

# Indigenous knowledge system and visual communication: a pictorial analysis of illustrated manuscript paintings of assam

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## ABSTRACT

The illustrated manuscript painting of Assam represents a visual archive of indigenous knowledge, religious narratives, cosmological beliefs, and cultural communication systems. These manuscripts were not merely documents but it also considered very important visual instruments that transmitted philosophical, social and symbolic knowledge through ages in pictorial form. This research investigates the role of visual communication and indigenous knowledge systems in three major Assamese illustrated manuscripts namely Hastividyarnava, Anadi Patana, and Chitra Bhagavata. Through qualitative pictorial analysis their iconographic interpretation, are analysis to examine the narrative structures, symbolic motifs, compositional arrangements, and cultural meanings embedded within these manuscripts. The analysis of these manuscripts reveals that Hastividyarnava, visually documents indigenous veterinary and therapeutic practices associated with elephant culture, while the, Anadi Patana represents cosmological concepts and metaphysical understanding through symbolic visual structures. Similarly, Chitra Bhagavata functions as a devotional cultural narrative manuscript, that communicates moral and religious values through sequential pictorial storytelling. The Assamese illustrated manuscripts were revered for its visual systems of knowledge transmission and cultural preservation rather than decorative artistic purpose it held meaning and purpose. Through interdisciplinary analysis, this paper highlights the importance of manuscript paintings as carriers of indigenous intellectual traditions, visual semiotics, and socio-cultural identity within the historical context of Assam.

**Keywords:** Assamese Manuscripts, Visual Communication, Indigenous Knowledge, Pictorial Analysis, Manuscript Painting, Iconography, Visual Semiotics, Cultural Narratives.

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of illustrated manuscripts in Assam gained significant momentum during 16<sup>th</sup> century in the medieval period under the patronage of the Ahom rulers and the Neo-Vaishnavite movement initiated by Srimanta Sankardeva. These manuscripts reflected the religious, political, and intellectual environment of the time and became widely known mediums of visual communication among the communities of the northeastern part of the country. These illustrated manuscripts known for its vibrant colors, stylized figures, symbolic motifs, through narrative sequencing, manuscript paintings contributed to the preservation and dissemination of indigenous cultural knowledge. It occupies a distinctive position in the history of Indian painting and visual culture. It not only served literary and religious purposes but also functioned as important visual documents preserving indigenous knowledge systems, social values, philosophical ideas, and

devotional narratives. A unique synthesis of textual narration and visual representation is demonstrated where illustrations actively participated in the communication of cultural meanings and symbolic interpretations.

The history of Assamese manuscripts illustrations and paintings dates back centuries, with influences from various cultures and artistic traditions. As stated by H.K. Barpujari, "*The earliest extant examples of manuscript illustration in Assam are from the Phung Chin manuscript, dated 1437 A.D. in the Ahom language and script It is a treatise on the Ahom conception of heaven and hell as modified by animism as well as Hinayana Buddhism. The style of painting which is individualistic will be termed Tai-Ahom in connection with the language in which the work is written. The style of illustration is as different from the Satriya School of painting in Assam as Ahom, a Tai language, is different from Assamese, an Indo-Aryan tongue. One style is as much Assamese as the other for in Assam the Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-*

*Burman peoples and cultures met to give one composite Assamese way of life.” (Barpujari 372). In contrast to paintings Barpujari quotes “The earliest reference of painting in Pragjyotisa, the ancient name of Assam is found in the Harivamsa and the Dwarika-Lila, both are derived from the Mahabharata.” (Barpujari 368). Another reference to the earliest painting is mentioned about the legendary love tale of Tezpur, Assam. The Harivamsa and the Dwarika-Lila were both ultimately derived from the Mahabharata, including the earliest mention of the painting Pragjyotisa in Assam. There is mention of Citralekha, a famous artist of portraiture, who, in accordance with Assamese legend, was associated with Sonitapura, the modern-day town of Tezpur in Assam, “In this connection, there is an appropriate Story, which goes to the Epic Age of Indian history. The Prince Usha dreamt that a beautiful youth appeared to her, and was a companion in her walks abroad. She confided this to one of the maids-of-honour, Chitralekha (literally, a picture), who had a natural gift for portraiture. This maid offered to relieve the anxiety of her mistress by painting the portraits of all deities and great men of the time so that the subject of the dream might be identified. As soon as Usha saw the likeness of Aniruddha, the grandson of Krishna, the youth of her vision was revealed to her. This artistic incident subsequently led to their nuptials and a series of adventures. all relating to the life of Krishna. The useful gift of able to reproduce from memory the likeness of a person forms the subject of several ancient Indian legends.” (Brown 19-20)*

The art of painting has evolved since antiquity and the Middle Ages. Since ancient times, illustrated manuscripts have served as a means of keeping information recollected from the past and describing the fantastic stories from sacred books. King Bhaskarvarman of Assam gave beautiful souvenirs to King Harshavardhana, as recorded in history. “The Harsacarita has direct references to the popularity of painting in 7th century Assam as the presents from Bhaskarvarman to Harsa of Kanauj included many accessories to painting. The presents included 'carved boxes of panels for painting with brushes and gourds', and gold-painted cages. Other objects were the fine-tinted manuscripts, volumes of fine writing with leaves made from aloe bark and of the hue of the ripe pink cucumber. It was in the direction of manuscript painting that Assam excelled in the Ahom period. Portrait painting is found in the border painting of some old Assamese manuscripts before and after the 14th century A.D. Harihara Vipra (14th century A.D.), for instance, in his Babhravahana Parva refers to paintings on walls” (Barpujari 371).

Neog, identifies three primary styles of illustrated manuscripts: the Tai style, the *Sattriya*

style, and the Court style (1998). The Tai style is alternatively referred to as the Tai-Ahom school. The Tai style exhibits strong influences from the Buddhist style originating in Burma, and its development can be traced back to the 14th and 15th centuries, during which it received significant support from the Ahom monarchs. The illustrating document exhibited Buddhist idioms due to the Buddhist origins of the Ahom kings. *Phung Chin* is often regarded as the earliest extant text written in the Tai language. Subsequently, the *Garhgaon* School of art gains prominence within the realm of artistic discourse. During the reign of Ahom monarch Kamalesvar Singha (1795-1811), the *Sattriya* School was known for its portrayal of sacred texts and epics through illustrative themes and subject matter. During the Ahom period, book illustration served as the predominant form of painting, only portraying courtly scenes depicting the activities of the monarchs in their daily lives. The *Sattriya* School developed in the *Sattras* of Assam, during this time, Assam was greatly influenced by the socio-cultural and religious practices of the '*Eka Saran-Naam-Dharma*'.

The *Sattriya* style, often known as the *Sattriya* school of art, has been cultivated within the elegant Vaishnavite *Sattras*. There exists a certain connection between the Court style and the *Sattriya* style, as the former originated from the *Sattras* that received patronage from the royal Ahom court. During the initial half of the 16th century, the *Sattriya* School emerged as a result of the influence of the Vaishnavite movement led by Sankaradeva. This artistic tradition persisted with great enthusiasm until the early 18th century. The *Sattriya* School was traditionally employed for the purpose of depicting religious texts and epic themes, a practice that persisted until the reign of Ahom monarch Kamalesvar Simha (1795-1811). The *Chitra Bhagavata* is considered the earliest extant example of illustrated manuscript art in the *Sattriya* school. The *Chitra Bhagavata* is dated to the year Saka 1461. The manuscript in question is widely regarded as a notable picture from the early 16th century. However, the ongoing debates among critics and researchers who draw comparisons between this manuscript and the Palam *Maha purana*, a text dating back to 1540 A.D. A further significant manuscript that exemplifies the court style is *Hastividya*, which was created by the Mughal artist Dilbar and Dosai. This text was commissioned by the Ahom king Siva Singha and his consort Ambika devi. The various aspects related to elephants, including their classification, methods of care and handling, as well as approaches to their medical treatment. *Hastividya* exemplifies a fusion of indigenous artistic traditions with influences from the Mughal, Rajasthani, and Pahari schools. The emergence of the *Sattriya* School as an

independent way of expression is attributed to its confident and varied style. The *Sattriya* school exhibits certain resemblances to both Western and North Indian miniatures. The *Garhgoan* school was initiated under the careful guidance of Rudra Singha, the Ahom monarch, within the premises of the Garhgoan palace. The *Sattriya* style, which emerged at the *Sattras*, has notable distinctions. The *Gita-Govinda*, an illustrative manuscript executed in the early 18th century, is considered one of the remarkable works produced by the Garhgoan school.

The practice of supporting illustrated manuscript paintings, which is an artistic tradition, is perpetuated by Siva Singha, the son of Rudra Singha. The Darang school of art emerged as a distinct type of manuscript painting during the patronage of the Koch dynasty. The beautiful school of art was founded by the Darang Raja of Mangaldai. The Darang school of art first exhibited resemblances to the *Sattriya* school; nevertheless, with time, it evolved to own its distinct artistic style. The Darang school of painting is renowned for its highly illustrated manuscripts, with two particularly prominent examples being *Anadi-Patana* and *Tirtha-Kumudi*. These paintings were created during the 18th century and can be considered contemporaneous with the artistic trends of that era. The work titled "*Anadi Patana*" holds great significance due to its authorship by Sankaradeva. The text discusses Anadi Patana, a literary work that explores several aspects of cosmic formation, including the creation of the universe, the actions of deities, the existence of multiple celestial realms, and the consequences faced by individuals in the realm of hell. The pictorial manuscripts constituted a form of artistic expression that served to exalt the depicted subject subjects. The decline in the utilization of murals and scroll paintings within courtyards and monasteries can be attributed to the adverse effects of humid climatic conditions. A significant quantity of illustrated manuscripts is being produced inside the confines of courts and monasteries. The *Sattras*, also known as the Vaishnavite monasteries, act as custodians of exceptional compositions and remarkable works of art. The Ahom aristocracy has also maintained their ancestral manuscripts. The destruction of several valuable manuscripts can be attributed to a combination of factors including inadequate upkeep, adverse climatic conditions, and the destructive raids carried out by the Burmese.

The practice of manuscript painting in Assam has a long-standing historical legacy. The manuscripts in Assam are crafted using two principal materials, namely the Sanchipat and the Tulapat. The bark of the agar tree, scientifically referred to as *Acquilaria Agallocha*, is commonly known as *Sanchipat*. *Tulapat* leaves are sheets that

are manufactured through the process of compressing cotton fibers. The compositions and artistic depictions are executed in the Tulapat language. Among the important illustrated manuscripts of Assam such as the, *Hastividyarnava*, *Anadi Patana*, and *Chitra Bhagavata* occupy prominent positions due to their thematic style and artistic significance. The illustrated manuscript of *Hastividyarnava* primarily focuses on elephants, their classification, diseases, and treatment methods, thereby preserving indigenous veterinary knowledge through visual representation. The *Anadi Patana* explores cosmological and metaphysical concepts associated with the origin of the universe and cosmic order. On the other hand, *Chitra Bhagavata* visually narrates the childhood episodes and divine acts of Lord Krishna based on the *Bhagavata Purana*. The study attempts to examine these manuscripts which represents as repositories of indigenous knowledge and systems of visual communication and not merely as aesthetic objects it also explores how pictorial elements, narrative compositions, symbolic imagery, and iconographic structures contributed to the transmission of philosophical, therapeutic, religious, and cultural ideas. Studies on Assamese manuscript painting primarily focus on stylistic development, Vaishnavite influence, and regional artistic characteristics. However, limited scholarly attention has been given to the role of manuscript paintings as visual systems of indigenous knowledge transmission.

## 1. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is based on secondary data collected from archival records, museum reproductions, books, journals, research articles, and scholarly writings related to Assamese illustrated manuscript traditions. The study employs historical and pictorial analytical methods to examine the visual language, stylistic features, symbolic representation, and indigenous knowledge systems reflected in *Hastividyarnava*, *Anadi Patana*, and *Chitra Bhagavata*. The research further analyses the interrelationship between text and image in order to understand the role of visual communication in medieval Assamese manuscript culture.

## 2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to examine the role of visual communication in Assamese illustrated manuscript paintings and to analyse the representation of indigenous knowledge systems in *Hastividyarnava*, *Anadi Patana*, and *Chitra Bhagavata* through pictorial analysis. It further intends to study the stylistic and symbolic features

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of Assamese manuscript painting traditions in relation to narrative, cosmological, and devotional themes. Also exploring how manuscript paintings functioned as important mediums of cultural preservation, religious instruction, and knowledge transmission in medieval Assam. Finally, the study attempts to position Assamese illustrated manuscripts within the broader context of Indian manuscript painting traditions and indigenous visual knowledge systems.

### 3. ANALYSIS OF THE ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPT OF *HASTIVIDYARNAVA*

*Hastividyarnava* a manual on the handling of elephant highlights its significance in preserving elephant-related indigenous knowledge, particularly concerning veterinary practices, classification of the species and the use of elephants in royal culture. the manuscript demonstrates a combination of practical observation and artistic representation. represents one of the most important illustrated manuscripts associated with elephant science and indigenous veterinary traditions in Assam. The manuscript visually documents different species of elephants, their physical characteristics, behavioural patterns, diseases, and treatment methods. In the image Plate 1 depicts certain treatment, *“The elephants with a straight constitution, spotted ears, with the neck one cubit protruded, the trunks about a cubit in girth, the eye-brows about two fingers long, deserve to be mounted only by a prince. Herbal medicines are to be rubbed over the soles of the left legs so as to make them steady and quiet. The left ears are to be pressed by the legs of the rider for making them tame. (75)”* (Choudhury 36).



Plate 1: An illustration from the *Hastividyarnava*



Plate 2: An illustration from the *Hastividyarnava*

In plate 2 we see the textual instruction and the illustration put together, *“The elephants that are hump-backed, with the tusks curved more than those of any other elephant and with the bellies being curved like a bow, deserve to be mounted by a rider having a loud voice. At their rutting stage, they are to be fed with a cock so as to get better results.*

*During illness a black cock, a monkey, a mongoose and two poisonous insects are to be bound together and placed on the running water like a floating raft by a pure Deodhai for their recovery. (73)”* (Choudhury 36). The illustrations reveal a strong observational approach where elephants are represented with detailed anatomical attention and expressive bodily gestures. The pictorial compositions often include mahouts, attendants, medicinal preparations, and therapeutic procedures, indicating the manuscript’s instructional and practical function. Through visual representation, the manuscript communicates indigenous systems of elephant care and healthcare practices associated with royal and military culture in Assam. Color usage within the manuscript is relatively controlled and functional. Earthy tones, greens, reds, and black outlines contribute to visual clarity and symbolic emphasis. The stylized representation of natural forms and medicinal elements further demonstrates the integration of artistic convention with practical knowledge systems. The manuscript therefore functions not only as an artistic creation but also as a visual archive preserving indigenous veterinary knowledge and therapeutic traditions.

The illustrated folios of *Hastividyarnava* reveal far more than artistic skill. They operate as visual records of an indigenous elephant-care system deeply rooted in the socio-political life of medieval Assam. Text and image do not function separately here; they depend on one another. The written instructions explain treatment methods, bodily conditions, and behavioural traits, while the paintings translate those ideas into immediately recognizable visual forms. The elephants are rendered in profile with controlled, deliberate postures. Nothing appears accidental. Their stance, the curvature of the trunk, the positioning of attendants, and the restrained movement within the frame all communicate temperament, health, and manageability. The interaction between the mahouts and the animals is equally significant. Touch becomes a visual language of control, care, discipline, and therapeutic engagement. The accompanying textual passages strengthen this relationship between image and instruction. References to herbal applications, ritual recovery procedures, taming practices, and bodily treatment point toward a structured ethnoveterinary knowledge system rather than isolated folk practices. Even the simplified compositional style appears functional. The absence of elaborate backgrounds keeps attention fixed on the elephant’s body and the procedures associated with it, suggesting that clarity of communication was prioritized over decorative excess.

Seen in this light, *Hastividyarnava* is not merely an illustrated manuscript. It is simultaneously an artistic production, an instructional guide, and a

visual archive preserving indigenous therapeutic knowledge and elephant culture in Assam.

#### 4. ANALYSIS OF THE ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPT OF ANADI-PATANA

The *Anadi Patana* from Narowa Kuji Satra, Nagaon belongs to the Assamese illustrated manuscript tradition associated with Neo-Vaishnavism. It is linked to the manuscript culture that flourished between the 16th and 18th centuries under Vaishnavite *Sattras* and regional royal patronage. Composed by the saint Srimanta Sankaradeva, was composed to emphasize cosmological symbolism, metaphysical structures, and philosophical visualization within Assamese manuscript traditions. This reflects the indigenous interpretations of cosmic creation and universal order through symbolic visual forms. *Anadi Patana* shares similarities with several other Indian cosmological manuscript traditions that explain the origin, structure of the universe through symbolic illustrations. Such as the illustrated *Bhagavata Purana*, Jain cosmological illustrations and the *Vishnu Purana* which converts abstract

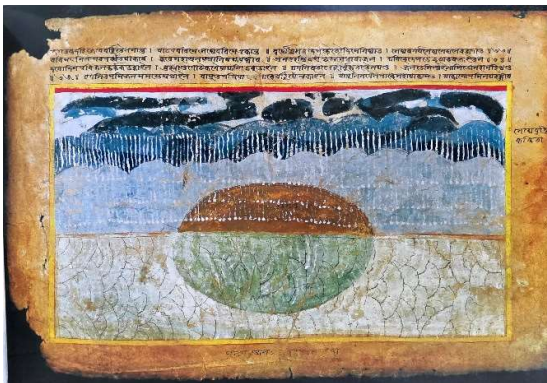


Plate 3: An illustration from the *Anadi-Patana*

metaphysical ideas into carefully organized visual systems. These works which rely on the layer-by-layer compositions, celestial symbols, geometric patterns and hierarchical spatial divisions to convey cosmic structure and their philosophical thought. These images were never meant to be purely decorative or just for aesthetic purpose. They carried intellectual and spiritual meaning, while functioning as visual tools for propagating knowledge and complex religious concepts to a far wider audience. *“A unique picture of the Great Deluge displays superior imagination and skill of the artist as painter besides his clear comprehension of the subject. Many bold lines in white emerging from the cloud, like water falling from a spring, create a most evocative spectacle of downpour of rains. The artist renders cloud in overpowering dark shades and recreates the rhythm of water in many fluent lines below to signify vast ocean in which the earth in*

*glowing terracotta colour is on the verge of sinking. The painting can be considered a masterpiece for originality in draughtsmanship and spontaneity in expressions combined with symphony of colours.”* (Kalita 70). Similarity among these traditions is the close relationship between text and image. Written passages with doctrinal explanation, while the paintings translate those ideas into forms that could be visually understood. Flat perspective, repetitive motifs, symbolic geometry, and stylized arrangements appear repeatedly across these manuscripts, creating a visual vocabulary within Indian cosmological art traditions. *Anadi Patana* emerges not as an isolated regional manuscript but as part of a larger Indian tradition of visual knowledge systems where painting became a medium for communicating cosmology, spirituality, and metaphysical understanding.

Here, in Plate 4, we can observe that the composition is deeply symbolic. The vast blue area surrounding the figures in between represents the cosmic ocean which creates an infinite sense of space and primordial stillness. With the repetitive brush patterns resembling ocean water waves



Plate 4: An illustration from the *Anadi-Patana*

generates movement creating sense of motion within the composition, suggesting that the dynamic energy of creation itself. the calm reclining posture of Narayana’s in contrasts with the ever-expanding cosmic environment, reinforces the idea of divine stability amidst universal transformation. The serpent bed is equally important symbolically. In the Indian cosmological traditions, it signifies eternity, cyclical time, and cosmic continuity. Brahma emerging from the lotus growing from the Narayana’s navel visually communicates the concept that creation originates from divine consciousness. The four-faced form of Brahma further symbolizes the expansion of time, knowledge, and spatial awareness in the newly forming universe. *A lotus-stalk emerges from his navel. Brahma is born on it. He sits on the pericarp of the lotus. He is at the opening gate of the womb of the universe. Time and space have expanded and*

*with-it Brahma becomes four-faced. Gradually he is moving from darkness to enlightenment. The two chambers with text-lines above create balance in the agitated atmosphere. (Kalita 96).*

The manuscript also demonstrates the indigenous integration of text and visual imagery characteristic of Assamese illustrated traditions. The textual chambers placed above the painting not only accompany the illustration but they frame and stabilize the visual compositionally. this creates a structured narrative space where philosophical concepts which are communicated through both

narration into a structured system of visual communication where gesture, rhythm, symbolic color, and sequential composition collectively functioned as tools of devotional and cultural transmission. The manuscript is primarily based on the *Dasama Skandha* (Book X) of the *Bhagavata Purana*, which narrates the life, miracles, and childhood episodes of Lord Krishna. Produced within the Neo-Vaishnavite cultural movement initiated by Srimanta Sankardeva and later expanded by his disciples, *Chitra Bhagavata* emerged as both a devotional and visual narrative tradition in Assam religious stories, moral teachings, and devotional philosophy could be communicated to wider audiences. "In former birth,



Plate 6: Illustration from the Chitra Bhagavata

verbal and pictorial language. The folio functions not simply as devotional art but as a visual-philosophical representation of cosmological knowledge within the Assamese manuscript culture.

##### 5. ANALYSIS OF THE ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPT OF CHITRA BHAGAVATA

*Chitra Bhagavata* has been recognized for its devotional narrative structure and visual storytelling techniques associated with Neo-Vaishnavite traditions. It is observed that the manuscript employs sequential narration, expressive gestures, and symbolic iconography to communicate moral and religious teachings. The manuscript illustrations are not static devotional images, they possess movement, theatricality, and dramatic sequencing similar to Assamese Bhaona and *Sattriya* dance performance traditions. Figures are often arranged rhythmically across the horizontal surface of the folio, creating visual continuity rather than isolated pictorial moments. This makes the manuscript function almost like a performative narrative space. The visual language of *Chitra Bhagavata* demonstrates how Assamese manuscript painting transformed religious

*you two meditated on me, aspirant of having me as son so, I incarnate myself firstly as Prasnigarbha, secondly as Bamana, and thirdly in my own image. If you fear Kansa, then take me surreptitiously to Gokul, where, at Yasoda's place Yogamaya is being born and you place me on Yasoda's bed removing Yogamaya". Having recounted this much, Lord Sri Krishna assumed the shape of a baby under their very nose."* (Baruah 15). This folio from *Chitra Bhagavata* depicts the divine transfer of infant Krishna from Mathura to Gokul in order to protect him from King Kansa. Vishnu instructs Basudev and Devaki to secretly carry Krishna to Nanda and Yasoda's house, where Yogamaya has been born. The episode symbolizes divine incarnation, protection, and the cosmic purpose of Krishna's birth within Vaishnavite tradition.

In Plate number 6 from *Chitra Bhagavata* depicts the famous episode of the killing of Putana, the demoness sent by King Kansa to kill the infant Krishna. Disguised as a beautiful woman, Putana attempts to poison Krishna by breastfeeding him, but Krishna instead causing her death. "When the night-roveress offered her breast to Krishna to kill him, then availing himself of the opportunity the Lord clasped hard and sucked with rage in such a way that her breast and life all were absorbed. Putana fell on the

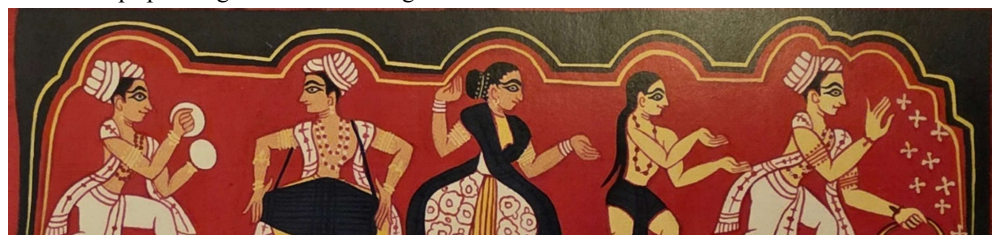


Plate 5: An illustration from the Chitra Bhagavata

ground foaming at the mouth as if struck by lightning.” (Baruah 29). This painting captures the dramatic moment after the encounter, where the gigantic body of Putana lies stretched across the composition while the small blue figure of Krishna remains unharmed upon her chest. This distinct style differs considerably from the Mughal and Rajput manuscript traditions of the same period. Comparing to the Mughal paintings it emphasized on realism, naturalistic space, and courtly refinement, as during the Mughal period Persian artisans were higher for making pieces as it was during that time other artists from outside the country were brought into and specific styles came into, while in Assamese native people made their own artworks and became a distinct visual language and style, Assamese manuscript paintings favored symbolic clarity and narrative communication. Rather than pure focus on improving anatomical or environmental scenes unlike Mughal or Rajput styles, Figures in *Chitra Bhagavata* are generally stylized, elongated, and rendered in side viewers profile each facial expressions remain simple, yet bodily with symbolic gestures and mimicking rhythmic movement which conveys an emotion within the scenes. The compositions are appeared flat, with minimal and doesn't have illusionistic depth but simple to understand, but this stylistic simplicity strengthens the narrative readability of the paintings. Strong outlines, vibrant colors such as red, yellow, blue, and green, and decorative spatial divisions contribute to the visual dynamism of the folios.

Compared to other illustrated manuscripts of India, *Chitra Bhagavata* also demonstrates a close relationship with Assamese performative traditions such as Bhaona and *Sattriya* dance. The movement of figures, gestures, and sequential arrangement of scenes create a performative rhythm across the manuscript. This distinguishes Assamese manuscript painting from many North Indian courtly manuscript traditions. Where compositions were often more static and formal. The paintings of *Chitra Bhagavata* prioritize devotional immediacy and visual experience over aristocratic sophistication.

The themes that represented in the manuscript are deeply devotional and narrative in nature. Most of the illustrations portray stories i.e. episodes from Krishna's life his birth, childhood miracles, playfulness interaction with the gopis, subjugation of demons, lifting of Govardhana, and divine manifestations. Alongside storytelling the manuscript reflects social and cultural aspects of Assamese life through costume, ornamentation, architecture, and local visual conventions. Nature, animals, rivers, forests, and musical gatherings frequently appear within the pictorial space, reinforcing the pastoral and spiritual atmosphere associated with Krishna devotion. The integration of text and image. Script and painting coexist within the same compositional structure, allowing visual, verbal

narration to act together. It is not only an artistic production but a system of communication and cultural preservation in visual art. Through symbolic imagery, rhythmic narration, and devotional iconography, *Chitra Bhagavata* occupies a place within the broader history of Indian illustrated manuscript traditions.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The illustrated manuscripts of Assam, particularly *Hastividya*, *Anadi Patana*, and *Chitra Bhagavata*, reveal the rich visual and intellectual traditions of medieval Assamese culture. These manuscripts were not merely decorative works of art but important systems of visual communication through which religious narratives, cosmological ideas, indigenous knowledge, and social values were transmitted across generations. Through symbolic imagery, stylized figures, rhythmic compositions, and the close integration of text and image, Assamese artists developed a distinctive manuscript tradition rooted in Vaishnavite philosophy and regional artistic identity. *Hastividya* preserved ethnoveterinary knowledge and elephant culture through instructional visual representation, while *Anadi Patana* transformed abstract cosmological concepts into symbolic pictorial structures. Similarly, *Chitra Bhagavata* employed narrative movement, devotional imagery, and performative rhythm to communicate the life and miracles of Lord Krishna. Despite differences in subject matter, all three manuscripts functioned as repositories of indigenous knowledge systems and cultural memory.

The study further demonstrates that Assamese illustrated manuscripts occupy an important place within the broader history of Indian manuscript painting traditions. Assamese manuscript art emphasized narrative clarity, symbolic communication, and devotional accessibility. These manuscripts therefore stand as significant examples of how visual art, spirituality, philosophy, and cultural pedagogy intersected within the manuscript traditions of Assam.

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