



Study of Lord Krishna Theme in Indian Painting under various context

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Introduction: The inspirations provided by the Bhāgavata Purāṇa gave rise also to devotional poetry in many Indian languages: Braja Bhasa in the north;

Gujarati in the west; Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada in the south; and Bengali, Oriya, and Asamiya in the east. By the fifteenth century there was a vast body of poetry, which was not



only the preserve of the elite or Sanskrit speaking, but was the language and literature of the high and the low, the affluent and the poor.

Painting, music, dance, and theater were the visual, aural, and kinetic counterparts of this powerful and pervasive movement. Any account of the Krishna theme in Indian painting has

necessarily to recognize the rise of Vaishnavism, the popular *bhakti* movement, and the impact of the poetry of the *bhakti* poet-saints.

Krishna theme in Indian mural painting : Evidence of the Krishna theme in Indian mural painting has to be traced to the magnificent large-scale depiction of the theme in South India, particularly Kerala. The Padmanabhapuram palace, the Mattancherry palace of Cochin (18th century), and the Padmanabhaswami temple (17th century) murals are striking examples of a distinctive style of painting that is analogous to the performing arts tradition of the region, particularly Kathakali.

However, by the fifteenth century and more particularly the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was a prolific popularity of miniature paintings based on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the Gītā Govinda. Later, the poetry of Suradas, Keshavadasa, Bihari, and other poets became the backdrop or springboard for their pictorial visualization of the theme. The paintings have been





considered as mere illustrations of the text. However, a closer analysis reveals that the painters employed a variety of means to create their own visual text, which did not literally follow the verbal text.

Buddhism had practically disappeared from India, its place of origin, by the eighth century A.D. Its associated art too declined, leaving an artistic bridge to be spanned.

The Vaishnava revival of the 11 and 12 centuries brought about by Ramanuja and saint poets like Jayadeva of Bengal gradually established Krishna as the supreme deity, the approachable glorious Vishnu. Jayadeva's Gita Govindam, the song of the divine cowherd, echoed the poet's deep spirituality, with Krishna as the human soul attached to earthly pleasures, and Radha the wise divine.

The enchanted gopis were the five senses – smell, touch, sight, taste and hearing. Krishna's return to Radha was the surrender of the repentant, to God.

Guru Gobind Singh [1675-1708] was not just a soldier—he was a poet-scholar, well-versed in Persian, Hindi and Sanskrit, who wrote on the legends of Rama and Krishna. He also had 52 bards in his permanent employ.

Kesavadas, a Brahmin from Orcha, Bundelkhand, was the court poet of Indrajit Shah of Orcha. His 'Baramasa [12 months] and Rasikapriya [in 1591] are both immortal works: the latter details various emotions and legends of the Krishna theme.

The Mughal connection

Art closely followed poetry and literature, making for a truly divine combination, and the scenic beauty of the Kangra Valley made exquisite settings for the painted tableaux. These paintings were first influenced by the Mughals, their occupation of the Punjab and Himachal showing in the Islamic influence on painted beards and clothes. With Sikh ascendancy and royal patronage, the later Kangra paintings showed longer beards, and a Punjabi style of apparel.

The delicacy of the Kangra and Pahari paintings were heavily based on the weight of the Krishna theme—its legends brought out vividly by the painter's brush. Exotic symbolism was re-enacted by the imaginative painter. The beauty of the female, the hilly landscape, the Beas river valley, its rivulets and streams, terraced fields along the low hills of the Dhauladhar range and trees such as the peepal, mango and plantain brought Krishna alive — living his delightful life, as one of



the denizens of the village. All local events had the divine couple of Radha and Krishna as central characters, as the hero and heroine.

The divine flautist : In the Guler painting, ‘The divine flautist’ Krishna stands on a large lotus flower, playing the flute. He is surrounded by gopis, whose only interest is Krishna, while a couple of cowherds appear to be looking, a little furtively, at the divine scene.

One gopi is offering betel leaf to the lord, another waves the chauri, yet another is fanning the lord, while another is tugging at his upper cloth or uttariya, to gain his attention.

Cows and calves are nearby, ever attached to Krishna and even the fish in the Yamuna are up in the water, attracted by the magic of his flute. Gods and gandharvas rain flowers from the sky,



enchanted by the earthly Muralikrishna.

Melody of Spring : This shows Krishna growing up happy and carefree in Brindavan, safe from Kamsa. He sings and dances along the river, with devoted gopis providing the percussion. Even the dhol is covered in floral painted fabric, the pastoral scene a simple floral delight.

Delightful portrayal

‘Driving the flock’ is just too delightful a portrayal of the Krishna theme. Yashoda’s cherished pet, the little Krishna, is off to graze the cows, along with Balarama, his brother. Yashoda gives a stick to Krishna, to drive the herd. Balarama is shown as a chubby and happy boy. His priorities



are clear, depicted by the many laddus being wrapped in his waistcloth, ready for feasting later, in the woods. A lady holds a plateful of laddus- simple joyful treats.

‘**Feast in the forest**’ shows a gang of boys sitting down to lunch in a clearing—the leaf plates and ‘donnais’ are filled with delicacies. The rich and the poor are enjoying the repast together—Krishna, the provider and the protector of all.

Holi, the festival of colour, has long projected joy. Krishna and his mates happily spray maidens with the red coloured water, refilling their sprayers from pots carried by some others of the gang. Singing and dancing is part of the revelry.

‘**Krishna’s magic flute**’ shows him alone, playing just for his love of music, and for other beings. A pair of cranes, cows in all shades, trees, flowers, the forked lightning and other cowherds—all get transfixed in sheer ecstasy. The river too seems to leave its course, taking a bend towards Krishna and his melody. The tinkling bells of the cows and their taut tails all show rapt reaction to the ethereal flute.

The engrossed twosome wander among the glades by the river, sit down on a branch of the bauhinia, under a mango tree near a plantain grove. In the Gita Govindam, Jayadeva narrates the separation and reconciliation of Radha and Krishna, as a pastoral drama. Radha sits alone by a tree, while Krishna dances with gopis, afar. A gopi brings Radha news of Krishna – “There he is, the sky-coloured figure, anointed with sandal, enrobed in gold, wearing a garland of wild flowers and forest leaves. The pacified Radha meets Krishna in a garden of tamaala trees, with atimukta creepers flowering freely. Krishna has spread His blanket on the ground and they sit on it, with Krishna devotedly braiding Radha’s hair. She has eyes only for Him, while the birds, lotus blooms, peacocks and dark clouds create the perfect romantic setting.

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