatasutra* and one of the *Aryadharmā*, known as Gilgit manuscripts represent the ever earliest reported examples of the miniature art form. [Daljeet and Jain \(2006\)](#)

During the Pala dynasty in Eastern India, in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, in the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. this art form flourished. Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu writings were illustrated on palm leaves in this genre. They are in the style of Ajanta, although on a smaller size. Merchants requested them, and they were produced at their request and presented to temples and monasteries.

Because of the support of wealthy Jain merchants, miniature painting became a major movement in Gujarat and Rajasthan during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries A.D. and extended to Central, North, and Eastern India. Mandu, in Madhya Pradesh, Jaunpur, in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, and Bengal, in Eastern India, were also important centres for manuscripts with art. One of the manuscripts from the regions of Gujarat from around fourteenth- fifteenth century is the illustrated manuscript (painted book) of *Bal-Gopal-Stuti*.

Bal-Gopal-Stuti, a hymn to the Baby Cowherd authored by *Bilvamangala*, a religious poet devoted to *Krishna*, has been a very popular poetry for ages, especially in Southern and North-Eastern India. [Wujastyk \(2014, June 15\)](#) The verses are filled with affection for the naughty *Krishna*. He has been shown as a merry youngster, a lovely young lover, and a brilliant human manifestation of the Godhead. When it comes to these stories, the ultimate and purest kind of love is devotion to the supreme beloved. Such tales have moved the human heart to seek for spectacular and pure manifestations of love. [Chanchani \(2018\)](#). It's hardly unexpected that generations of artists have refined, and embellished core themes derived straight from these hallowed magnificent stories in diverse creative works. The most spirited exploration and elucidation of *Krishna* came during and post the *Bhakti* movement. The movement related to the *Vaishnava Bhakti* initiated the inclusion of the *Krishna* themes and tales of his divine plays in the different art forms which were being practiced then and still continues with the tradition. [Archer \(2004\)](#)

His lyrics piqued people's interest, and it's been suggested that a number of illustrated copies of *Bal-Gopal-Stuti* were created approximately a hundred years following *Bilvamangala's* death. Written in Sanskrit the *Bal-Gopal-Stuti* is a revered literary masterpiece dedicated to *Krishna*. [Dehejia et al. \(2019\)](#) In the folios of *Bal-Gopal-Stuti*, *Krishna* is seen in his most typical form. He is usually shown as a lovely blue boy wearing a yellow *dhoti* and a peacock feather crown. Smiling, playful, mischievous, frolicking in the green forests of Vrindavan and up to his usual tricks as an ingenuous lover, playing flute and entralling the cows and *gopis* (maidens) with his music. In the paintings of this text, *Krishna* is occasionally shown with four arms, similar to Lord *Vishnu*. The paintings on such small paper, with the text, provide a visual focus for worship and induce the aesthetic relish.

These paintings were done in response to the text, and each artist gave the poem a new lease on life by interpreting it in his own distinctive way. However, while the book is still recognised in its entirety centuries after it was written, the matching sets or series of paintings have not survived as well. Aside from the physical damage to the paintings, most series and manuscripts have been disjointed, and folios have been lost or bought by collectors and institutions all around the world. The information available on the production of these paintings is limited to begin with, but when they are separated from one another and the colophon, date and attribution become much more difficult. [Gadon \(1984\)](#)

The *Bhakti Bhava* for the delightful, mischievous little *Krishna* is depicted in paintings from the *Bal-Gopal-Stuti* series, which is a depiction of the Sanskrit anthology. The feelings were brilliantly portrayed by the artist, indicating the aesthetic pleasure. The vibrant red background pulsates with the *Bhava* of love and desire, filling the viewer with joy.

The colours employed in the painting are mostly for suggestive reasons, and they are more in line with the thoughts and emotions that the painting elicits than with what the setting would have looked like in reality. The use of yellow and red in fabrics and costumes heightens sentiments of joy and pleasure along the *Shringara Rasa*.

Rasa is a significant premise in Indian aesthetics that examines the emotional issue via art. Ideas, and icons are brought together in a single frame to transmit feelings and moods to the audience. [Bhosale \(2013\)](#). Painting's primary goal is to achieve aesthetic appeal through depiction. Since the discovery of how to communicate through drawings and compositions, paintings have been characterised as a language that aids in the expression of notions, emotions, and fantasies.

The [Figure 1](#) is a folio from the manuscript of *Bal-Gopal-Stuti* in the collection of Baroda Museum. The painting depicts *Krishna* sitting with his cowherd friends in the lands of Vrindavan. He is shown as *Narayan*- the God- *Vishnu*. The image is on the right side of the folio and the text is on the left side written in *Devanagari* script in nine lines. The folio is divided by red vertical lines to specify the space for text and painting. The painting has red background which is again divided by horizontal lines in small compartments. A row of cows at the right bottom is depicted which is still seen in the folk arts of Nathdwara known as *Picchwai*. Red wavy lines on the top depicts the sky. *Krishna* is shown with four arms which is a common depiction for *Vishnu* shown with a *Chakra* and *Shankh*. He is seated on a *Chauki* and is offering sweets to his friends. The two trees depict the forest. The textiles bear the elements of folk art. Few floral folk motifs are drawn to fill up the negative spaces in the image.

Figure 1



Figure 1 A folio from *Bal-Gopal-Stuti*.

Source Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery, Vadodara.

The Figure 2 depicts Krishna taking cows to the forest for grazing. The nine cows are drawn in three vertical rows and a variety of trees denotes a thick jungle. Krishna is shown with his flute and a stick. He is depicted in blue colour wearing a *Pitambar*, which is a common depiction for him. He is wearing a peacock feathered crown and is also adorned by jewels around his neck, wrist, and ankles. He is wearing armlets and *Kundals*. Folk motifs fill up the spaces and the textiles also have the folk motifs thus creating a sense of harmony with the repetitive depiction. The red background pulsates with energy. Big protruding eyes, three fourth face profiles show the influence of Western Indian style of paintings.

Figure 2



Figure 2 A folio from *Bal-Gopal-Stuti*.

Source Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery, Vadodara.

The Figure 3 depicts another *Avatar* of Vishnu-Ram. The author *Bilvamangala* through the verses has paid homage to the God who is both Krishna and Ram. Ram is shown fighting the demons. He is also shown blue skinned, with a bow and arrow which marks him as Ram. The artist has followed the same iconography of Krishna

to depict the image of *Ram*. Red background, protruding eyes, three quarter faces, folk motifs in textiles and spaces are continued with in the manuscript.

Figure 3



Figure 3 A folio from *Bal-Gopal-Stuti*.

Source Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery, Vadodara.

The **Figure 4** narrates one of the most popular subjects among the artists from ancient times. The image shows *Krishna* with *Radha* and other *gopi*. *Radha* is probably offering a pot of *Krishna*' favourite food-butter. The other *gopi* is shown with a *chavar* (hand fan). The verses on the left suggest about the author *Bilvamangala* who is overwhelmed by this scene of devotion and love of *gopis* for *Krishna*. The artist has drawn the author with folded hands on the left. The folk motif on the drapes gives a suggestion of harmony-one of the principles of painting. The image is pulsating with *Shringara rasa*. The wavy lines on top of the painting suggest monsoon sky thus enhancing the mood of *Shringara rasa*. *Krishna* is depicted in *chaturbuja* (four arms) playing his mystical flute which sets the mood- another *Vibhaav* of *Shringara rasa*. *Vibhaav* is a stimulant to create *rasa* in the image. The figures are adorned with jewellery and beautiful drapes. The flowing *dupatta* and trees indicate a soft breeze in the jungles of Vrindavan where this scene occur.

Figure 4



Figure 4 A folio from *Bal-Gopal-Stuti*.

Source Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Figure 5 and Figure 6 are again from the same manuscript of *Bal-Gopal-Stuti* which are in the collection of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The images narrate the tales of *Krishna*' childhood. Folk art and bright vibrant colours are centrally schemed in the images of *Bal-Gopal-Stuti*. Trees are depicted in circular form. The images as well as the verse describing the picture express the sentiment, emotion of the chosen moment. The artists have expressed their vision in universal manner, squeezing out the spiritual essence of the theme into a visual vocabulary.

Figure 5



Figure 5 A folio from *Bal-Gopal-Stuti*.

Source Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Figure 6



Figure 6 A folio from *Bal-Gopal-Stuti*.

Source Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

2. CONCLUSION

Twelve *Bal-Gopal-Stuti* manuscripts are known today which were apparently prepared between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries in Gujarat. These manuscripts serve a wide range of purposes, both sacred and secular. Exact periods

and places of production are not known. It is also not known who were the patrons or what was the purpose these manuscripts served? It might be assumed that they were made to satisfy a demand from *Vaishnavas* who might likely have been wealthy merchants themselves. The illustrated manuscript spread across many museums and private collections are a record of the ateliers of painting.

The *leelas* of *Krishna* holds a special place among the various art forms. Three quarter faces with protruding eyes, sculpture like iconography, adornment of figures is a common feature of the manuscript of *Bal-Gopal-Stuti*. The scenes narrate the tales and praises for *Krishna* generates the *bhakti rasa*.

Bal-Gopal-Stuti when studied, takes one to analogous manuscripts like the *Gita-Govinda*, the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Vasanta- Vilasa* and while the eye looks for similarities in the style of painting, the mind is soaked with both piety and paintings of that era.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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