

COLLECTION

An Illustrated Manuscript

The western Indian style of painting, in which religious Jaina paper manuscripts were illustrated from about the end of the fourteenth century, distinguishes itself with its vibrant colours and the jewel-like quality of the miniatures. The main characteristics of these manuscript illustrations are the brilliant hues of red, blue and gold, highly accomplished drawing, stereotyped postures of the body, exaggerated chests and waists, three-quarter profile of the faces, long pointed noses, with the eye on the farther side drawn in full so that it protrudes into space beyond the line of the cheek. The human figures are draped in elaborately patterned costumes which reflect the rich tradition of embroidered and printed textiles of Gujarat. Another interesting feature of this school is that the two ends of the upper garment, for both men and women, are spread out like wings on either side of the body. Architectural elements are often incorporated into the compositions. Some of these elements may indeed reflect contemporary life but in these miniatures they have become highly stylised.

Though a great majority of the manuscripts illustrated in this style

pertain to the two hagiographical works of the Jainas, the *Kalpasutra* and the *Kalakacaryakatha*, often copied together in the same codex, a few manuscripts of Vaisnava and Sakta texts, such as the *Bhagavata-purana*, *Gitagovinda*, *Balagopalastuti* and *Devimahatmya*, are also extant.

But so far we know of very few manuscripts of non-sectarian or secular texts illustrated in this style. The most notable of these is the scroll of the *Vasantavilasa*, now in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington DC. The scroll (some 11 mts long and 23.5 cms wide) was copied and painted at Ahmedabad in 1451 during the reign of Sultan Qutbuddin for the merchant Candrapala of the Srimala clan. The *Vasantavilasa* is a poem in Old Gujarati, celebrating spring, a popular theme in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The poems' motifs are the passage of winter, the arrival of spring, trees sprouting forth fresh leaves and flowers and Kamadeva's supreme reign over the hearts of the young. The poetic treatment of this theme is known as *phagu*, a word derived from the Sanskrit *phalgu*, denoting the coloured powder people play with during the spring festival, Holi, and

A manuscript of the Prakrit drama, Karpuramanjari, composed by Rajasekhara towards the end of the ninth or the beginning of the tenth century, was illustrated in the western Indian style of painting. Now in the personal collection of Dr SD Kaushik, this manuscript with its twenty nine folios and thirteen miniature paintings, is an important document for both textual criticism and art history, says

Sreeramula Rajeswara Sarma



Painting 1
(flv)

The play opens with a salutation to Sarasvati. The manuscript also begins with a painting of the Goddess of Learning who is revered by Jainas as well. There are several sculptures of Sarasvati in Jaina temples and she is also depicted in Jaina manuscripts. However, this is perhaps the only miniature in this style where she is delineated in a most elaborate manner. Unfortunately, the painting is considerably damaged

The goddess, represented with four arms, is seated in an ornate mandapa. Unlike the poetic conception of the goddess as dressed in white like the autumnal moonlight, here she has a very colourful apparel: a green blouse and a skirt with geometrical and floral patterns. On either side are two worshippers, obviously priests. The one on the right hand side is waving a camara. The background is painted in red and ultramarine and the decorations and ornaments are executed in white. The artist's favourite motif is the frieze of hamsas, which he employs in almost every painting. Here, it embellishes the arch and the pedestal of the mandapa



Painting 2
(f2r; legend:
SUTRADHARA)

This miniature depicts the Sutradhara with three musicians, all standing in graceful postures beneath an elaborate canopy. All the conventional elements of this school of painting are assembled here. Yet this is a unique composition because it is the only illustration of the Sutradhara and his retinue known to us. The four figures sport a U-shaped mark on their foreheads. The Sutradhara, as is evident from his attire, will play the role of the hero. The musicians play the drum, the trumpet and the flute respectively. Significantly, the flute is not held in front of the face but behind the back like the cowherd's stick. Such depictions occur elsewhere in this manuscript as well as in other Kalpasutra illustrations. The gay abandon of music can be seen not only in the postures of the musicians but also in their facial expressions

Crimson red and blue are the dominant colours but gold is also lavishly used for ornaments, the borders of the billowing clothes and the trumpet. The artist differentiates between the complexions of the four: two are fairer and painted in yellow and the other two are darker and painted tawny. The Manasollasa, in fact, recommends that different colours should be used for different classes of people but here variety is introduced for purely decorative reasons. The alternate arrangement of lighter and darker shades lends a rare charm to this composition



Painting 3
(f3v; legend:
RAJA VIDUSAKA)

After the prologue, the Sutradhara enters the stage in the role of the hero, a naked sword in his right hand indicating that he is the king. He is accompanied by the queen and the Vidusaka. One frequent motif in the Kalpasutra illustrations is a scene depicting King Siddhartha and Queen Trisala, the parents of Jina Mahavira, or the royal parents of other Tirthankaras, seated in the court under elaborate umbrellas or canopies. This motif inspired the artist to paint the king and the queen in the conventional mode of the Kalpasutra illustrations

The king is seated cross-legged on an ornate throne, the queen on a high seat, possibly a wickerwork modha. The queen wears her hair in a long braid, as do all women in this genre of painting. She is dressed in a green blouse and her lower garment is decorated with the artist's favourite motif of swans, hamsa-dukula

Between the two stands the young Vidusaka, dressed in a short white dhoti. The lustrous effect is achieved by painting white over silver. His upper garment passes over his chest as a narrow golden strip, its ends spreading out like wings on either side. His posture and the jaunty beard, rather than his solemn facial expression, betray him to be the jester. He is darker in complexion than the high-born king and queen

also in the spring season. The *phagu* poems, consisting of *muktaka* type of independent stanzas somewhat loosely strung together, were apparently sung and perhaps also accompanied by dance. An earlier form of *phagu* can be seen in the opening scenes of Harsadeva's *Ratnavali* and in Rajasekhara's *Karpuramanjari*, where people vie with one another to recite songs in praise of spring. The manuscripts of the *Vasantavilasa* still retain the original prototypes — each stanza in Old Gujarati is followed by one or more parallel stanzas in Sanskrit and/or Prakrit taken from the

classical poems of Kalidasa up to medieval times.

In the illustrated scroll of the *Vasantavilasa*, the text is written in black, red, or occasionally in blue, but each fifth section is written in gold letters upon a red background. After each section consisting of the original stanza in Old Gujarati and its parallels in Sanskrit and Prakrit, the theme of this section is illustrated in a panel that occupies the entire width of the scroll. The beginning of the scroll is damaged and out of the estimated 84 panels some 79 survive. These miniature paintings share all

the conventions of the manuscript illustrations of the Jains but have a much wider range from lyrical settings of spring to unabashed depictions of sexual acrobatics. There are some technical shortcomings in the execution but this is compensated by the love of nature that permeates throughout. Norman Brown, who brought out an excellent edition of this text, together with facsimile illustrations, wrote in 1962 that the '*Vasantavilasa* is the only one of the very few secular works which uses it (ie this style) and the only one with an extensive series of illustrations'.



Painting 4
(f4r; legend:
VAITALIKA 2)

The play opens with the king and the queen reciting verses in praise of the spring which is just beginning. The two Vaitalikas also sing a song each on this felicitous theme. In drama, Vaitalikas never appear on the stage but always speak from behind the curtain. In this charming miniature, the artist decided to illustrate them nevertheless

The painting is considerably smaller in size and does not occupy the entire height of the manuscript like the others. But, once again, the artist transcends the conventional formalism and depicts the joy of singing both in the facial expressions and physical postures of the Vaitalikas. He also distinguishes between the two by their complexions and the markings on their foreheads. At first sight, these appear to be the distinctive marks of the Vaisnava and the Saiva sects respectively. But, in Jaina manuscripts, the U-shaped tilaka, and occasionally the horizontal tripundra are generally applied to all men except monks. Here, these two types of marks do not signify any difference in sectarian affiliation but just a variation in decorative devices

Recently, I was fortunate in locating the manuscript of another secular text illustrated in this style, now in the private collection of my colleague Dr SD Kaushik. It is the manuscript of the Prakrit drama *Karpuramanjari* composed by Rajasekhara towards the end of the ninth or the beginning of the tenth century.

Unlike the other plays where characters use both Sanskrit and Prakrit, this one is composed entirely in Prakrit and is, therefore, classified as *sattaka* in Indian dramaturgy. Hitherto, this was thought to be the

only extant *sattaka*, but in recent years, a number of other plays of this genre have been discovered and published. However, all these are later imitations of the *Karpuramanjari*, which remains the pre-eminent example of this style.

A brief colophon states that the manuscript was completed on *Samvat 1534 varse phalguna vadi 9 guruvara*, which corresponds to Thursday, 26 February 1478 AD, but does not mention the name of the scribe, the painter or of the patron who may have commissioned this illuminated

copy. However, it appears that the copyist and the artist are two different persons.

The manuscript consists of 29 folios, measuring 26.8 x 10 centimetres. There are some thirteen miniature paintings in the manuscript, executed on the right hand side of the page. They occupy the entire height of the folio which is about 10 centimetres and, their width ranges between 8.8 and 10 centimetres. Though the paintings on the first and the last folios are partially rubbed off, the manuscript is generally in an excellent state of preservation.



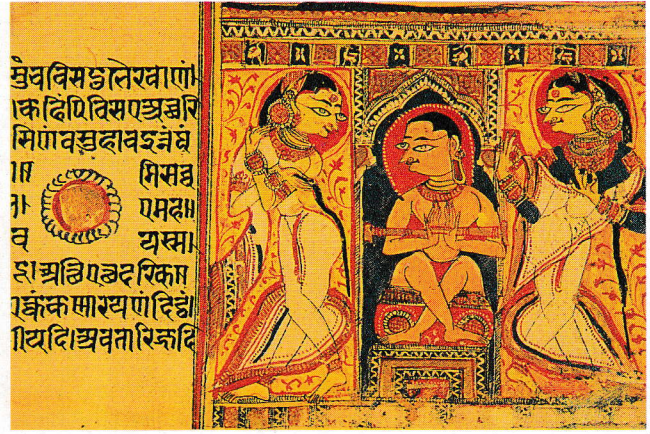
Painting 5
(f4v legend:
VIDUSAKA CETI)

While the court was thus in a mood of gaiety, each competing with the other in reciting songs in praise of spring, an argument ensues between the jester and the maid Vicaksana about their respective intellectual and poetic abilities. The Vidusaka claims scholarly inheritance because his father-in-law's father-in-law had once carried palmleaf books. This humorous interlude is powerfully captured by our artist

Vicaksana, an important character in the development of the play, is richly dressed in a green blouse and a skirt with rosette designs. Between the two, there is a plaque on the wall with a pair of geese, also engaged in an argument. The wings of the foremost goose are stretched out like the arms of the arguing Vidusaka and Vicaksana



Above:
Painting 6
(f7v legend:
BHAIRAVANANDA
VIDUSAKA 2 rupa)



Right:
Painting 7
(f8r; legend:
BHAIRAVANANDA
VIDUSAKA
KARPURAMANJARI)

Soon the Vidusaka loses the argument to the superior wit of Vicaksana and walks out in a huff. Outside he runs into Bhairavananda, an adept of the heretic Kaula cult. Overawed by his magnetic personality, Vidusaka re-enters the audience chamber to announce him to the king

Though the legend Bhairavananda Vidusaka 2 rupa, states that the two figures (rupa) of the heretic and jester are to be painted, the artist decides otherwise and paints instead the heretic and the king, because their encounter is far more important. Also, scenes depicting the encounter between the Jaina monk, Kalaka, and the foreign king are the stock-in-trade of the illustrators of the Kalakacaryakatha, and these became the models for the artist. The result is that the flamboyant Bhairavananda looks like a serene Jaina monk. The artist, of course, invests Bhairavananda with what may perhaps be a yogapatta but it is doubtful if heretic priests of the Kaula sect ever wore it

Bhairavananda brags about the wonders he can perform, and the Vidusaka asks him to produce a beautiful maiden he had once seen in a distant land. Lo and behold! The heroine Karpuramanjari is instantly transported from her royal bath in the kingdom of Vidarbha to the court of our king

The miniature shows two women, one on either side of Bhairavananda. Karpuramanjari is to his right. He is looking at her, apparently in great wonder at his own magical prowess. The near transparent cloth and the bare bosom suggests that she has just emerged from the bath. The other woman, apparently a maid, is offering her a piece of cloth. In the play it is Vidusaka who offers his upper cloth to the heroine to sit upon. The copyist obviously wished that Vidusaka be portrayed in this scene, for he mentions him in the legend. But, the artist substitutes him with the more decorative maid. The lower ends of the garments worn by these women fall to the ground in a heart-shaped pattern. This is again a mannerism typical of this school

It is the second oldest manuscript of the play and is closer in point of time and provenance to the oldest one, which was copied in Samvat 1528. Its value in determining the text of the *Karpuramanjari* cannot, therefore, be underestimated. Also, this is the only illustrated manuscript of a play known to us. The reason why it was chosen for illustration is not because it too deals with the spring season. In fact, only the first two acts contain what can be termed as an earlier form of *phagu*. Significantly, all the

illustrations but one, are related to the first two acts. Again, in the *Vasantavilasa*, three stanzas from the *Karpuramanjari* are cited as parallels. Thus, this Prakrit drama seems to have been seen by the literati of fifteenth century Gujarat as closely akin to *phagu* literature. It may also have been staged.

In point of style, however, the paintings are closer to the *Kalpasutra* illustrations of the fifteenth century than to those of the *Vasantavilasa*.

Wherever it is possible, the artist tries to adapt the limited repertoire of the religious illustrations of the *Kalpasutra* to the erotic theme of the *Karpuramanjari*, but occasionally he also manages to go beyond the convention to produce original compositions.

The obverse side of the first folio carries the title of the manuscript in the words *Karpuramanjari satta*. The expression *satta* is another form of the word *sattaka*, ie the type to



Above:
Painting 8
(f12v)

In the second act, *Karpuramanjari* sends the king a love letter written on the scented petal of the ketaki flower. The king unfolds the letter and reads it aloud. The copyist probably desired an illustration of this scene because he left space in the folio but omitted to write the appropriate legend. The artist filled the blank with a painting of the queen who is seated in a mandapa similar to the one occupied by Sarasvati at the beginning of the manuscript. There are two maids on either side of the queen, one of whom is holding a vina in her hand. This painting does not quite fit here, nor in fact in any other folio because after the first act the queen does not appear on the stage until about the end of the play

However, this painting reveals what was missing in the damaged portion of opening folio: two hamsas above the mandapa holding lotus stalks in their beaks and, next to them, two heavenly musicians — half-human and half-bird — playing on trumpet and flute. These are apparently meant to be kinnaras, but this is indeed a rare composite form of delineation

Right:
Painting 9
(f14v)

Returning to the narrative of the play, after the king reads the letter from *Karpuramanjari*, the maid Vicaksana tells him that the heroine is suffering greatly from the ardour of her love. In the painting she is shown reclining on a couch under an elaborate canopy. In *Kalpasutra* manuscripts, there are often nativity scenes with the royal mother of the Tirthankara reposing on a bed. The artist imitates these readily available models in depicting the heroine in her state of a *virahotkanthita*



Painting 10
(fr15v)

The Vidusaka and Vicaksana arrange for the king to see the heroine when she goes to the pleasure garden to perform the various rites of the spring festival. The first rite is connected with the swing. The artist takes great pains to depict Karpuramanjari on a swing. There are intricate arches and banners above the swing and the entire composition is decorated with the artist's favourite motif of rows of swans. The picture is filled with too much detail and appears heavy and static, while the theme is the movement of the swing and the jingle of the heroine's ankle bells. In a comparison, lyrical painting on the same theme in the Vasantavilasa, which shows the hero and heroine on swings in the midst of flowering trees and humming bees, is infused with light and movement



Painting 11
(fr17v)

The next spring rite to be performed by Karpuramanjari, and a rare illustration, is the dohada of trees, ie, to bring to blossom kuruvaka, tilaka and asoka trees by respectively embracing, glancing at and kicking them. This is a favourite motif in Sanskrit poetry. In the stage presentation of the play, Karpuramanjari performs the three acts successively. But, in the painting, the artist, with an admirable degree of economy, makes Karpuramanjari and her two maids perform the three acts simultaneously. On the left, a maid embraces the kuruvaka, in the middle another maid looks keenly at the tilaka, and on the right Karpuramanjari kicks the asoka with her foot. The three highly stylised trees have already brought forth flowers. In fact, there is no difference between the asoka on the right and the kuruvaka on the left

which this play belongs. Indeed, *satta* seems to be a common form of the word in medieval Gujarat as it occurs also in the shorter version of the *Vasantavilasa*. The title is followed by a fourfold mention of *rama* which suggests that it was copied by a Hindu and not a Jaina.

On each folio page, there are nine lines of text. The top line is perfectly straight, written apparently on a previously laid out guideline. On either side of the text, broad borders

drawn in red are superimposed on gold. If there is a painting, borders are also drawn on either side of it. On the first folio, an ornament in light blue is added to the borders but this practice is not continued in the later pages.

In the centre of each page is a circular red dot with a 12 millimetre diameter, painted upon gold and surrounded by stylised light blue petals. This dot has no apparent function in a paper manuscript. It is

just a reminiscence of the central hole in palmleaf manuscripts through which the rope for fastening the manuscripts passes. On the reverse side of each folio, such dots are also painted in the two margins. Usually, folio numbers are written on these marginal dots but in this manuscript they merely, play a decorative role.

The copyist first drew the borders, then marked off the space for painting (*alekhyasthana*), and often wrote in fine letters at the top of the



Painting 12
(f18r)

While Karpuramanjari is thus performing the rites of the spring festival, the king and the Vidusaka are watching her surreptitiously from behind a dark tamala tree. The illustration is done in so formal a manner that one would hardly recognise the theme. This could well have been a court scene but for the fact that the king is depicted standing. An amusing aspect of this painting is that the artist, in a burst of eclecticism or out of absent-mindedness, changes the marks on the foreheads of the king and the Vidusaka that until now were U-shaped. Here these two appear suddenly with different marks

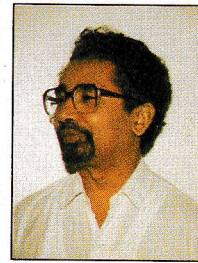


Painting 13
(f29v)

After this encounter between the hero and heroine in the pleasure garden, things take a serious turn. There are palace intrigues: the queen becomes jealous and imprisons Karpuramanjari but the king meets her through a subterranean passage and so on. But these dramatic events of the third and fourth acts are not illustrated. The next and final illustration shows the 'Happy End'. For this scene, the artist once again chooses the same architectural composition as for the painting of Sarasvati and the queen. While heavenly musicians play on the trumpet and flute, while gods shower blessings, the king and heroine are united in wedlock

right hand margin the subject of the painting to be executed. He then copied the entire text and passed on the manuscript to the artist for painting the illustrations. Of the thirteen paintings in the manuscript, six carry such legends. But the artist did not always follow these instructions.

Having thus described the general outlay of the text and illustrations and the relation of the copyist and the artist, we can look at the miniature paintings consecutively and examine the themes and incidents they depict



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