Chapter IV

ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPTS OF MAJULI: HISTORY, GROWTH AND SIGNIFICANCE

4.1 Introduction

The traditional paintings of Assam, in the form of illustrated manuscripts and miniature paintings are perpetually a source of inspiration to thousands of artisans and art lovers across the country and known for its unmatched quality of indigenous features, landscape depictions, and interpretation of vivid characters with flora, fauna and outstanding strokes of mastery, all it has been an integral part of the rich Assamese culture and heritage since earlier ages. The word manuscript is derived from two Latin words ‘Manus’ (hand) and ‘Scripture’ that means hand written (traditional) materials, especially books. If the paintings are incorporated in a manuscript illustrating the subject of the text; it is signified as illustrated manuscript. The background of painting in Assam can be traced back to the seventh century A.D, the earliest references of Assamese paintings are available in the Harivamsa and the Dwarika-lila based upon the Mahabharata, mentions the narration of the dream of princess in which she saw a beautiful youth and on the request of her, an aide name Chitralekha made a sketch of the person and princess recognized that sketch as Aniruddha, grandson of Krishna. (Brown:1920)

So the manuscripts are considered to be derived from the mythological tales and the most prominent among which are ‘Chitra-Bhagawata’ and ‘Hastividyaranva’ executed in the medieval period. Most of these manuscripts have been collected from different parts of the state and published in the form of books, along with the reproduction of the original illustrations. However, the illustrations of these manuscripts are up to some extent is conventional and stylized to be categorized as folk paintings. There are a number of Assamese manuscripts, where the painting reflects the folk connection up to a great extent as well. In medieval Assam, different classes of painters evolved with time.
Among them, was a special class called *patuas*, whose paintings were popular as *pats* (scrolls). (Sarma: 1989)

Nevertheless, the most versatile among all the Assamese painters were known as *khanikars*. Their work mainly related to the *Satras* institutions and the *Namghars* of village, some *khanikars* can still be found in certain villages and *Satras* of Upper Assam Known for their excellent artistic creations. There are numerous important Manuscripts in which Assamese miniature paintings are treasured, have been preserved in Assam State Museum, Guwahati, Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti and the Historical and Antiquarian Department of Guwahati. Besides these, the Assam Fine Arts and Crafts Society, Guwahati and Jorhat fine art Society have been playing a significant role in presenting the rich cultural heritage of the state and many others are lying with the private collectors.

These manuscripts and the traditional paintings have also been done on the silk and other processed fabrics (Robinson: 1975). It is mentioned in the earlier accounts, that during the visit of Hiuen-Tsang and Harshavardhana king of Kannauj in the capital of Kamrupa; the king Bhaskarvarmana presented those exclusive Assamese silk paintings including carved and decorated boxes of panels and painting brushes, gourds and gold painted bamboo cages. Some of the references of portrait and court paintings are also available in the old Assamese manuscripts around the fourteenth century A.D for instance Vabhruvahana’s (King of the Manipur) Palace described in *Vabhruvahana-Parva* by Harihara Vipra poet of the fifteenth century, mentioned about the mural paintings on walls of the palace, and the *Uttarababril* (inscription of the King Bhaskaravarman-III\(^{rd}\)) about the pictures of deities, *Gandharvas* (celestial dancers), decorations with flora and fauna and portraits of his palace; these explanations of the paintings might be pursued by the existing paintings occurs in the temples and the palaces which represents that the art of painting was in tradition in that period. (Barua: 1949)

The regional office of the Archaeological Survey of India in Guwahati had registered around two hundred and fifty manuscripts in the North-east India as antiquities. Some of the manuscripts are fully illustrated. However, there are
around one hundred and ten manuscripts in the collection of the Department of Antiquarian and Historical Studies, Assam, including fifty-seven illustrated manuscripts. The Kamarupa Anusandhan Samity, Guwahati, is another institution having a large collection of manuscripts some of which are on display in the Assam State Museum (plate-4.01). A significant number of manuscripts are persevered around the six hundred in the Vaisnava monasteries or Satras. Moreover, a large number of manuscripts are lying in the Namghars and prayer halls of the villages and towns in the Brahmaputra valley (plate-4.02). However, it is a matter of concern that a considerable number of manuscripts are unscientifically preserved in private homes of individuals. (Hazarika: 1990)

The zenith of the visual and textual tradition in North-east India was reached in the manuscripts, prepared in the post medieval period with the use of languages such as Sanskrit, Assamese, Tai Ahom, and Tibetan. Most of the Ahom buranjis (chronicles of 13th to 19th century A.D) and Vaisnava literatures (16th to 19th century A.D) such as kirtan-gosa, Nama-ghosa, Ankia-nat, Bhagwat and others are written on sanchi-pat made from the bark of Sanchi tree (Aquilaria agallocha). Besides the religious and mythological aspects of creation, the study of elephants and classic episodes were also the subjects of the manuscripts tradition in old Assamese cult. One of the older texts, written in Sanskrit, the Kalikapurana supposed to have been written in the 9th century A.D. Some of the little known manuscripts on sanchi-pat are kumaraharan by Rama-Dvija (1652, A.D), Laitu Buranji (1715, A.D) of Tai-Ahom tradition and another interesting manuscript written in the Muslim tradition by Rama-Dvija in 1797, A.D. This manuscript is titled as sahapari upakhyan. Here it seems a kind of diffusion of the folk literatures from the western part of India to this region. (Barua: 1993) Subsequently in the medieval period the fine art of painting is closely associated with Sankardeva and Neo-Vaisnavism as Sankardeva himself was a visionary figure and in the means of painter he painted scrolls and backdrops depicting the visuals of seven Vaikunthas (abode of Vishnu) while he used to arrange theatrical performances of China-yatra. The terms chitra-putali, Pata, and chitrakara in this connection are prevailed in the medieval literature, can be
assisted as the art of painting pats and scrolls exists parallel in Assam as to the other parts of India.

The primary paradigms of the Vaisnava paintings were established in the Chitra-bhagwata through the story illustrations of the tenth volume of the Bhagwata-Purana. Later the important examples of illustrated manuscripts can be incorporated as the Bhagawat-kirtan, Dharma-purana Usha-Haran, Shaily-Parba and the Hastividyanarnava an illustrated Treatise on the study of elephants is unique in itself. Therefore the Vaisnava art of the painting manuscripts in the miniature form mainly came into the tradition, in the period of seventeenth and eighteenth century, according to the available resources it seems that the Royal and Vaisnava Schools of the miniature painting has been developed in Assam finally with indigenous and external influences of Moghal, Rajasthani, Kangra in the late medieval period. (Borkakoti: 2005)

4.2 Method and Materials of Manuscript paintings

The artists has been traditionally considered as a special class of people in Assam and popularly known as khanikar. They were regarded both as an artist and the craftsman and used to perform many kinds of fine tasks simultaneously; most of these people were associated with the prominent Satras, painting the manuscripts, to make the idols and crafts in wood and to adorn the Satra campus. The Khanikar used to make masks also on the occasion of Bhaona or theatrical performance to be worn by the actors. The writers of the manuscripts were usually a different class people usually called Likhak or Lekharu in Assam (Goswami: 1930), usually the likhas accomplished their job of writing first and leave the blank spaces to be illustrated by the khanikar or Illustrator later, according to the profession Likhaks were naturally the literate persons but it’s not same always in the case of Khanikars, some them were illiterate as well and it is apparent that sometimes Khanikars did their works without fully understanding the essence of the text. But mostly the themes of the manuscripts were memorized by them due to practice and as part of the general folklore tradition of Assam the Khanikars were familiar with them. However up to some extent both
were the indispensable clutch and responsible to determining the nature and characteristics of the traditional Assamese paintings.

4.2.1 **Sanchi-pat:** are the most profound medium as the paper was not much known to the Assamese society at the period, was made from the bark of the Agar tree (*Acuilaria Agallocha*) (plate-4.03) which is easily available and lasts adequately long though its need to be long patience and experience to prepare the *Sanchi-pat* for writing and painting as well. Gait in History of Assam has described the process to make *Sanchi-pat* as selected tree of around 15 to 16 years of age with growth of 30 to 35 inches thickness and about 4 feet long from ground is appropriate to collect the bark which has been removed in stripes by 6 to 18 feet in and 3 to 27 inches in breadth. The collected stripes of the bark are rolled up separately with the inner or white part of the bark outwards, and the outer or green part inside, and kept for drying in the sun for several days. These dried barks then rubbed uniformly on a board or any other hard surface, to remove the outer rough layer of the bark, and then rubbed barks are left to be exposed in the dew for a night, after this, epidermal layer of the barks (*nikari*) is cautiously removed, and the remaining proper bark is cut into the appropriate size of 9 to 27 inches long and 3 to 18 inches in breadth. These cut pieces are dipped into the cold water for about an hour and the alkali is extracted then the surface of the barks is scraped smooth with a knife. The smoothened barks again kept in the sunlight to be dried for about half an hour, then the perfectly dried barks are rubbed firmly with a piece of burnt brick, these pieces then again rubbed with a prepared paste of *matimah* (*phaseolus radiates*) and then the barks are dyed yellow by the yellow arsenic, and kept again for dried in sun after this the stripes are finally rubbed as smooth as marble thus end of this whole process leads the stripes for writing as well as painting. (Neog: 1988)

As described by Dr. Bhuyan in the *Note on Assamese Manuscripts*, the leaves of the *Sanchi-pats* were numbered by the second page of the folio and the centre of each leaf was perforated for fastening the string to pass through. The thicker leaves were used as the cover of the manuscript and some spare leaves
were added always to record changes of the ownership of the manuscripts and the other important events of the life, to be added by the owner (plate- 4.04, 4.05). There are variety of sizes in manuscripts as smallest as thumb of a man’s hand for an instance *Ahom mantra-puthi* with 60 leaves measuring one and a half inches by three inches and some folded manuscripts called as *Bakala Puthi* might be 8 feet long whereas *Gitar Bakala* is around eight feet long and 6 inches broad folded in the shape of small square booklet (Neog: 1988, p-302).

4.2.2 *Tula-pat*: besides *Sanchi-pat*, *tula-pat* is another medium which has been utilized extensively in writing as well as painting also (plate-4.06), but was not practised as *Sanchi-pat* due to less permanence comparatively, *tula-pat* made from two words where *tula* means cotton and *pat* means leaf as it is made by processing the cotton pulp. *Phung-chin* (1473 A.D) is the earliest available manuscripts of this medium. According to M.Neog on the basis of *Kathaguru-charita* *tula-pat* seems more like smooth lint in spite of paper, and it is made by ginning, felting and pressing the cotton into sheets. However H.K Barpujari in ‘*The comprehensive History of Assam*’ mentioned some other methods to process the *tula-pat*, considering to him *tula-pat* is literally paper not fine lint and made from pounding wood, following this process three kinds of trees are usually chosen as per the characteristics of the required paper, like *maihai* tree for white *tula-pat*, and *yamon* tree for the brown. Then the barks of these trees were cut into the suitable size then beaten methodically, by this the fibre of the bark became loosened and separated from the scaly. After this the collected fibre were boiled properly to remove all the impurities and make the pulp, in next step pulp was pored over the water in the rectangular ditches of appropriate sizes. Then it was left to be cooled after this the film of pulp formed a surface of the strong sheet or paper this sheet then collected from the water and kept in sun to be dried further the dried sheets rubbed to make smoothened for writing and painting on it. The similar technique of making *tula-pat* is described in the ‘*Shan at Home*’ also (Barpujari: 1990).
The prominent manufacturing centres of *tula-pat* were situated at Namphakial, Munglong and Narayanpur district of Lakhimpur in Assam (plate 4.07). The Ahom and the other people of Shan stream and the Monpa Buddhists community of the Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh were mainly used to apply this technique to make *tula-pat*. Besides this palm leaves or *tal-patra* were also used in some of the cases or rarely as palm does not grow much in Assam though common in the Burma and Bengal. Palm leaves manuscripts were executed by the Buddhist *Vihara* of Disangpani in Sibsagar district, the inhabitants of this area are largely belongs to the Ahom and the Shan tribes they all are Theravada Buddhists thus the bamboo strip folios and palm leaves manuscripts were confined to the Buddhists of the Upper Assam (Barpujari: 1990, p-379).

Another significant feature of these manuscripts is the Ink, used for writing which is water proof and lasts for years without fading and bearing the strong pigment as deep as Chinese black (plate-4.08). Ink which is called *Masi* in Assam is basically made from *silikha* (*Terminalia citrina*) and bull’s Urine. A particular process is acquired to make the Ink, few fruits of *silikha* kept in water with bull’s urine dipped in an earthen bowl for some days, then the bowl is left to be exposed in dew for quite a few nights, hereafter the water which turned black is poured into an another container in the form of ink, iron or iron sulphate and sometimes blood of a particular fish (*Kuciya*) are also added to make it more sturdy and permanent (Neog: 2008). There were some other procedures also to prepare ink from the extract of *Amalika* (*phyeanthus ambalica*) and the barks of the trees. Interestingly some time sap of the earthworm was also used for the invisible writing (Goswami: 1930). The pen used for writing was mainly made from goose’s feather or reed. In spite of that various combinations of the colours were been used in painting manuscripts among these yellow and green are prominent. Some important materials for making colours are Indigo (Blue), Yellow ochre from (*Gerumati*), *hengul* (vermilion), *haital* (yellow arsenic) and lamb black, the vermilion (*hengul*) and yellow arsenic (*haital*) were the chief components and used in almost all the painted manuscripts sometimes base of
the colours were made by buffalo hide, this was, first burnt properly and the ash extracted in the form of fine powder it was then added with the required blue or red colours extracted from the different kind of berries and creepers (Rajguru, 1988). Such material could provide the basic and primary colours whereas few other combination of colours were made from this by mixing each other and various vegetable pigments, in some of the cases crude variety of calk has been used to prepare the surface of the painting which probably became the cause of decaying colours and even manuscripts itself (www.atribute to Sankardeva.com, 2014). The gold paint was also used rarely for the important manuscripts illustration and some royal letter sheets were decorated by the floral border designs, mainly the Buddhists of Assam used the gold paint in some of the illustrated Theravada manuscripts as in Phung-chin. The required gold for the paint was normally collected from the sands of the Subansiri, the Burhidihing and the other rivers of upper Assam area, people who used to involved in gold-washing popularly known as Sonowals. (Barpujari: 1990)

4.3 Origin and development of different Schools of Painting in Assam

The art of paintings in Assam are mainly available in the form of manuscripts illustrations and prominently practised on the rectangular format of the Vaisnava manuscripts, Tai-Ahom Buddhist manuscripts and some other manuscripts of Hinduism including the less amount of cloth painting on muga silk. According to Dr. Dasgupta, Assamese miniature painting can be divided into five categories that of the Tai-Ahom school, the Satriya School, the Darang School, the Garhgaon School and the school similar to the Garhgaon School. Besides these some authors divide it into three main categories of Tai-Ahom school, Satriya School and the Ahom or Garhgaon School. (Dasgupta: 1992)

4.3.1 Tai-Ahom School is also known as Tai-shan School developed in the period of around fourteenth and fifteenth century in the patronage of Ahom court as the Tai-Ahom community mainly belongs to the Buddhism so the subject of paintings in the manuscripts are also influenced by the Buddhist mythology. Ahoms were the sincere admirers of art and painting and brought their religious
and secular manuscripts by the time of getting settled in Assam, exchange of paintings and manuscripts prevailed in the their customs primarily in the nuptials, moreover these customs had been carried out even after they settled down in Assam and with their other traditions, art of manuscript painting had also been nourished and established the Tai-Ahom school of painting.

Tai-Ahom art is primarily related to religion and confined to the Buddhist community the significant example of the manuscript illustration is the Phung Chin manuscript it is the earliest existing specimen of Tai art dated 1437 A.D written in the Ahom language and script. Another Tai Ahom illustrated manuscript of the later period is Suk-Tanta-Kyempong supposed to belongs the year of 1523 A.D both the manuscripts are based on the Hinayana Buddhism. Phung-Chin mainly depicts the Theravadi and Ahom conception of different heavens and represents the description of the sixteen heavens and the similar number of hells the manuscripts comprehends the Ahom conception of Trans departure of the soul into the heavens and hells, every notion has been described by the illustrations. (Barpujari: 1990)

**Stylistic Analysis**

These illustrations cannot be entirely considered as the paintings as the minimal painterly aspects has been applied to represent the visuals they are more like contours and drawings which drew on the surface with fine black outlines. Colours like yellow, red, brown, blue, and green, has been rendered only in few of the pictures and that of in some of the portions of the composition. Interestingly gold paint has also been used carefully up to some extent to highlight the main areas as to depict the heart of the Buddha in Mahaparinirvana Stage, to show the Bodh-gaya in the identical form of Mandala and the other holy places related to Buddha. The characters and subjects are composed on the surface directly without any support of background. The illustrations are mainly occupied with the lean human figures and combined form of human and divine beings in anthropomorphic appearance. Drawings are made in flexible, curved and even broad lines, figures and gestures are full of expression though they are
unusually elongated. All the human figures have been depicted curiously in front view often in sitting posture and doesn’t creates any mudras (gestures) with three quarter face profiles and looks somewhat similar to each other but the illustrations are seems completely successful to represent the text. Manuscripts also mention the name of the scribe as well as the illustrator that of Chao Kyang Shen belongs to Kingson Maolung a place between Shan states and southern china. The next manuscripts Suk-tanta-Kyempong belongs to Namphakial in the lakhimpur district of Assam, which is based on the Lokadharma of Theravada Buddhism written in the Tai-phake language in Ahom script and represents the same style of painting as Phung-chin. Though controversies are there about the dates of both the manuscripts but it can’t be denied that they represent the early phase of the miniature paintings of Assam. Significantly this school is the only surviving school of Assamese Buddhist painting and still progressing with its style and characteristics and manuscripts are being still produced by the Buddhist artists of the Lohit District of Arunachal Pradesh (Barpujari: 1990, p-373).

4.3.2 Satriya School: The significant style of Assamese painting developed under the phenomenon of Neo-Vaisnavism and practised in the various institutions of Satras regarded as the Satriya School of painting. It is associated with Sankardeva as to propagate his ideology he incorporated vivid art forms including painting, Sankardeva was a visionary figure and in the means of painter he himself painted scrolls and backdrops depicting the visuals of seven Vaikunthas (abodes of Vishnu) while he used to arrange theatrical performances of China-yatra. The Satriya School has been flourished through the manuscripts illustrations in the seventeenth and eighteenth century and expended from Koch-behar in the west to the deep eastern areas like Majuli of Assam. Chitra-Bhagawata (plate-4.09) is the earliest specimen of the Satriya School of miniature painting and the manuscripts depicts the narrations and stories of the book X of the Bhagawata-purana (plate-4.10, 4.11). Further there are around twenty more illustrated manuscripts belongs to the Satriya school have been recovered from the various places of Assam, these important manuscripts are – Gitagovinda by Kavi-raj Chakravarty, Samkhadudavadha, Dharma-Purana by.
Kavichandra dvija, *Ananda lāhiri* by Ananta Acarya, *Hastīvidyarnava* by sukumar Barkath, *Lava-Kusar yuddha* by Harivara Vipra, *Kalki- purana* by Ghanshyam Phukan, *lanka-kanda* of Ramayana by Madhav Kandali, *Bhagwta Book XI, Darrang Rajavamsavali* by Suryakhari, *Anadi Patan* by Sankardeva, *Kumar-Harana* by Ananta Kandali, *Tirtha Kaumudi, Ajimalopakhyana* by Sankardeva, *Kirtan-ghosa* by Sankardeva, *Vanamalidevar Carita* by Ramakanta Dvija, these manuscripts are completely illustrated besides these number of other manuscripts are decorated with floral and geometrical motifs on the borders. And some manuscripts were covered with carved and painted wooden boxes (plate-4.12, 4.13, 4.14). The illustrations of manuscripts are divided into two categories first is ornamental or decorative paintings it has been applied mainly on the sides and borders (plate-4.15) of the manuscript with floral, geometrical, somewhat figurative and creeper kind of designs (plate- 4.16, 4.17). In the second category the story and theme painted with vivid details in the manuscript. In most of the cases scribe himself were rendered the illustrations of the manuscripts though in some of the cases scribe and painters both were the professional and separately done their job sophisticatedly like *Hastīvidyarnava* the names of the painters Dilwar and Dosai are mentioned in the manuscripts, similarly in *Vanamalidevar carita* name of painter is recorded *Vijaya Khanikar* (Neog: 1959).

**Stylistic Analysis**

The vibrant and versatile style of Satriya School developed its own expressions from the different prevalent styles of other parts of India. As Satriya school is not purely patronized or court art thus the narrations of the manuscripts depicts the textual, religious and mythological themes which confined to represent the texts in spite of pictorial fundamentals and skill full representations of painting, though some of the general features of the illustrations were influenced with their contemporary styles of western Indian miniature painting are the angularity and flexibility of the human body, sharp and pointed nose which is not the facial feature of the north eastern people, broad chest and the curved thin waist, and the stylized and decorative method to paint the rivers, clouds and the
pouring rain seems more symbolic and ornamented rather than a realistic temperament, similarly other features can be observed in the depiction of landscape and nature, trees, leaves mountains and creepers painted in decorative manner which are not completely resembles with the vegetation of the place and the relative proportions. Perspectives have not been considered majorly, the architecture and the buildings mostly painted in the white colour as if the buildings are made of the marble. The windows, doors, shelters, stairs, terrace and domes are resembles with the Moghal and Rajasthani schools. According to the Dr. S.K Chatterjee the Assamese manuscript paintings are the prosperous combination of the religious and mythological Assamese style of painting and the elite and sophisticated Moghal and Rajasthani miniatures and relatively with kangra art also. (chatterjee: 1955) Though the date of the Bhagawata 1539 A.D considerable the earliest available illustrated manuscript is not beyond the doubts but it cannot be denied that the tradition of the medieval Satriya style of illustrated manuscript and miniature paintings of Assam is closely related to the times of Sankardeva and later it flourished and took its definite shape in the reign of the king Rudra Simha (1696-1714) and Siva Simha(1714-1744) as their portraits are painted in some of the illustrated manuscripts and considering the names of the Dilwar and Dosai, the Mohmadian painters. It can be said that those Kings imported painters also from north India for exclusive work of painting. Consequently Dr. Chatterjee discerned that environmental and the natural beauty can be noticed remarkably in the late medieval miniatures of Assam, (Chatterjee:1955) whether in the depiction of the beautiful landscape, creepers and bejewelled trees with bountiful flowers, fruits and vegetables, lavishly green rising and falling plains with plants, shrubs, rivers and the mountains moreover realistic depiction of birds of different colours, animals in moving and respite positions and objects related to the Assamese day today life like Drums, cymbals, pepa (horn pipe) Assamese Trays (Horal) indigenous Sun shades (japi) Sitting stools (Tamuli-pira) and bed-stead (chal-pira) are all embellish the original flavour to the paintings.
4.3.3 **Darang School:** The school of painting flourished under the patronisation of the Koch Kingdom popular as Darang Raj of Mangaldai in the district of Darang, Assam distinguished as the Darang School though it has close similarities with Satriya School as it said to be originated from Satriya School but it developed gradually its own stylistic characteristics (plate-4.18). As the Ahom court and Koch kings patronised the Assam Vaisnavism and Satriya school of Painting so the Manuscripts of Darang School are not much in numbers though some of the remarkable manuscripts like Anadi-Patana (plate-4.19) and Tirtha-Kumudi (1686) were produced by the school, both can be considered contemporary to each other as stylistically they are similar. *Anadipatana* is the important work of the Darang School (plate-4.20). It elaborate the theory of creation as discerned in the *Bhagawata Purana* and *Vamana Purana* and it is more significant due to Sankardeva himself was the author of this work. *Tirtha Kaumudi* is treatise on the Hindu pilgrimages of Assam as well as India it is an important and great manual of that period of the Hindu customs and the geography as its starts with the explanation of the *Kamakhya* temple of Guwahati, Assam and covers the distant pilgrimages of India like *vrindavan*, *kurukshetra* and other places.

**Stylistic Analysis**

The Illustrations are executed conventionally on the manuscript, as the natural and the constructed thing are represented allegorically; figures are placed on the monochrome background with lean posture and fidgety gesture with fish shaped eyes, anatomy of hands and feet are disproportionate in a nut shell *Tirtha-kaumudi* seems a primitive and effects like a execution of folk art. The main features of Darang School are the illustrations executed on the *Sanichi*-pat folios and each leaf is numbered presiding by ‘*Sri*’ (plate-4.21) which was influenced by the Satriya School (plate-4.22). The illustrations are painted inside the frame called ‘*Alekhya-sthana*’ (particular area of painting) which is bounded with the bold outlines (plate-4.23). These miniatures are stylistically similar to the Satriya School but the pictorial qualities of the paintings are more sophisticated.
compare to the former. The colours are opaque and applied in tempera method, basic colours are red, orange, Blue, black, brown, blue and ink, exclusive colours like silver and Gold has not been used. Human figures are commonly painted small and weighty, their limbs are well matured and the heads are bigger though some of the male figures are elongated with slight lean limbs and finely carved face particularly in the Tirtha-Kaumudi but it depicts the indigenous figures and features. Female figures compare to the male figures are short and weighty, these are generously ample, and curves are benevolently carved. Faces are elegantly hefty and pleasing, the eyes are large, pastille and fish shaped depicting the expression of concentration curiosity and appears all attentive, eyebrows are arched shaped, nose is curved and pointed. Hairs are decoratively tied in the chignons or in the granny knots suspended below the head. The orana (scarf) are wrapped around the upper part of the body on the head and chemise and skirts or lehengas (lower garment) and saris worn by the females. Male figures are adorned with the Dhoti (lower wrap-around cloth), gamoca (shoulder cloth) and waist-bands. Landscape here seems to be not given much importance as it has been executed simply with flat monochromes, the other elements of nature like mountains, lakes, rocks and swing of the plains are not in painted in much details and has been treated conventionally, in some instances here and there some vegetation with few creepers and flowers are rendered on the plains. Likewise architecture also represented just through the lines and with minimum efforts and details. (Bhuyan: 1997)

4.3.4 Garhgaon School: The Garhgaon School of painting is associated to the Ahom royal court or a product of Ahom court it was an absolute example of court art and flourished under the patronage of Ahoms (Plate-4.24) in the eighteenth century and a distinct stream of painting established in the eastern Assam apart from its contemporary Satriya School and popularised as the Garhgaon School the term derived from the name of the Ahom capital near to the present Sibsagar district of Assam, and represents the adequate characteristics of commissioned art to make it separate from the Satriya school which was emerged and intermingled with the Vaisnavism and general society (Neog, 1972)
according to the Stella Kramrisch works of the court art depends upon the will of its patroniser, are free from the creative urge thus the artist, assigned for the occupation is a tool of the monarch and work according to the will of his master. This is the same thing happened to the Garhgaon School in Assam as the Rudra Simha initiated the tradition of court painting by assigning the artists to illustrate the copy of Gita-Govinda (plate-4.25) in the early eighteenth century and the tradition continued by his son and Successor Siva Simha and his companions Pramathesvari Devi and Ambika Devi (1741 A.D) by this the finest specimens of the court art had been executed (plate-4.26). The paintings of the Garhgaon school perpetually depicts that it has been utterly commissioned work and it was the matter of privilege to the assigned artists as they have been selected for the particular work. As the school has been developed inside the court and the elite culture of the Garhgaon thus the common society of the Assam has remained untouched to the aristocratic art. The most noteworthy work of the school is Hastividyarnava which is not only an informative account on various creeds of elephants, their manual of training and care, their ailments and treatment including the modes of constructing their stables but also a guide to the existing culture and geography of the region (plate-4.27). The paintings are represents the impetus of the miniature painting of Assam (plate-4.28) with a prosper combination of indigenous art and the mainstream Indian school of painting such as Moghal, Rajansthani, and pahari.

The treatise has been compiled by ‘Sukumar Barkaith’ in 1734 A.D under the benefaction of the King Siva Singha and his Queen, Ambika Devi. And the most imperative thing of the manuscripts is that the illustrations has been painted for sure by the proficient artist ‘Dilbar’ and ‘Dosai’ as they inscribed their names in the manuscripts, their identity is not known but it is believed that they were the Muslim painters and probably they have been invited by the above king for the particular purpose or might be settled earlier for the profession in the state. But it is apparent by the master work of the painters that they certainly were experts of the every basic fundamentals of the painting and their illustrations are the evidence of distinction (plate-4.29). (Choudhury: 1975)
Stylistic Analysis

The illustrations of the various creeds of elephants with their individual nature, has been represented in very realistic manner through different colours like gray, red, brown and blue with perfect drawings and proportion of the body. Green and brown has been used extensively in backgrounds and the text is scribed on the yellow ochre background mostly on the upper left corner or on side of the folio as the paintings confined to most of the surface of folio. The scribed area is separated by the bold margins from the illustration area (plate-4.30). The use of mughlai pagdi (Turban) by the kings, nobles and the princes, long flowing garment (Angarkha) with waist band (Kamarbandh) and the lower garment Dhoti drape around both the legs separately, worn by the Muslim nobles of the period are clearly depicted in the illustrations. Females are represented in three pieces of garment as dupatta covering the head and the upper part of the body over the blouse or chemise, Ghagra (skirt) or Sari is worn on the lower part of the body are similar to Rajasthani style of painting (plate-4.31). Architecture and buildings rendered in white colour with sharp lines seems to frame the human figures of nobles and Kings are similar to the Moghal style (kalita, 2009). The other interesting feature of the Garhgaon art is portraiture (plate-4.32) which can be observed in the Hastividyrnava as the portraits of the author Sukumar Barkaith, the painters Dilbar and Dosai, portraits of the royal patrons Siva Sima and Ambika Devi including the other nobilities painted here at par life like and seems pretty competent with the contemporary trends of Moghal, Rajasthani, Pahari and other schools of India (Chatterjee:1956). Similarly the treatment of landscape and depiction of natural beauty is remarkable achievement of Garhgaon School as the background of the main subjects is adorned in realistic manner with green rising and falling plains with creepers and shrubs including blue hills and mountains which in a sight are reminiscent of the deep green paddock, grazing fields and distant ranges of hills surrounding the Garhgaon in the present Sibsagar District. The other noticeable examples of Garhgaon School are Sakhachuda Vadha, Bhagawata Book VI, Rasik Priya, and Darang Raj Vamsavali.
4.4 Preparation and Preservation of Manuscripts in Majuli

Manuscripts preparation is the integral part of the tradition of Assam and regarded as an art since the pre-Sankarite periods, whereas the growth of this art got the impetus with the expansion of the Neo-Vaisnavism in 16th century, as the art played a vital role to propagate and spread the ideology of Sankardeva, and became the prominent model of the communication itself. Thus each Satra institution had some of the expert inmates to prepare and preserve the copies of the manuscripts. Nevertheless being the active study centres of the Vaisnavism and the classical scriptures including the epics, the Satras of Majuli has also became the centre of the development of the classical Sanskrit and vernacular literature as of the very beginning of their origin (plate-4.33). Soon by the time Satras had been converted into the library of the multitude manuscripts and most of these still having the huge collection, some of the prominent Satras like Auniati and Dakhinpat Satra (plate-4.34) of Majuli were earlier maintained the collection of thousands of manuscripts in their library (Nath: 2009). The Satras were produced the manuscripts in Assamese as well as in Sanskrit as the scholars like Sankardeva, Madhavdeva, Ananta kandali and Ram Saraswati were equally proficient in the Sanskrit and produced numbers of works, still some of the Satras for instance Auniati Satra preserving the collection of Sanskrit manuscripts like Bhagavata-Cantos IX, VII-IX, Kumar Sambhav, Mahapuja Vidhi, Jyotish-Muktwali, Gopal Sahasra nam, Bhakti Kavya and Sri Hastamuktavali with a translation of Assamese prose. According to Dr. Nath the preparation and preservation of the manuscripts was once the respectable job inside and outside the Satras which was not only provided the vocation to many of the people but broaden the literature, knowledge, art and culture among the society (plate-4.35). It was due to popularity of this craft that despite immeasurable investment of hard labour and time numerous of Manuscripts had been produced and these manuscripts contributed extra ordinarily towards the cultivation of Assamese and Sanskrit literature in pre-modern era, but due to predominance of the modern technology preparing and preserving them in Majuli and other places has been no longer in practise today. This shows that any culture however much paying it
might have been in the past, would give away to one that holds superior technology and status. (Nath: 2009)

4.5 Study of Illustrated Ramayana: Sundarakanda Manuscript

The Significant illustrated Manuscript of Ramayana Sundarakanda is recovered from the Bengenaati Satra of Majuli by Pandit Hemchandra Goswami for preservation in the library of kamrup Anusandhan Samiti, Guwahati, according to the date mentioned in the manuscript its belongs to 1715 A.D and the illustrations represents the early phase styles of Satriya school of painting.

Narrations and illustrations of the manuscript are based upon a section of Sundarkanda from the epic of Ramayana, where sampati a mythical bird was telling Angada (King of the monkey army) and the other conquerors of the Sugriva’s (chief of monkey army) camp that Ravana abducted Sita and kept her in Lanka (palace of Ravana) then Angada with his company of conquerors processed to south sea along its north coast, where they accumulated followed by a discussion to search a audacious person who could jump over the enormous sea in one stride to reach Lanka and search out Sita. But nobody amongst them possesses the capability to jump the sea to arrive Lanka. By the time they made a consensus that only Hanuman (a valiant monkey deity) could do it (plate-4.36). Consequently jamavanta (a mythical elderly bear deity) made Hanuman to memorize his past glory and powers, and by recalling his past Hanuman realized his powers and assured to all the leaders that he would accomplish mission and proceed to Lanka, after arriving the Lanka Hanuman observed the entire city of Lanka in this course he came across with city life of the people and saw every nook and corner of his Palace and Lanka and found that inhabitant Raksas (demons) were engaged in different acts as well as reading Vedas, Ravana had abducted many women from different places and engaged in sexual activities and amusement with them. Later he saw Asoka-Vana (Palace-garden of Lanka) and at last he found sita, guarded by many demons under the giant tree. In the mean time, Ravana arrived at the place with his main consort and wife Mandodari and tried to convince Sita to surrender
herself to him (plate-4.37). But she refused to submit herself, due to this Ravana became annoyed and ordered the subordinate demons to frighten and convince Sita for Surrender. Hanuman was observing all this by hiding himself behind the leaves of the tree and the demons involved themselves to convince Sita to surrender by applying all the means but no use (plate-4.38) at last in the night they all became hopeless and tired and slept. Hanuman got the opportunity to come out from the tree and to introduce himself to Sita. In order to introduce himself he delivered a particular ring to her marked with the name of Rama and assured her to be relieved within no time (plate-4.39). Sita gave a sweet fruit to Hanuman with affection, as he requested her to give something to eat as he felt too hungry, after eating the fruit Hanuman found it very delicious and became eager to have more, but he advised by Sita that the fruit is available in the garden but protected by numerous demons then Hanuman disguise himself as a Brahmin and took permission from the keeper of the garden to have one fruit but he picked many fruits from the garden and this lead a fight between him and the demon guards, as a result hanuman killed and wounded many of the demons, within no time Ravana got the report of the incident and sent many other audacious demons to arrest hanuman but they also killed. Finally Indrajit elder son of the Ravana imprisoned Hanuman in a noose called naga-pas (plate-4.40, 4.41) and brought him in prison to the Ravana, as he wanted to kill him but his brother Vibhishana advised him not to kill so the Ravana ordered his men to set Hanuman’s tail on fire and abscond him free, as a result aggravated Hanuman burnt the Palace and city of the Lanka with his flaming tail and created havoc, after accomplished his mission Hanuman jumped into the sea and put out his tail from fire then he returned successfully back to Kishkindha and reported about Sita and all the incident to Rama, Angada, Sugriva and all others. After this all the camp of Rama including the army of Angada, Sugriva, and other marched to the Lanka to fight with Ravana and rescue Sita (plate-4.42). (Kalita: 2001)
4.6 Stylistic Analysis of Illustrated Ramayana- Sundarkanda Manuscript

**Basic features:** The paintings of Sundarakanda appears to be a sequence of the tradition of Satriya School, the artist here followed the paradigms of the Chitra-Bhagawata in the means of pictorial composition, conventional use of proportion, flat or two dimensional perspective, angularity, minimal use of landscape, linear manifestations of design, specifically repetition of the figures but interestingly placement of different characters, probably to break the monotony of the linear composition and symbolic hierarchal representations of the characters is remarkable. Beside some of the minute changes in the manner of application and draughtsmanship which varied artist to artist in the tradition.

**Colour chiaroscuro:** Almost in all the paintings brilliant primary colours has been used with contrast to each other, and palette is confined up to the red, blue, yellow and green. Artist didn’t attempt to represent the perspective, mass, volume, grades, texture and chiaroscuro with the colours. The objects and figures are filled by even flat colours. This might be due to the imaginative and symbolic interpretation in spite of realistic and practical approach. But artist achieved the success to represent the colour symbolism and balance, he comes forward from dark to light scheme gradually as green in the background, blue in the sky and water, then red and yellow applied in the foreground figures according to their importance specially in the outdoor prospects, whereas opposite to this if he has used blue, black and green in the foreground or in front figures he plumped for yellow and red in the background for an instance demons and Ravana painted in dark shades of blue and black then artist applied light green or red in the background. In most of the illustrations red is prominent in the background. Interestingly white and yellow has been used very sensibly in the costumes, arches or other places which creates balance to the contrast of the colours. Outlines of the figures and objects painted in black.
Architecture: Artist of these paintings is not much concerned to depict the architectural designs and all the details, architectures which represented here are confined to the basic rectangular shapes and there are no articulations in the shapes and design. Simplicity of the architectural designs might be occurs due to the less consciousness of the perspective representation or probably most of the Satriya painters belongs to the simple and remote background thus it is much complicated to them to imagine and depict the variations, complexity and dimensions of the architectural designs. Though this is the common aspect of the Satriya School, but artist closely tried to symbolically represent the variation among the different architectures.

Landscape: The natural and pictorial objects like hills, mountains, fields and sky are not concerned much in the illustrations though out of requirement hills and plains are painted in the wave like blocks with flat colours and each block imposed one above other, by differentiating them broad outlines. Objects are depicted without following any perspective thus the effect of distance is not appeared in the illustration sky is also painted in flat blue colour except some chromatic variation here and there, clouds are imposed on the blue flat sky or made by few wavy and spiracle lines of white colour with brush. Similarly water is bounded in a box and basket which shape confined up to the square, rectangular and horizontal in flat colours and the waves depicted through the rhythmic lines, due to this it seems very minimal and up to some extent it resembles to the abstract form. Field and plains painted in flat green shade where trees, leaves and flowers are painted in a folk manner and rendered in flat colour patches. Some aquatic animal like the fishes, alligator, tortoise and other appears characteristically folk and decorative.

Figures: As different elements and proportions has been used in the paintings of this manuscripts. It seems that all the illustrations were not accomplished by the same artist some of the figures are adequate, where two or three are disappointing and incomplete also, the manuscript unfortunately found in burnt
condition and not preserved properly. However, considering the main characters
the figures can be kept in three categories as figures of deities like Rama,
Lakshamana, and Sita. Figures of Demons like Ravana, Bibishana, Asura,
raksasis and the anthropomorphic forms like Hunuman, Sugriva, Angada,
Jambuvana, figures of first category like Rama and lakshmana are depicted in
generous moderate and elite gesture, anatomy of these figures are triangular,
chest are broad and compare to waist. Eyes are broad and seem parquetry
under the lifted arched eyebrows, hair styles of these figures are interesting and
peculiar which makes spiracle pattern from forehead to behind the neck, Face of
Sita is always calm and graceful. The figures of Demons are interesting in some
cases long tongue is coming out of the mouth and painted as of snake,
monstrous and horrible with bulky and heavy anatomy with broad chest and
shoulders carrying weapons, almost all such figures coloured deep blue or
similar to black, figure of Ravana is attractive and spread up in the composition
with ten heads and around fifteen arms and hands which appears horrifying. The
anthropomorphic figures are more close to the animal figures as the character of
Hanumana, Sugriva, Angada, and others looks like as monkeys of different
weight and volume which are not detailed, hairs of the body imposed with marks
of the brush, animal figures are ordinary elephants and horses are not as
practical as in Hastividyarnava. Some of these figures of Sundarakanda
expresses some meanings through the symbolic gestures of hands which is
Similar to the other Satriya school Paintings like Chitra-Bhagawata and Anadi-
patana, moreover the paintings towards second half of the manuscripts, figures
became more mature and better with less folk elements which shows that some
of learning or novice artists also practised their hands.

Costumes: Figures of the male deities are wearing a long cloth on the shoulders
over the neck and dhoti (lower garment) wrapped on both of the legs separately
with kamarbandh (a cloth tied over the waist). Some of the noble figures worn
Mughlai-pagdi (Turban) and mukutas (crowns) whereas the figures of demons
are only in dhotis; Ravana is bejewelled with some ornaments. Female figures
like Sita wearing a blouse above the waist portion and a sari over it, anthropomorphic figures are painted without clothes though in some of the cases like Jambuvana, Sugriva, Nala, Nila and Bali wearing the dhoti and crown.

Paintings of the Ramayana-Sundarkanda besides the folk and conventional treatments certainly demonstrate the effort and talent of the artist as he successfully used the each n every possibilities of the lines to individualize the characters through the outlines and linear texture to represent the rhythm, motion, force and dimensions of the object and that of within the limited colour palette. Artist remarkably used his imagination according to the text and made live all the characters allegorically on the surface, which perceived the par excellence to express the extract of the words.

4.7 Conclusion

The art of manuscript illustration or miniature painting of Assam significantly marked its progression in the medieval period which undoubtedly rooted by the ideology of social and cultural reformation of Vaisnavism. As these paintings were not prejudiced by the palate contentment or shallow enjoyment thus the sole objective of the paintings is to convey the sacred themes of the epic and puranic lore. Most of these illustrated manuscripts of Satriya style represent the distinctive style developed in Assam in the form of miniature painting are executed on Aloe bark (Sanchi-pat) and indigenously ginned cotton paper called Tula-pat. The art of paintings in Assam are mainly available in the form of manuscripts illustrations and prominently practised on the rectangular format of the Satriya or royal manuscripts, Tai-Ahom Buddhist manuscripts and some other manuscripts of Hinduism including the less amount of cloth painting on muga-silk. These manuscripts paintings can be divided into three main categories of Tai-Ahom school, Ahom School or Garhgaon School and the Satriya School. The designs patterns of the Chitra-Bhavata have been continued as traditional style by the painters of Satriya School is appears more indigenous in approach and developed under the sacred Vaisnavite environment of the various Satras and in direct response of Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankardeva.
consequently the theme of almost all of Satriya school was life and events of Lord Krishna and the Bhagawat Purana. While the Darang and Garhgaon School of Manuscript painting was patronized by the Kochs and Ahoms respectively. Darang School in style more or less persuaded or related to the Satriya School and emerged with more sophistication as in the illustration of Tirtha-Kaumudi and Anadi-patan manuscripts. On the other hand Ahom School mainly executed the translation works like Illustrations Ananda -Lahari and Gita- Govinda and some original secular works like Hastividyarnava (painted by imported artists from northern India Dilbar and Dosai). The manuscript paintings patronized by the court represents the progressive combination of Rajasthani, Moghal, and indigenous style which profoundly flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The art of manuscripts paintings developed in Majuli prominently depict the Satriya style of painting in presentation and thematically imbued with Vaisnava cult, moreover vitally contributed to wide spread the themes of Neo-Vaisnavism through brilliant colours and interesting interpretations of characters, all these manuscripts are conventional in style and techniques and religious in motif. The artists were more concerned to the narrations in spite of exposure of their visual and technical accomplishment hence the paintings of Satriya manuscript embedded with angular convention, linear compositions, flat colours mainly yellow, green and red, and lack of perspective.

Illustrated Ramayan: Sundarkanda manuscript observed in the present study from Bengenaati Satra followed the similar trends and reveals that the solitary aim of the Assamese miniature paintings indeed Satriya manuscripts is to illustrate the narrations of epics and puranic tales to convey the message of the emerging Bhakti-cult (Neo-Vaisnavism) in the form of line and vivid colours, which entrenched by the Sankardeva in sixteenth century. Simultaneously these manuscripts contributed extensively to usher the education and learning, literature and fine art including culture and socio-religious harmony among the society for centuries.
Plate 4.01 Manuscripts in collection of State Museum, Assam

Plate 4.02 Manuscripts in collection of Auniati Satra Museum, Majuli
Plate 4.03 Manuscript on Sanchi pat

Plate 4.04 Manuscript on Sanchi pat

Plate 4.05 Manuscript on Sanchi pat preserved in Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam
Plate 4.06 Manuscript on Tulapat

Plate 4.07 Manuscript on Tulapat preserved in K.K Handique Library, Guwahati

Plate 4.08 Manuscript on Tulapat preserved in Dakhinpat Satra
Plate 4.09 Illustrated Chitra Bhagwata Manuscript

Plate 4.10 Chitra Bhagwata preserved in K.K Handique Library

Plate 4.11 Illustration of Chitra Bhagwata
Plate 4.12 Carved wooden box of Manuscript

Plate 4.13 Painted wooden box of Manuscript

Plate 4.14 Painted wooden box of Manuscript
Plate 4.15 Decorative floral motifs on the borders of Manuscript

Plate 4.16 Geometric and Figurative decorations on the borders of Manuscript

Plate 4.17 Geometric and Floral decorations on the borders of Manuscript
Plate 4.18 Illustration of Anadi Patana Manuscript

Plate 4.19 Illustration of Anadi Patana

Plate 4.20 Illustration of Anadi Patana, Darang School
Plate 4.21 Leaf Marked by 'Sri' and followed by Numbering, Darang School

Plate 4.22 Leaf Marked by 'Sri', Bahgwata Manuscript of Satriya School

Plate 4.23 Particular Area of Painting 'Alekhya Sthana', Darang School
Plate 4.24 Illustration of Luva-Kusa Manuscript Garhgaon School

Plate 4.25 Illustration of Geet-Govinda Manuscript Garhgaon School

Plate 4.26 Illustration of Luva-Kusa, Garhgaon School
Plate 4.30 Colour Scheme of Hastividynava Manuscript

Plate 4.31 Style of costumes in Hastividynava Manuscripts

Plate 4.32 Practise of Portraiture in Hastividynava Manuscript
Plate 4.39 Ramayana-Sundarkanda, Bengenaati Satra, Majuli

Plate 4.40
Plate 4.41 Illustration of Ramayana Sundarkanda

Plate 4.42 Illustration of Ramayana Sundarkanda
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