6.1 Introduction

Eastern India comprising modern day Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Assam has in its account rich a tradition of painting. In the Pala period (750-1206 A.D) in the entire Eastern India including Magadha, Bengal, Nepal, Pundra, Verandra, Kamrupa and Northern Orissa (Kalinga) took the shape of a Eastern Indian cultural area, following the Buddhist idealism under the profound guidance of Mahayani Buddhist Pala king of Bengal. India has inherited a pre-Aryan culture which is reflected in the folk art ritualistic: Those were also made in Harappa five thousand years before (Vatsyayan: 1982).

Assam is a land of diverse culture. It is a land of a number of tribes and cultures and this is reflected in the traditional art of the place as well. Assam is situated in Brahmaputra valley in North East India where once existed a flourishing genre of puthi painting.

Illuminated palm leaf manuscripts are very important chapter of the history of pictorial art of Assam. The study of Indian painting is incomplete without the understanding of manuscript painting tradition in its proper perspective. The styles of paintings are characterized by Mughal, Rajput and Pahari style. In Assam the art of painting developed around the illumination of manuscript in direct response to the Bhakti movement spearheaded by Srimanta Sankardeva during 15th to 16th century AD (Kalita: 1996). Manuscript
painting is a very ancient tradition of Assam. Assamese manuscript painting is considered as the traditional painting of medieval Assam. In medieval Assam, the art of manuscript illustration was flourished with the emergence of three major distinct school of painting. These are,

1. Tai-Ahom school,

2. Sattriya School and

3. Ahom court style/Royal school.

The Illuminated manuscripts painting of Assam can be divided into two main categories. These are (i) Assam School and (ii) Tai Ahom School. Assam School can be further subdivided into two schools. One is Satriya other is Royal Style. (Kalita: 2009)

These manuscripts were prepared on *sanchi-pat* (bark of *sanchi* tree) and on *tula-pat* (handmade paper) during the period of medieval Assam. The Satriya style of paintings is the product of Srimanta Sankardeva. As the indigenous school of painting in Assam the Satriya style is the earliest. The style of the painting shows Mughal, Rajput and Pahari influences.

The birth-place of Ahom court style or Royal school is Darrang Raj of Mangaldoi. This style is close to the Satriya style because it grew up at the royal patronage of Koch Royal family of Mangaldoi in the line of Satriya style and soon it developed its own characteristic feature. The paintings of Tai-Ahom School are mainly represented by two paintings Phung Chin manuscript dated 1473 A.D. and Suktanta Kyempong. Various kinds of folk elements are found in the paintings of Assamese and Tai Manuscript of Assam.
The distinct types of illuminated manuscripts in Assam are Hastividyarnava, Gita-Govinda, Bhagavata-purana, Anadi-patan, Ananda-Lahari, Kirtana etc. The stories of the Bhagavata, the Puranas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the epics were generally illuminated in the manuscripts of Assam. Many manuscripts contain pictures of Lord Vishnu and of his incarnation according to Hindu conception. These large numbers of illuminated and illustrated manuscript of different schools, many of which are unique for their calligraphy, delicacy of lines, elegance of composition and charming colour schemes.

The study of this chapter is concentrated upon analysis of stylistic characteristics of illuminated manuscripts Hasthividyarnava, Gita-Govinda and Bhagavata-Purana. Ahom Coart style flourished under the reign of King Sivasimha (1713-1744). Manuscripts which belong to that are Sankha-Surbadha (1726), Usha-Harana (1730), Hastirvidyarnava (1734), and Skhanda Bhagavata and Dharma Purana (1735). Some manuscripts have been preserved in the Assam state Museum, Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti and the Historical and Antiquarian Department. Beside these, the Assam fine Arts and Crafts Society, Guwahati and Jorhat Fine Arts Society have been playing a significant role in preserving the rich cultural heritage of Assam.

Historically speaking, the satras used to patronize and support their own persons called khanikaras to work with their penmanship. These craftsmen were traditional carvers primarily associated with wood crafts viz. the curving of the lion seat called the Simhasana for enshrine the holy book, construction of huts and namghors and curving of sculptures. They were professional groups who also paint and prepare stages for bhawanas, were
initially associated with copying of original texts and make-up of actors of
dramatic performance produced in the satras. As they develop skill in such
vocations, they were perhaps granted or even encouraged to work on
manuscript illustration. It is notable that their familiarities with colour and form
of traditional theatre inspired them to create parallel pictorial forms in line and
colour on the surface of the picture space left vacant by the scribe in the folio
of manuscript. The various scene of dramatic performance were rendered in
the folio of manuscript by these kanikaras. Therefore dancing pose,
expressive gesture, typical curves and bends of stances and postures of
dramatics were reflected in the painting of folios.

6.2 Stylistic Aspects of illuminated Manuscripts of Assam

According to stylistic point of view Boruah states "The general
composition consists of a large central area, generally painted red, where the
subjects are depicted and a narrow surrounding border in green or blue,
broader at the top, forming a series of canopies over the central area. There is
no attempt to differentiate the various planes. Though red is used as
background colour almost invariably, yet in exceptional cases yellow, pink and
blue are also used" (2011). In the context of stylistic features Kalita remarks
representations of pouring rain water, rivers and lakes are of a conventional
type. The lacks of expression in the faces of human figures are simply
compensated by their poses and mudrās which are greatly effective. The
most characteristic feature of these miniatures is that each human, animal or
any other figure is framed by trefoil arches or 'architectural niches' (2009).
Therefore, according to the above statements it can be noted that the manuscript painters used monochromatic red background and yellow, blue may be used occasionally. The paintings are free from any type of decorative design. The entire area is never broken into foreground, background or horizon, either by changes in their respective colors or by the introduction of symbolic and significant motifs like grass, plants or clouds. The entire composition appears to be in eye level view, all other perspectives being absent here.

The documented manuscripts belonging to the 18th century forms a style in which the 17th century elements as well as the Rajput, Mughal elements have been found to converge in a unique manner. The flavour of the Rajput-Mughal idiom when translated from its vertical format to the horizontal format of the Assamese manuscript and being blended with the local idioms, they naturally resulted in a unique style. In this group of manuscripts, green seems to have replaced red as the background colour. Besides many new shades of colour hitherto unknown to the Assamese painters began to appear in most of the paintings.

Most of the paintings lack the depth that is found in the Rajput, Mughal idioms. However, the solidity of the body is fairly achieved in the depiction of male and female figures. The male and female faces are depicted in different ways. Some are depicted in profile, some in three-quarter and others in their frontal view. The costume, particularly those of the female became very elaborate and in many cases they became identical with the costume of late Rajasthani paintings. The plants and animals in this group of manuscripts are
both conventional and naturalistic. Great varieties of flowering trees are found in some of the manuscripts of this group, which are quite unique and are depicted in ornamented decorative pattern rather than like natural plants. The architectural depiction is quite complex here used elements from the Rajput and Mughal paintings. There are also examples where a new type of architecture has been found to have evolved from such application.

Paper-making is one of the oldest technologies that developed in North East region. It is believed that, the close geographical and perhaps socio-cultural and political proximity with China, which was the first country to develop the craft of paper-making, was instrumental in establishing the industry in the area. Along with papermaking developed the technique of writing (Baishya: 2005). The Northeast is known for producing special and indigenously-developed types of paper, writing ink, painting material and innovative processes to preserve manuscripts and paintings.

Regarding the process of making sachi path Neog presents, a tree namely aguru or sachi is selected of about 15 or 16 years growth and about 30 or 35 inches in girth. This tree should be 4 feet from the ground. After that the bark should be removed in strips, from 6 to 18 feet long and from 3 to 27 inches in breath. After rolled up these strips separately are dried in the sun for several days. They are then rubbed by land on a board to facilitate the removal of the outer or scaly portion of the bark. After this they are exposed the dew for one night. In the next morning the outer layer of the bark is carefully removed and the bark proper is cut into pieces of a convenient size, 9 to 27 inches long and 3 to 18 inches broad (2004). These are put into cold water for an hour and the alkali is extracted. After which the surface is
scraped smooth with a knife. They are then dried in the sun for half an hour and when perfectly dry these are rubbed with a piece of burnt brick. A paste prepared from *matimah* (*phaseolus radiates*) is next rubbed by means of yellow arsenic. This is followed again by sun drying after which the strips are rubbed as smooth as marble. *Sachi* trees abounded in Dakhinkol the part of the country south of Brahmaputra.

Another material, on which writings and paintings were done, that is tulapat, made from pressed cotton. This was generally used for inferior manuscript. Neog mentions, “Black ink used for writing and painting was very fast colour and it was as deep as Chinese black; it is also water proof and does not easily fade even after long exposure”. They used natural colours for those paintings. Those are indigo, yellow ochre (*gerumati*), *gengul* (vermilion) and lamp black. The material used for their paintings are black ink prepared from *silikha* (*terminalia citina*) and bull’s urine (Choudhury: 1976).

6.3 Bhagavata-Purana Manuscripts

The painting style of Ruche Bapus Bhagavata-purana suggests the development of assumes painting towards a cross-fertilization of the Satriya and the Ahom court idiom. About the characteristics of paintings Kalita says “The gorgeousness of dress and costume and jewellaries will speak about how the artist viewed his pictorial object in terms of over emphasis on decoration in line and colour. The paintings reveal that his was a concern for bright colour and for that matter he had selected Satriya palette of primary hue with rich red and highlighting white and yellow. On the other hand observing the picture frame from at the upper to corners the artist wanted to
develop a new aesthetic in the design of the frame” (2009). Artist exhibits his keen observation of human body, the movements and suppleness of limbs, the way of limbs move or rotate communicating different action and inner emotional nature to be reflected through the manipulation of hand, legs and limbs. The brush of the artists were fine in depicting curves and bends in human body and in designing regional textile, hair-dos and many others (Choudhry & Chudamoni: 1998) In the sphere of design, Satriya artist, either consciously or unconsciously, relied on the distribution of figures along geometrical lines.

Important feature of illuminated manuscript of Assam are lyrical draughtsman ship, simple composition, dramatic narration and splendid colour. All combinations of colours were used. The prominent colours were yellow and green.

(a) Bhagavata Purana, Book X (Adi Dashama) Chitra Bhagavata

The Chitra Bhagavata (Bhagavata-Prana, book X) dated 1539 A.D. (1461 Saka) from Bali Satra Nagaon is one of the earliest manuscript painting of Assam. (Neog: 2004). The Chitra Bhagavata (A name given to the printed version of the Adi-Dashama rendered in to Assamese verses by Srimanta Shankardeva) represents the earliest manuscript of Assam. It was recovered from Satra named Bali Satras in the district of Nogaon. As the style of Satriya School, the first illustrated example is found that is Chitra- Bhagavata (17th century). Here the artist creation is in the middle part of the page and the remaining portion fill with description about the painting. The Bhagabhata, Book X comprising the child hood days of Krishna popularly known as Adi-
Dashama was rendered by Mahapurasha Srimanta Sankardeva. Book X includes the most enduring images and stories of Krishna: the mischievous child who steals butter; the godlike child who holds the entire universe within himself; the boy who can slay demons and move an entire mountain with one finger; the cowherd who is the love of all the gopis, making them leave all their duties to follow him (Vatsyayan & Neog: 1986).

The style was contemporary with the Kirtana paintings of Na-Burka and Kath Bapu Satra (Kalita: 2009). Lyrical draughtsmanship, simple composition, dramatic narration and splendid colours give the Bhagavata illustrations a charm which distinguishes them from similar Bhagavata paintings from Udaypur elsewhere. This manuscript is executed on tulapat folios measuring 48cm x 20cm in size with a total of 322 paintings executed in 156 folios.

He further states that some elements though from Rajasthani, Mughal and Pahari can be seen in them, they are profoundly controlled by the local traits which relegate these high styles in the background are submerged by the local style. Therefore, it can be noted that manuscripts painting has its stylistic relation with Rajasthani, Mughal and Pahari style of painting. Trees are not illustrated with decorative manner. It is depicted in realistic manner. Hill river cloud and other natural motifs like fish bird are skillfully painted. Shaded lines are not evident here. Costume of female figure consists of fine lines and it represents a wavy surface so as to bring out in effect the shape of the physique it covers.
Stylistically the paintings differ from the Satra as well as court school of Assam. The paintings of Chitra-Bhagavata represent a particular style marked by simplicity of expression, meticulous draftsmanship leaving for angularity in the delineation of figures defined by long flowing sharp line. (Choudhury: 1998). A stylistic feature of Mughal painting is not directly prominent in the manuscripts Paintings of Chitra Bhagavata but outline or contour of Mughal miniature is clearly evident here. Spontaneity, playful line is used in this period. On the other hand this spontaneous line of Satriya School became bold and acquit in the Ahom court style. A painting represents (Plate.6.3) eight female figures where all of them are depicted profile against the deep blue and red background. Attempts at symmetry are evident. Movements of the figures are dynamically depicted. The faces of human and human-like figures do not express though each figure in its totality brings out the desired effect. Regarding this matter Dr. Moti Chandra says, in figure drawing a certain degree of angularity is perceptible. The eyes are fish-shaped, the eyebrows are arched, the nose is pointed and forehead is sloping and wide, the waist is usually narrow (Fig.6. 2).

The painting style is figural with linear draftsmanship. Background colour is green and red is alternately used for the figural forms. The outlines of the figures are heavy with thicker brush strokes. The figural forms of paintings are marked by vitality and freedom of movement. The male and female figures are always conventional and except in the portrayal of Brahma, all figures are depicted in profile. The male costume consists of a Dhoti
(Plate.6.2) and a scarf hanging from the neck with its two ends freely falling over the shoulders on either side.

The female costume consists of a mekhala (long skirt) and a riha (scarf) tied round the waist and bosom that runs further behind to cover the hair knot forming a balloon like appearance ((Plate.6.3). Depiction of animals (Plate.6.1) and birds are both conventional and naturalistic. The simplicity of the painting is made manifest by the simple, yet effective, treatment of line. The deft handling of line is evident in some works where its tensile character is brought out by a relaxed switching from thick to thin and closing form in a soft manner. The treatment of the landscape is always conventional. Water is always painted in basket pattern inside squares and rectangles. The mountains are depicted as piles of multi coloured rounded bodies. Some of the paintings of the manuscripts are remarkable for majestic architecture presenting some splendid look in the construction.

Some forms of the paintings are derived from folk. The 19th century folk trend which began in the late 18th century with the Darrang paintings finds ubiquities presence in these paintings. One of the paintings shows (Plate.6.5) Krishna with serpent Kali. The tight undergarment looking like a short trouser worned by the cowherd boy is a peculiar feature. One may rightly visualize certain impact of south East Asia dragon in the fish scale texture of the serpent and its corpulent forms. Border decorated with floral motifs. Border brushstrokes provide a freer movement for the forms. White colour linear textures on the black body of serpent kali create a contrast feeling. Another painting (Plate. 6.2) from Bhagavata-Purana, book X, depicts Krishna lifts his right arm to kill the washerman, Balarama followed by a gopa is looking at
Krishna. Balarama is holding a blooming lotus in his right hand. Applications of bold lines are clearly evident in figurative form. Background colour is gray.

Paintings are found through the proper arrangement of line and colour. Folk paintings give aesthetical feelings through their colourful line drawings. It is very interesting to note that animal figures play a significant role in the manuscript painting of Assam. For example, Plate 6.4 exhibits Krishna firmly holding the tail of the demon elephant. Balarama is standing behind Krishna. In order to create contrast feeling, artist applied pure black colour in the animal figure against red background. The background is free from decorative elements. Black contour has been applied in animal figure. Plate 6.1 displays the Horse Demon rushes at Krishna to attack him. Here demon horse has been illustrated with white colour against of deep background.

The style of Chitra-Bhagavata painting exhibit Rajput-Mughal influences. The birds and animal motifs were drawn in the picture in a clear and sympathetic manner (Neog: 2004). Animals and birds were depicted in realistic manner. The figures are mostly in profile like other folk painting of Indian subcontinent. Sometimes face part is profiled and silhouetted against the deep background while the body stands frontally. Neog explains “The unusual figures of Kalia and his wives, Garuda etc. are ingeniously managed and remind one of the roles in bhaona, a Vaisnava play in making”.

6.4 Gita-Govinda

A new and secular branch of the art of painting has been established in Eastern Assam under the Ahom. “The 18th century style shows a happy
blending of the basic eastern Indian style of religious miniature found in Orissa.

The characteristic aspect of Gita-Govinda and Ananda-Lahiri is similar to each other. The painting style is dominated by linear draughtsmenship and stiff angularity to define contours of human figures and simple depiction of other pictorial forms. Stylized trees are clearly visible in the folio. Trees are generally painted like the sprays (Plate.6.7 & 6.8). Artists drew the trees and foliage in a stylized manner. Flowing lines of bright colours were used to depict the branches of tree. These stylized trees are seen in the painting of Orissa patachitras (Plate.5.20.a). The costume of women usually consists of sari. Men wear dhoti (Plate.6.10), jama, turban and dupatta (Neog.2004). Postures of figure are angular and almost profile except few figures. The figures are drawn with meandering line. The long meandering line over the top of the figures arrests the flow of a colour and creates the negative space above in mute green or greenish blue. Use of contour is an important aspect of the court style.

Pallate of Gita-Govinda was rich with the basic hue of primary colour. Background was always filled in with red monochrome. Local flora and fauna, animals, trees and romantic theme like love story of Krishna are the subject matter of Gita-Govinda manuscript. For example Plate.6.7, The painting divided into three parts. The left section represents Krishna and Radha. In the middle part a gopi is wandering in the forest. In the last section Radha is sitting in her chamber. The flowering trees and other linear motifs clearly depicted in the painting. Depiction of flowing line is clearly visible here. Therefore line plays a significant role in these paintings. Line creates in and
out depth in the contours. Red blue grey and brown colours were used in the background of paintings. The landscape of painting consists of blue sky, basket pattern water decorative trees. It is very important to note that the compositions are very simple and most of them are free from border design except few paintings. Choudhury remarks "The Assamese paintings have no stylistic relation with pata paintings or with Orissa paintings. Nor has it any affinity with the folk paintings of Madhubani paintings of Bihar." The present researcher is not agreed with the above statement. Because after having detail study of line drawing of Orissa patachitra, Madhubani, Manuscript painting she can sum up that there is some similarity of linear style which is found in both the paintings of Madhubani and Assam Manuscript (Figure.6.1 and Plates 6.14-6.16). Plate.6.6 and 6.9 depict the folio of Gita-Govinda. Here artist applied strong lines with bright colour to depict stylized trees, animal motifs and dresses of Krishna and Radha.

6.5 Hastividyanava

Hastividyanava is one of the well-known illustrated manuscripts of Assam commissioned under the patronage of King Sivasimha and his Queen Phuleswari. The idioms developed in the Ahom court style but it is much closer to the Satriya style. It is assumed that the artist who migrated from outside Assam tried their hands first in paintings and drawing some figures of elephants in many such horizontal folios of the Gajendra Chintmoni avoiding the complexities of local landscape, human figure and architecture in heir paintings. The most significant aspect of Hastividyanava painting is study of animal form, particularly elephant, individualized in a verity of modes and situation (Kalita: 2009). Gray, red, black colours has been used to depict
animal forms in the manuscript. Mostly the pure space in ubiquitous has been used to setting the animal forms.

We can see extensive use of green and yellow colour in those painting. The text is placed in the upper left corner in almost all the folios in yellow ochre background. Elephants are depicted in naturalistic manner rather than abstract. The architectural forms depicted in the painting are mostly similar to Mughal architecture rather than indigenous style (Plate.6.13).

Artist presents his taste for linearity by contour in the animal form (Plate 6.11). Bold contours in refinement in shading in the animal bodies exhibit masterly handling of the brush for rounded and more life-like and animated form (Kalita: 2009). Trees and foliages, mostly silhouette, particularly drawn to create some conceptual forms. The folios divide the text and the pictorial settings into halves, sometimes floral motifs as a centre (Plate.6.12).

The linear architectural design which depicted in the painting of Hastirvidyarnava is similar to Mughal painting. In this context Kalita states “King Siva Simha commissioned the service of Sukumara Barkath to write book on eliphentology and Dilbar and Dosai, two artists to execute paintings in the folios. It is stated elsewhere that the Ahom King, Rudrasimha brought from the west from the Muslim families expert in different arts and crafts. Form the above statement it is clear that Painting of Hastividyanava manuscript represent the Mughal style of painting. In the context of linearity Kalita states sinuous contours of the elephants weighing against the cursive contours of the mountain ranges create mellow grace in the compositions.
The folios of Hastividyarnava are illustrated with paintings of greater skill and workmanship depicting various types of elephants and natural scenes from the Ahom royal court. Existing folios of Hastirvidyanava numbering 235, (the original manuscripts had 193 folios) measuring 58x16cm in size. Elephants were illustrated up to 163 and from the 64 to the end with their ailments and treatment. (Choudhury: 1976) Choudhury says the painters of illuminated manuscript Hastividyarnava were very expert in line drawing and use their brush with skillfulness.

6.6 Conclusion

Although the genre of the art of painting around the illumination of manuscripts declined in the late 19th century, the activity did not stop altogether. The pace of activity is occasional and few artists of the satras continued this tradition till the 20th century. Today there is no living tradition in Assam.

The basic subject matter of the manuscript was based on mostly mythological stories, epics, flora fauna etc. In addition to indigenous art form, it is found that there was an amalgamation of foreign elements such as the Mughal and Rajput miniatures paintings form. The linear motifs depicted in the illuminated manuscript are both in stylistic and realistic manner. Animal figures are mostly painted with realistic manner. The stylized trees depicted in the painting are resemble to Orissa patachitras.

The manuscript acted as a vehicle to know the social scenario of the time and finally acted as the mirror of the past. The aspect should be looked after by the government departments devote to the pre the male headgear
consists of three-pointed or four-pointed tiara in some cases and the *atpati* type turban.
Plate 6.1 The Horse Demon, the Kesi also called the Hayasura, rushes at Krishna to attack him, Folio from Bhagavata Purana

Plate 6.2 Krishna lifts his right arm to kill the Washerman, Balarama followed by a Gopa is looking at Krishna, Folio from Bhagavata Purana
Plate.6.3 Folio from Bhagavata Purana, Adi Dashama, Known as Chitra Bhagavata, Satriya Style.

Plate.6.4 Krishna firmly holds the tail of the Demon Elephant, Kubalaya to uproot its Trunks, Balarama is standing behind Krishna, Folio from Bhagavata Purana

Plate.6.5 Folio from Bhagavata Purana, Book X (Kali-Damana)
Plate.6.6 Krishna entreats Radha praising her beauty; Chandra serves as a smile, for Radhas face. A love scene in forest during full moon night, folio from Gita-Govinda

Plate. 6.7 Krishna sits on a Calpira (Wooden Stool), while Radha sits bellow. A Gopi is wandering in the Forest; Radha is again seen in the Chamber. Folio from Gita-Govinda

Plate.6.8 Kamdeva is releasing arrow from his bow, while Krishna is laying on the ground being pierced by the arrow.
Plate 6.9 From left Raga Gunjari, Radha, Krishna and Sakhis at the Poet, Joyadeva, Folio from Gita-Govinda

Plate 6.10 Detail Study of Figure

Plate 6.11 Folios from Hsthividyarnava, Court Style
Plate 6.12 Folios from Hsthividyarnava, Court Style

Plate 6.13 Folios from Hsthividyarnava, Court Style
Plate 6.14

Plate 6.15. Linear Design in Rajput Painting

Plate 6.16 Linear Design in Madhubani Painting
List of Figures

Figure 6.1 Linear Depiction of Branch

Figure 6.2 Female Figure, Satriya style, Bhagavata Purana, Illuminated Manuscript Painting of Assam
Figure 6.3 Male Figure Satriya style, Bhagavata purana, Book X
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