

Manuscript tradition of Assam

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Assam, a north-eastern state of India has a rich history of its tradition, art and culture. The Major part of Assamese traditional painting is covered by the manuscript paintings. The *Bhakti* movement launched by *Saint Sankaradeva* (1449-1568 A.D.) gave a definite shape to Assam School of Painting, more particularly the *Sattras* School of Painting. The rich tradition had a set back with the British rule in the 19th century. So far, one hundred and fifty illustrated manuscripts have been discovered in Assam. Some of these illustrated manuscripts have able to draw the attention of scholars of India and outside because of some inherent peculiarity and distinctiveness of painting.

The craftsmen responsible for the creation of paintings and penmanship were known as *khanikars*. Their devotion to the movement guided them to render many numbers of paintings in a single manuscript. Assamese illustrated manuscript were generally drawn on *Sanchipat*, the bark of Agar (Scientific name - *aquaria agallocha*) tree, *Tulapat* (hand made paper pulp), wooden plate and to a lesser extent in *Muga* clothes. *Sanchipat* is the unique writing material of Assam and can't find in other parts of India.

Manuscript paintings of Assam were a vibrant form of art since 16th century onwards. Very few artists of *sattras* kept the flame burning till the early 20th century in spite of many hurdles that came their way. However, at the same time, there was increased interest among academics about the preservation and study of these manuscripts. At present, there are only a handful of artists who are practicing manuscript painting and writing in Assam. These few artists are hopeful that the involvement of a large number of dedicated artists may help in the promotion of manuscript paintings in Assam in the near future.

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