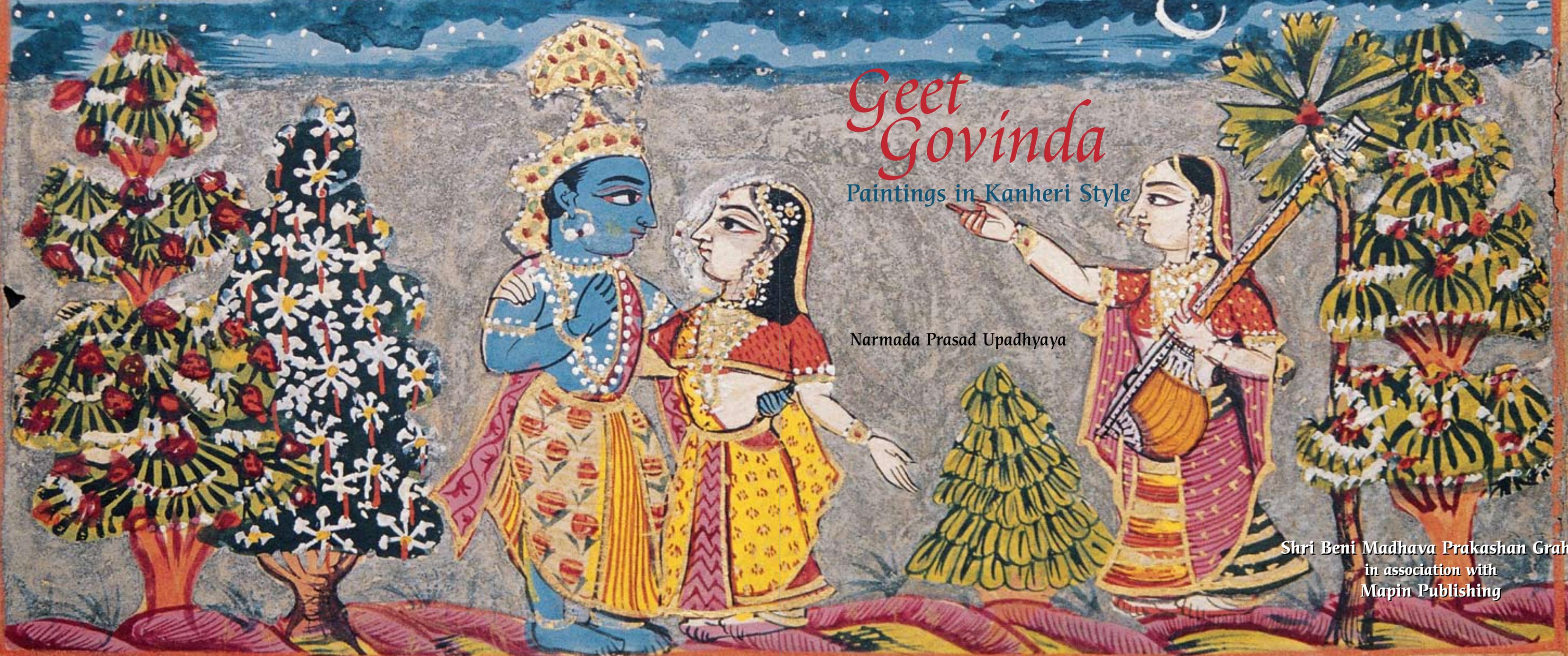


# Geet Govinda

Paintings in Kanheri Style

Narmada Prasad Upadhyaya

Shri Beni Madhava Prakashan Graha  
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*Dedicated to the memory of  
Late Shankar Shri Krishna Dev,  
who searched and preserved  
this unique and eternal  
cultural heritage of our  
glorious tradition forever.*

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During medieval times when Muslims had seized power, the name Kanhadesh changed to Khandesh. Kan Bai, associated with Krishna, is a popular deity of this region and this fact leads credence to the popular belief that the original name of this region was Kanhadesh.

The transformation of Radha vis-à-vis Kan Bai, began slowly. Kan Bai, Kanha Devi and Moga Devi are just simple transformations of Radha. In a village called Dev Mogra in Shahada Tehsil, two small sculptures stand in the Mogadevi Temple. The metal sculpture is called Moga Devi or Kalimata. This is probably an image of Radha since the idol holds a *matki*, pot, in her hands. The other sculpture is that of Krishna, which is easily identified.

The local people, particularly the Patils, even now sing the verses of *Geet Govinda* in the regional dialect. The Rasa dance tradition continues in a dance called Hallisak performed in Khandesh. The tribals of the village gather together at night, around a wooden pillar. They form a circle and dance, emulating in their own way the famous Rasa dance of Brij.

The tradition of preserving *Geet Govinda* manuscripts also continues in Khandesh. One of these is in the possession of Shri Triyambak Shastri, aged 75 years. He has had the *pothi*, manuscript, has in his family for four generations. Dr. Shivaji Devre has provided a detailed list of manuscripts, which he found in Khandesh. These manuscripts are in a language which is a blend of Brij and the local language. The verses include conversations between the *duti*, messenger, and Radha; and the *duti* and Krishna. A comparison between these verses and the *ashtapadis* of *Geet Govinda* makes clear the similarities between the two. A unique

tradition endures in Khandesh that when these *pothis* become old, they are submerged in a river and are rewritten afresh.

The illustrated manuscript of *Geet Govinda*, found in Dhule, is said to have been painted in Prakasha, which is located on the bank of the River Tapti and has as many as 104 temples.

Prakasha was earlier known as Akashnagari. It was also known as Prateek Kashi, or 'symbolic Kashi', since the indigent masses could not afford to go all the way to Kashi for a *darshan*, glimpse, of Vishvanath. In the course of time, Prateek Kashi changed into Prati Kashi, and is now called Prakasha. I was informed by the officials of Samarth Wagdevta Mandir that they had no knowledge regarding the illustrated manuscript of *Geet Govinda*, which was discovered by Shri Krishna Dev. The history of this *mandir*, temple, is quite old. Shri Shankar Shri Krishna Dev, who was also known as Nana Saheb Dev, founded it in 1935. He was a political and social activist and a lawyer by profession. He was a follower of Guru Samarth Ram Da, a great saint of his times, the mighty Guru of Shivaji and the author of *Dasbodha*. Shri Dev established Satkaryottejaksabha in 1892. In 1935, this Sabha was known as Samarth Wagdevta Mandir i.e. the temple of the god of learning. It is also, in fact, a museum where several art objects and manuscripts are preserved and is used as a library. An idol of Ramdasa which is worshipped by visiting scholars is enshrined in the library. More than 10,000 manuscripts are preserved in the temple and out of these 3,500 catalogued manuscripts have been numbered. The *Geet Govinda* bears 'bad' number 2234.

The illustrated *Geet Govinda* contains 290 miniatures. Two folios have not been illustrated. Each illustration has a suitable Sanskrit caption.

The last miniature bears the colophon below:

Temburanpure Likhitam Raghav Ramen  
Shri Sadashivam Diyate Kshetram Prati  
Samvatsar 1822 shake 1687 Parthiv Naam  
Samvatsare Hemant Ritu.

This indicates that the illustrations of the *Geet Govinda* go back 236 years. It is obvious that it was completed after execution in CE 1765. The paper, which is used for the preparation of manuscript, was found, after minute examination, to be more than 200 years old.

Another illustrated *Geeta Govinda* executed in the style was also found in the Samarth Wagdevta Mandir. This *Geeta Govinda* is also quite old. It is quite likely that both the manuscripts were illustrated simultaneously by the same set of artists. A notable point about the colophon is that there is some rewriting over the text. After thorough examination, it could be deduced that rewriting was done to rejuvenate the original text. There is no rewriting on the recorded years of execution.

No substantial information regarding Raghav Ramen, who is mentioned in the colophon, is available in spite of exhaustive attempts to trace his history or lineage. Sadashiv Kshetra, also mentioned in the colophon, is undoubtedly Prakasha, which other religious sources have verified. Temburanpure is also untraceable. It may be assumed that this manuscript might have been illustrated somewhere else and then brought to Prakasha, because the colophon speaks about a *prati* or copy. It is possible that other illustrated manuscripts were prepared and copies of them sent or brought to the holy places. 'Temba' is a Marathi term,



Shiva temple of Prakasha

which is used for a small village. On the basis of the available material, it is probable that local and Rajasthani artists located in Prakasha or around Prakasha illustrated this manuscript.

The main feature of this *Geet Govinda* is that it is complete. One of the rare characteristics of this illustrated manuscript is the portraying of ragas and *raginis*. Gurjari, Basant, Ramkali, Karnataka, Deshakh, Deshi Waradi, Bhairava, and Vibhas are the *ragas* and *raginis*, depicted by the artists. Another significant feature of this manuscript is that eight cantos possess couplets of good wishes in the end. These couplets are not found in other manuscripts. There are nine *shlokas* in this manuscript which make it different from others of its kind. A couplet refers to the name of a poet



Samarth Wagdevta Mandir, Dhule

Kavindra Ravindra. It can be deduced that the inscribers and artists might have incorporated these couplets. The miniatures are executed on the basis of these *shlokas*. Every *ashtapadi* is tastefully painted in the Kanheri style.

It seems possible that the local artists opted to paint the local style of dresses, jewellery, flora and fauna while the Rajasthani artists preferred to paint the delicacy of the figure and facial expression. The absence of the application of rare and precious colours indicates that the artists used local colours, mainly vegetable and pigments obtained from minerals. Indigo is frequently used in painting the sky and Krishna. The choice of colour seems to follow Mewar and Nathadwara patterns. The artists seem to have adopted the traditional method for executing the miniature. *Tipai* follows *sachchi tipai*—light and shade modelling comes first, followed by the final outline and colouring. They do not seem to have used gold or silver. These characteristics have imparted a unique regional flavour to the miniatures.

The drawings show the perfection of the line, and the treatment of colours is noteworthy. In some depictions of Radha, the face is round. The frontal depiction of face shows an imbalance of lines in some miniatures. Some miniatures represent the joint venture of the local and Rajasthani artist. The Rajasthani artist depicted Radha in a manner identical to that of the Mewar and Malwa schools. Historically, Khandesh had a close relationship with Rajasthan. The King of Jaipur visited Dhule, and according to tradition, would have been accompanied by the artists. The influence of the Mewar school is also clear as is the influence of Nagpuri style of the later medieval period. The thin birds represent the main

feature of this style. The miniatures, based on the theme of *Ramayana* which are preserved in National Museum, New Delhi, are identical in several respects to these miniatures. Apart from the toy-like birds, the flora and fauna painted in Nagpuri miniatures, is also quite similar to those of the Kanheri *Geet Govinda*.

These miniatures do not possess the delicacy and ornamentation of the pictures executed in a royal atelier but they show an originality of style and execution.

These miniatures can be categorized into those influenced by the Nathadwara, Jaipur, Mewar, Alwar and Malwa schools and those that show an amalgamation of styles resulting in a Khandeshi or Kanheri style.

The female figures that belong to the first category wear a *lehnga*, or skirt; and *chunni*, or veil. They wear Khandeshi as well as Rajasthani ornaments. *Nath*, nose ornament; *karnaphool*, earrings and *chudis*, bangles are common features. The size of the *nath* is abnormally big, which is one of the specific characteristics of Khandesh. In some miniatures a *mathapatti*, an ornament for the forehead, can be seen. The size of the *karnaphool* is also big and the number of *chudi* or bangles is more than what is usually depicted. The women are shown wearing ornaments symbolic of married women such as *mangal sutra* and *payal* or anklets. In Khandesh, women paint a longer red mark on their forehead, which is known as *khori* or *malvat*. In several miniatures we find figures of women with a *malvat* on their forehead. This is a composite feature of the Rajasthani and Khandeshi style. The profiles are identical to the Mewar and Malwa schools. Some female figures are shown wearing a high *juda*, lock of hair, a significant feature of Jaipur and Bundi.

The male figures in this first category are tiny, their faces are round, noses longer, bodies bulky and are shown wearing *dhoti*, loose garments for the lower body and a *dupatta* or scarf. Their tied hair, called *choti*, is identical to those of Goswamis painted in Nathadwara miniatures. Pandits are seen with a circular *tika* on their forehead. This is a peculiar Khandeshi influence. Krishna is depicted as the Blue Lord. It is an exceptional feature of these miniatures that only in one figure do we find Krishna with a *morpankhi mukut*, peacock crown. In the rest of the miniatures, he is shown wearing a crown of a type worn only in Maharashtra. It is also significant that the figure of Krishna shows the input of various artists. In places where it seems as if a skilled artist painted him, his figure looks proportionate and attractive but the work of unskilled artist immediately attracts the attention. The eyebrow has been painted straight. This feature is different from the Rajasthani styles where eyebrows are generally depicted as being more rounded.

In all, these miniatures, the foliage is exceptionally painted. *Kela*, banana; *nariyal*, coconut; *champa*, *parijat*, dense *kela* trees with red petals, *gudhal*, *chameli*, *kewda* and *supari* trees are brilliantly depicted. The *kunja*, or grove, in which Radha sits is painted in the Khandeshi style. The *mandap* is decorated with the white flowers of *chameli* or *sadafuli*. The depiction of flowers trees and animals is based on the Deccan style.

The miniatures of Khandeshi style depict tiny female figures. The eyes are round. They wear *navvari* saris. They wear a *mangal sutra* around their neck and show a *malvat* mark on their foreheads. In some figures, this *malvat* is vertical. The female figures are not very thin and wear a big *chuda* on the right wrist. In all the miniatures where Krishna appears, he

## Album Section



Plate 1, Opening verse, 1st Canto

The sky is surrounded by dark clouds.  
The forestlands are darkened by *tamal* trees.  
Krishna fears these in the night, hence, O Radha,  
accompany Krishna and take him to his home.



Plate 2, Opening verse, 1st Canto

Ordered by Nanda,  
Radha and Krishna are going through  
The thickets under *tamal* trees  
And on every step they enjoy  
Love-plays in loneliness.  
On the Yamuna river's bank  
These secret love plays may be victorious.



Plate 3, 1st Canto, Couplet 4

If your heart wants to remember Hari,  
If you are curious about the arts of his seduction,  
you should listen to the sweet, soft and lovable  
lyrical poems of Jaideva.



Plate 4, 1st Canto, Couplet 11

In the battle, you have spread in all directions the  
sacrifice of Ravana's ten heads; this joyful deed  
was much liked by the gods of directions.  
O Kesava, you have performed this deed while you  
were the incarnation of Ram.  
O lord of the world, O Hari, may you be victorious.  
O lord of the world, O Hari, may you be victorious.



Plate 5, 1st Canto, Couplet 16

By incarnating as fish, you have upheld the  
*Vedas*  
By incarnating as tortoise, you have given support  
to the earth  
By incarnating as boar, you have raised the world  
By incarnating as partly man and partly lion, you  
have torn the demon Hiranyakasipu  
By incarnating as Vaman, you have cheated  
King Bali  
By incarnating as Parasuram, you have destroyed  
the warrior class  
By incarnating as Ram, you have conquered  
Ravana  
By incarnating as Haldhara, you have killed  
numerous demons  
By incarnating as Buddha, you have spread  
compassion  
By incarnating as Kalki, you have routed the  
barbarians  
O Krishna, we pay homage to all your ten  
incarnate forms.



Plate 1 Nanda directing Radha



Plate 2 Radha and Krishna in the grove