

**Chapter - VI**

**KARANJA : CAULDRON OF STYLES**

### THE SHASTRA BHANDARAS: CAULDRON OF DIVERSE IDIOMS

It is evident that images and manuscripts, illustrated or otherwise, in the Digambara Jain *bhandaras* in Vidarbha were collected over a period of about two hundred and fifty years since the establishment of the *bhattaraka* seat at Karanja in 1518 CE, the accretion facilitated by the religious activities of the *bhattaraka-sravaka* nexus. Though only a fraction of them are illustrated, these manuscripts make for fascinating study as they represent artistic activity carried out in places which were far removed from traditional bastions of manuscript painting, for patrons whose own roots were located miles away. Unfortunately most of the painted documents do not disclose the name of the place where they have been painted, though they are likely to have been executed in one or other of the Digambara centers in Vidarbha or the proximal areas, namely Balapur, Anjangaon, Achalpur, Shirpur, Deulgaon, Shirad among others and then transported to the *shastra bhandaras* of the religious nucleus, Karanja, in itself a center of painting activity, or alternately, after copying taken to the latter for illustration. The illustrated manuscripts, with the exception of the Sugandhadasami in the Sengana temple in Nagpur, and the Adityavara vrata katha in a private collection, are now in the temple collections of Karanja. Numerous others have either been lost in transit or remain anonymous, relegated to some private collections.

Four distinct styles may be identified from the illustrated manuscripts and paintings gleaned from the *shastra bhandaras* of this region. The earliest, the Rajasthani –Deccani or the so called Aurangabad style of mid to the late seventeenth century, exemplified by the *Pancakalyanaka pata*, the Marwar-Sirohi of early eighteenth century, as seen in the Sugandhadasami group, The Mewar- Sirohi or localized Sirohi, observed in the Yashodhara carita of A.D. 1736 and related works, and the provincial Deccani, datable towards the end of the eighteenth century, with traceable Rajasthani and other influences, exemplified by the Adityavara vrata katha.

The material at our disposal is too disparate and scanty to presume that a workshop of painters was established in the nerve center of Karanja at any point

of time. All the same, these paintings, despite affiliations with certain Rajasthan idioms, maintain a distinctive character in terms of thematic content and style that set them apart from contemporaneous Svetambara and Digambara Jain works of the Gujarat –Rajasthan region. The question that springs to mind is who exactly were the painters responsible for these works executed for the Digambara Jain patrons in Vidarbha territory?

### **ELEGANCE AND GRANDEUR : THE PANCAKALYANAKA SCROLL**

The finest document, in terms of style and workmanship is without doubt, the *pancakalyanaka* pata. Though the *pancakalyanakas* or five key events are integral to the life story of each of the twenty four Tirthankaras, its selective representation in painting does not appear to have been popular in Rajasthan or Gujarat, where instead entire texts such as the Kalpasutra dealing with Mahavira and life histories of other Tirthakaras such as Parsvanatha, Neminatha, and Rishabhathatha have been taken up for illustration. The Digambara Jains similarly have displayed a preference for illustrating the entire narrative of Adipurana or Mahapurana wherein the biography of the first Tirthankara, Rishabha, among other narratives, is delineated. On the other hand, paintings limited to the five main events appear to have been popular outside western and northern India, in areas where migrant Digambara Jain communities settled. It is of relevance to note here that such themes have been limited to *shastra bhandaras* in the Deccan, notably in centers traditionally considered strongholds of Digambara Jains, namely Kolhapur in western Maharashtra, where the *pancakalyanakas* are included in the compendium of rituals, a manuscript known as Pratistha sarodhara Jina yagna kalpa<sup>1</sup> and the *pancakalyanaka* cloth scroll from Karanja in Vidarbha. Interestingly, both these documents choose to represent the *pancakalyanaka* or five principal events from the life of Tirthankara Rishabha, the first of the Jinas, whose images have also been found in substantial numbers in various large and small shrines all over the Deccan., in addition to the fact that the gigantic image of Gommateshwara at Shravana

Belagola in Karnataka, the focal point of Digambara worship in southern Deccan, is of none else but Rishabhanatha's son Bahubali.

The *pancakalyanaka* scroll is an excellent albeit isolated example of the finest of traditions resulting from the confluence of Rajasthani, Deccani and Mughal schools coalescing in Aurangabad in the Deccan. It displays a kind of sophistication and elegance not observed in any other work from the Deccan area and despite its unmistakable affiliation with the Rasamanjari, dated 1650 CE (Pl. 285) and other related paintings from the Aurangabad region, (Pl. 286) still remains unique. In its magnitude and fine workmanship the scroll bespeaks the involvement of a painter with superior talent, patronized by an individual or a group of individuals of some social standing and influence. It is likely that the *bhataraka* of the seat of Karanja, Jinasena, who held the privileged position from 1655-1685 CE,<sup>2</sup> was the patron of the scroll. The town of Karanja by this time had experienced an unprecedented period of economic and cultural efflorescence, with the mercenary Digambara Jains migrating from Rajasthan and Gujarat becoming firmly ensconced in their new surroundings, acquiring vast tracts of land and setting up brisk business. It is to this enormous wealth that the Maratha leader Shivaji's army was drawn, Karanja was plundered in 1670 CE, the Maratha army taking away vast amounts of booty. Again, the *pitha* of Karanja had been consolidated by this time and grown considerably in stature. It is therefore highly likely that an artist or a group of them were sought to execute the scroll from Aurangabad in the neighboring region of Marathwada, where painting activity despite turbulent times of the Mughal campaigns in the Deccan, continued for the Rajput noblemen in service of the Mughals stationed here for extended periods by painters who had accompanied the retinue of Rajput princes from native Rajasthan. The project, which would have entailed monetary aid, is likely to have been initiated by Jinasena, with generous support from the Digambara community.

The scroll is representative of the eclecticism discerned in the Aurangabad style with the coalescing of the Rajasthani, Deccani and Mughal schools. It is based on the Adipurana, a highly revered text of the Digambaras, which incidentally

was also copied by *bhattarakas* and the laity in Vidarbha in impressive numbers. The eloquent text offers immense visual possibilities and is layered with nuances, which only a painter inured to handling such themes would be capable of executing with confidence. Considering the Dīgambaras' affiliation with Rajasthan and Gujarat and the presence of Rajasthani artists among the retinue of Rajput nobility in Mughal service in the Deccan, it seems only logical that one, or a group of them be invited to Karanja. The artists responsible for executing the scrolls were not those accustomed to paintings in the large format such as the *vijnaptipatras* and *vividhatirtha patas* which were just about begin to gain popularity from the mid seventeenth century as is evinced from such examples as *vividha tirtha pata* in the collection of Samvegi Upasraya, Ahmedabad, dated 1641 CE<sup>3</sup> and became increasingly in demand by the middle of the eighteenth century in Rajasthan as the *vijnaptipatras* from Sirohi dated 1737 CE,<sup>4</sup> and 1761 CE<sup>5</sup> and that from Sojat dated c. 1750 CE<sup>6</sup> illustrates. On the contrary, the painter of the scroll appears to be one trained in the art of manuscript painting, in all possibility in the idiom prevalent in Mewar in the second half of the seventeenth century, which he translates with remarkable ease, on a larger scale and a different medium, cloth. His debt to Mewar is most apparent in the strong color palette, dominated by the intense red, the spatial divisions, architectural configurations, procession scenes, the costumes, as well as the use of *nimqalam*. To Mewar may also be attributed the painter's flair for the consummate handling of the narrative, as this provenance had an enviable tradition of visual transcriptions of complex narratives as evinced in the works of Sahibdin and Manohar. The stylistic traits discerned in the scroll belong to the school of Mughalised Mewar, but the scroll painter was certainly versed with the earlier Mewar traditions to have done the kind of justice he has with the *pancakalyanaka* scroll, particularly those tinged with a hint of the dramatic. The way in which he succeeds in recreating a mood of wonder and ecstasy in scenes such as the 'Dance of Indra,' (Pl. 287) is sheer poetry, much in the manner of 'Sahasrarjuna' in Sahibdin's 'Bhagwata Purana' of 1648 CE., of the Mewar

school, (Pl.288) and making the *vijnaptipatras and vividha tirtha patas* appear little more than banal illustrations. (Pl. 289)

Apart from the obvious debt to Mewar, the painter also incorporates other stylistic traits primarily of the Bundi, Bikaner, and Golconda schools. From Golconda is derived the grouping of figures, particularly the processional sequences, while several features such as the physiognomy of the men and women, the groups of ladies, and the costumes owe substantially to the school of Bikaner, the Bundi influence being attributed to the marriage of the Mewar and the Bundi idioms in the seventeenth century. These are again combined with several Deccani elements, predominantly the muted landscape, tree types, grid like gardens, opulent palace interiors, hues of dull greens, blues, mauves and browns, and the floral border emulating contemporary Deccani cotton painted and printed textiles. Other features such as the almost redundant *chakdar jama* of the Akbari period, or the conical close fitting turbans come across as anomalies. What is witnessed in Aurangabad is a complex coalescence of several idioms from Rajasthan as well as the Deccan. The presence of a large number of Rajput grandees belonging to the states of Mewar, Bundi, Kota and Bikaner, posted for extended periods of time in Aurangabad in the services of the Mughal army in their campaigns in the Deccan contributed in adding to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's second capital in the Deccan, a multifarious countenance. Several painters accompanied these kings and princes from their homeland, and worked for their patrons in makeshift ateliers when their masters were not actually engaged in warfare. The city doubtlessly was the conduit for Rajasthani idioms introduced in the Deccan and vice versa. This osmotic situation may be responsible for prominent Deccani traits making an appearance in Rajasthani painting and traits from Mewar, Bundi, and Bikaner to be absorbed in the Deccan. Although this status prevailed throughout the Mughal campaigns under Aurangzeb in the Deccan till the end of the seventeenth century, a very small body of works which could be actually pinpointed as belonging to Aurangabad school exist, at the pivot of which is the Rasamanjari of 1650, painted for a *thakur* of the minor branch of the Sisodiyas of Mewar<sup>7</sup>. Two other

documents, namely a Ragamala set and a Gita Govinda have been ascribed to this new idiom in Aurangabad as they bear stylistic affinities with the dated Rasamanjari. Another significant work whose provenance has been suggested as Aurangabad the dated Ramayana of 1653 CE<sup>8</sup>, from the reign of Rana Jagat Singh of Mewar, which displays pronounced Deccani traits of composition, landscape, architecture, figure types and costumes, has been the subject of debate. However, Losty, who, in the article, deals at length with features that he identifies as peculiarly Deccani, refutes the contention that a manuscript as bulky and complex as the Ramayana could have been painted in the relatively unstable environs of Aurangabad as it would entail the involvement of scribes and painters in large numbers working in tandem. He is in favor of Deccani influences percolating in Rajasthan owing to the migration of Deccani painters to Rajasthan and opines that though Rajasthanian painters stationed in Aurangabad did produce works, these were restricted to portraits and paintings in smaller format and not ambitious projects such as the Ramayana. Further Losty also questions the provenance of the Rasamanjari of 1650 whose colophon, besides other details, mentions the name of copying, and not the execution of the illustrations nor the identity of the painter. On the basis of this as well as the fact that the entire group was found in the vicinity of Mewar, he suggests that the Rasamanjari was brought to Mewar to be illustrated after copying.

It is however evident that though the Aurangabad school was a consequence of the confluence of several styles from Rajasthan, it stands distinctly apart from contemporaneous painting in Mewar, Bundi or Bikaner, and exudes a charm of its own, and merely the fact that the Rasamanjari and the allied manuscripts being located in Mewar does not substantiate the view that they were not painted in Aurangabad for it would not be exactly cumbersome for the patron to transport what he had commissioned during his extended stay in the Deccan to his home base. In fact, both Aurangabad and Burhanpur, the most vital of the Mughal posts in the Deccan, could have nurtured artists and besides the Rasamanjari of 1650 and related group, there could have been more works executed in the Aurangabad area which have perhaps been lost. Several princes

of the royal house of Bikaner served the Mughals in the Deccan, and their connoisseurship saw a large number of superb Deccani paintings being taken away to Bikaner. The inscriptions state that they were acquired either by Rai Singh when he was the Mughal governor of Burhanpur,( 1607-1611) or by Anup Singh while governor at Adoni.( 1689-1698) <sup>9</sup>Others, such as Sur Singh and Karan Singh too spent a large part of their reign in the Deccan. Deccani artists, in addition to their works, may thus have traveled to Bikaner or alternatively Bikaner conventions could also have been introduced in the Deccan by Rajasthani painters traveling with the kings. Likewise, strong Mewar conventions are discerned in the five Ragamala paintings attributed to northern Deccan, formerly in the Khajanchi collection of Bikaner, and now divided between the National museum, New Delhi and the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benaras. and datable to the second half of the seventeenth century. Closely related is an elegant Sarangi ragini, in the Mittal museum, probably executed somewhere in the Aurangabad area<sup>10</sup>. Another incomplete Ragamala set, combining Deccani-Rajasthani idioms may be also attributed to Aurangabad. It appears that painting activity to a greater degree may have been carried out in the Aurangabad area, the inconsistency in style and workmanship reiterates the presence of artists with diverse backgrounds and potentials in the Deccan. The nomenclature northern Deccan or Aurangabad therefore implies the same territory in and around Aurangabad, perhaps as far as the town of Burhanpur. It is quite likely that the corpus of material identified as belonging to the so called Aurangabad school is merely the tip of the iceberg, and a sizeable quantity has not come to light. The *pancakalyanaka* scroll thus is one of the finer outcomes of the diverse traditions at play in Aurangabad and its superior workmanship indicates the involvement of an accomplished painter with Mewar origins, who was receptive enough to imbibe the finer nuances of the other Rajasthani idioms, as also those from the Deccan. It is likely to have been painted sometime around c.1675 CE, when *bhattaraka* Jinasena, the pontifical head of Karanja *pitha*, who had enjoyed more than two decades of power, and had become acquainted with painting traditions during his numerous travels westwards, and who sought

artists working in the neighboring Aurangabad region to execute the commission and also involved the wealthy laity who donated generously, and who along with the pontiffs, were the cultural consumers of such visual extravaganzas

### **DEBT TO THE SCHOOL OF SURAT: MANUSCRIPTS OF SUGANDHADASAMI KATHA**

The next stylistic group comprises of the two illustrated manuscripts of the Sugandhadasami katha, which though varied in terms of workmanship share the same iconography and stylistic traits. At a glance it is difficult to associate the paintings with any known idiom in or even outside the Deccan. The text was authored by Jinasagara locally and both manuscripts have the text inscribed in Marathi, the regional language of Vidarbha, which provides us one of the reasons to pin down their origins to this region. Painted in a flamboyant style exuding its own charm, they display features that relate them partially to the style prevalent in the Surat- Ahmedabad region from the late seventeenth through the eighteenth centuries. Surat, which was a major port at this time became a thriving center of trade and commerce, as well as a cultural hub embracing diverse influences. Illustrated manuscripts patronized by the Svetambara community and collected from Surat and its vicinity are observed to have been painted in varied styles ranging from what has been referred to as popular style<sup>11</sup> to Sirohi,<sup>12</sup> the latter being not only confined to its home territory but prevalent in many pockets of Gujarat as well. Though certain similarities between the Vidarbha manuscripts and the *vijnaptipatra* of 1737 CE in the National Museum, which may be considered a variant of the Sirohi idiom, are observed, particularly in the architectural units and the convention of folded pleats of the *patka* spread out in a fan shape below the thigh, the male and female figures in the *vijnaptipatra* are more carefully rendered, have elaborate coiffures and are bedecked in intricate jewelry. The manuscripts from Karanja have closer affinities with the scroll of the Paryushana kshamapana patrika painted at Ahmedabad in 1796 CE. (PI. 290) and the Candarajano rasa copied at Bhavnagar in 1798 CE. Architectural units such as domes, canopies, terraces

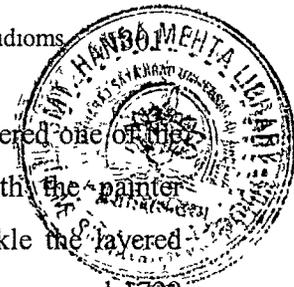
and others are treated similarly in both cases. Parallels are also observed in the physiognomies of the male and female figures, the gestures and stances, the manner of dress, including the peculiar schema of a tucking the *patka* into a series of neat folds below the thighs in case of seated figures. The convention of a series of folds arrayed primly below the thighs from the ankle to the hips, though not frequently observed in the Surat-Ahmedabad paintings is a persistent feature occurring not just in the Sugandhadasami group under the present discussion but in many other manuscripts from Karanja, added on sometimes even below a reclining figure (Pl. 291) Though earliest observed in the *vijnaptipatra* of. 1737 painted in the Sirohi idiom, this convention is not uniformly observed in the works of this school. It is rarely found in other Rajasthani schools and is visible in only selected manuscripts from Surat or Ahmedabad. However the convention of folds originating in Sirohi, which may be referred to as the most *obvious* trait,<sup>13</sup> gross and manifest, easy to perceive and adapt, which appears to have caught the fancy of the painter responsible for the Karanja paintings and repeated till it became nothing but a cliché. The presence of the nine yards *sakaccha* sari<sup>14</sup> has also been pointed out as in some of the pages, the surplus folds of the lengthy sari appear to have been tucked in a series of folds at the back of the hips but this could well be the same cliché of pleats that appears to have been such a vital part of the northern Deccani painter's vocabulary in the eighteenth century, and which they employed for seated, reclining and standing figures. The nine yards sari worn by womenfolk in a major part of the Deccan in Maharashtra and parts of Karnataka is commonly featured in the murals and manuscript paintings of the Deccan executed for Maratha patrons and in case of women wearing such a costume, the surplus length of the sari is looped behind the back form a scallop like pattern. (Pl.292) and does not spread out fan like into folds. Moreover, in the Karanja group it is observed in the garments of both male and the female figures. (Pl. 293) It would then be safe to assume that this convention which originated in Sirohi or perhaps Marwar becoming something of an obsession as a formal device for the painter of the Karanja manuscripts. The use of the square within

square pattern (Pl. 293) is noticed in several works from Mewar, Sirohi and Marwar, but only as a part of a larger architectural design. In Vidarbha, its repeated employment makes it a cliché as it served as a convenient element to fill several undefined spaces. The trees in both the manuscripts of the Sugandhadasami katha however appear unique to this region, with their thin trunks flaring into multiple branches that support the foliage. (Pl. 294) They cannot be related to any known type from Surat. Nor can the obsession of the painter to accentuate the breasts with radiating lines. (Pl. 294)

By the beginning of the eighteenth century the Sirohi idiom in its modified form had gained popular acceptance in the adjoining Marwar belt, as numerous discoveries from places such as Sojat, where the *vijnaptipatra* of c. 1750 CE, was painted, Masuda identified as a center for a Ragamala, and Balotra, where a Devimahatmya was executed, reveal. We already have evidence of a new modified idiom in the form of the *vijnaptipatra* of 1737, whose colophon mentions it to be painted at Sirohi, though certain departures from the known Sirohi idiom are already visible. The distinctive later Jain style used in the *vijnaptipatras* was developed by professional Jain artists called *mathen*,<sup>15</sup> who were sometimes former monks. Several scrolls, including one dated 1761 CE, a page from a Jain manuscript, dated 1745 CE in the Brooklyn museum, the Sojat scroll, and the scroll in the Kanoria collection could be attributed to these *mathen* who probably wandered from place to place in search of work. The Sirohi idiom was somewhat a borderline idiom, in itself a hybridized form of the Mewar and the Marwar schools. It was considerably fluid and easily adaptable, thereby gaining popularity not only in Marwar but also in South Gujarat, predominantly in and around Surat. One such example is the manuscript of Upadesamala whose colophon mentions the date of execution as 1708 CE, while a manuscript of the Durga saptashati, dated 1719 CE, and painted at Surat, also recalling the Sirohi style, is by a different hand. Other illustrated manuscripts such as the Kalpasutra dated 1804 CE and a Sripala rasa, dated 1829 CE, painted at Surat, are variants of the parent Sirohi style, though in the latter manuscript, the vibrant color palette, comprising of yellows, blues, browns, reds, and greens

is decidedly Sirohi, so are the thick set human figures, with the males attired in long *jamās* and turbans. There is discerned considerable delight in rendering nature as well as various type of vessels and ships. Whatever the beginnings of this school might have been, it is certain that Surat remained a center of this school and hence it is advisable to recognize this school as Gujarat school of late seventeenth and eighteenth century<sup>16</sup>. However, Surat was not home merely to Sirohi but also to other localized styles one of which is known as the popular style, which shows a predilection for simpler compositions, disproportionately rendered human figures, and rudimentary architectural and natural elements. It appears that Surat then was a melting pot of several styles, dominant among them being Sirohi, and all of them managed to make room for themselves as there appears to have been a substantial demand for painting manuscripts and scrolls related to different subjects. It is possible that painters from Rajasthan, in search of work, including the *mathen* were responsible for much of the painting activity carried out in the rapidly expanding commercial center of Surat as well as nearby areas with the wealthy merchant class of this town offering patronage in large measures, with the Sirohi, Marwar and Mewar styles, in that order, modified to meet the demands of a new class of cultural consumers. It is to this region that one turns to seek stylistic links considering Surat's proximity to northern Deccan, to the Khandesh-Marathwada- Vidarbha belt as well as the fact that there are inscriptions revealing business interests of Digambara Jain families of Vidarbha in Gujarat<sup>17</sup>. Also of great import is the fact that *bhattarakas* of Karanja had amiable relations and maintained constant communication with other *bhattarakas* positioned in seats of Surat, Idar, as well as other places, Surat was not only a significant Digambara *pitha* but also a transit point for *bhattarakas* and Digambara families from the northern Deccan traveling to major pilgrimage sites such as Girnar and Satrunjaya. The *bhattarakas* and their entourage often halted there for extended periods, sometimes staying as many as four months of the monsoon. Thus, though settled hundreds of miles away from centers where painting activity was carried out, the Digambara Jains of Vidarbha had a fair access to their places of origin

and were also in a position to commission manuscripts for their *bhandaras* by inviting painters to their new settlements. Though the paintings executed for the Digambara patrons in the northern Deccan does show certain affinities with the Malwa school the possibilities of Malwa artists traveling to the Deccan seem remote, as Malwa in the eighteenth century witnessed only sporadic painting activity, bordering on the folk or popular style, as evinced in a manuscript of 'Kiratarjunya' painted in 1768 CE<sup>18</sup> at Khargon, near Indore, or a Ramayana<sup>19</sup> of the early eighteenth century ( **Pl.295**) However, we are not aware of any manuscript painted for Digambara Jains settled in various pockets of Malwa- Bundekhand region where migrants from Rajasthan settled in large numbers about three centuries ago. It would be conclusive to assume that influences trickling into the Northern Deccan came mainly from Surat and its neighboring regions, which itself borrowed heavily from several schools of Rajasthan. The painters who are responsible for the Sugandhadasami group were influenced by both Sirohi and Marwar styles, in fact the latter appears more pronounced, particularly in the representation of architecture, the figure types and color palette. It would be relevant to point out to the presence of artists from Marwar in the Deccan in the seventeenth century when some of them traveled here along with the entourage of the Marwar ruler Gaj Singh who was stationed in the Deccan during the Mughal campaign under Malik Ambar in 1622 CE. It is known that artists as well as *charans* or bards accompanied Jodhpur nobles in the service of the Mughal army, several named artists being listed amongst those accompanying Maharaja Jaswant Singh to Peshawar later in the seventeenth century<sup>20</sup>. A manuscript of Kathakalpataru<sup>21</sup> located in Marwar and closely related to the Pali style is significant as it has a text written in Marathi, the language of the northern Deccan. This manuscript could have been illustrated by a Jodhpur artist during the campaigns in the Deccan itself in the idiom he was acquainted with or was perhaps carried away to Marwar to be illustrated. The two manuscripts of the Sugandhadasami despite sharing iconographies and stylistic traits, differ in workmanship and overall handling of the narrative. The Nagpur manuscript is decidedly finer, with affinities to the Mewar, Marwar and



Sirohi idioms that converged at Surat. In fact, it could be considered one of the finest representatives of the Surat style in the Deccan, with the painter attempting to evolve his own pictorial devices in order to tackle the layered narrative of a text alien to him. It was probably painted sometime around 1729 CE in Karanja and patronized by the pontiff Devendrakirti, whose pupil Jinasagara was the author of the Marathi text.

The Marwar influence in terms of composition, figure types and color palette, on the other hand, is most strongly discerned in the Sugandhadasami manuscript from the Sengana temple of Karanja, which shows the same predilection for simple uncluttered compositions and bold delineation of figures. The manuscript displays remarkable parallels with a late seventeenth century Ragamala in the National Museum, New Delhi, attributed to Marwar<sup>22</sup>. It is not in the cognizable Marwar style but rather its variant, the figure types, with pointed noses, receding foreheads and large eyes, being taller and more elegant than of the usual ones from this school. Another manuscript of the Sugandhadasami katha painted in a similar idiom and once housed in the Dīgambara temple in Nagpur<sup>23</sup>, is now untraceable. The illustrated manuscripts of the Ananta vrata katha, Adityavara vrata katha, Parsvanatha stotra, and Jivandhara purana belonging to this group and executed at Karanja<sup>24</sup> are likewise missing. It is evident that the Sugandhadasami manuscript in question, along with the another one on the same subject painted in the vertical format, from the Nagpur *bhandara* and now missing, as well as the aforesaid group from Karanja were executed by the same painter. He also appears to be from Surat, and arrived in Vidarbha around the same time when the Nagpur Sugandhadasami was executed and stayed long enough to complete a bulk of manuscripts, of which only the Karanja Sugandhadasami katha remains as of today.

### **THE MEWAR -SIROHI IDIOM IN VIDARBHA : YASHODHARA CARITA AND RELATED GROUP OF MANUSCRIPTS**

The third group of manuscripts, the largest in Vidarbha region, comprises of a dated Yashodhara carita, a Santinatha carita, an assortment of paintings of

various types of Indras and other gods, as well as an incomplete manuscript of the previous births of Tirthankara Santinatha. Though they recall stylistic features of both Mewar and Sirohi, they have been painted in what one may label a unique Karanja style. Their similarities with their Rajasthani counterparts lies in their warm color palette, use of flat areas of color, and a tendency towards compartmentalization. The color palette of bright yellows, reds, browns, blues and greens owes a great deal to the Rajasthani school, but the use of a particular emerald green is unusual and decidedly Deccani. The compositions are inconsistent and vary from the fairly ordered ones to others that are absolutely disorganized. Some of the pages introduce striking floral borders into the composition, a trait familiar in many manuscripts from Gujarat as well as Malwa till the seventeenth century. The folios are usually framed by a vivid orange border. The small rounded faces with pert noses and wide eyes are closest to Mewar (Pl. 296) and not the heavy chinned Sirohi types and display no traces of modeling. The costumes of the males and the females are not markedly different from any of the Rajasthani types but the *jamās* are almost up to the ankles and the turbans fairly simpler, lacking variety. Architecture is extremely rudimentary, but the artist shows a certain propensity towards delineating nature with different species of trees, shrubs, and bushes included. Animals appear in abundance and a great variety of them are represented with spontaneity. The elephants and horses particularly are handled more deftly (Pl. 297) giving the impression that the artist was comfortable delineating them. The black outlines of the figures are often reinforced with white, the drawing though crude at times, displays a certain degree of confidence.

It is possible to assign a date to this group on the basis of the manuscript of Yashodhara carita, dated 1736 CE copied at Balapur in Vidarbha region. The town of Balapur being close to Karanja, the nucleus of the Digambara sect in the northern Deccan, the manuscript was in all probability brought to Karanja to be illustrated, where artists were employed occasionally to execute works. Considering that no tradition of painting existed in this part of the Deccan, and the tenacious links of the *bhattarakas* of Karanja with Digambara seats of

Gujarat and Rajasthan, it is fairly certain that the artists were brought along with the entourage of devotees who traveled with the *bhattarakas* on pilgrimages to the western region. *Bhattaraka* Dharmachandra, who succeeded Devendrakirti to the Karanja seat in 1736 CE according to epigraphic records, could be the most likely patron of these works. An illustrated manuscript of the Yashodhara carita, painted probably in Sirohi, and dated c. 1700-1710<sup>25</sup> has certain stylistic similarities with the Karanja manuscript though it appears to have been painted by a different hand. Closest to the Yashodhara carita manuscript from Balapur appears to be the Candana Malaygiri katha dated to 1733 CE<sup>26</sup> from Karanja, which unfortunately is not traceable in the *bhandaras* in the present circumstances. It shares with the Yashodhara carita manuscript several features including the color palette, landscape, and figure types and seems most certainly to be by the same hand. This dated manuscript implies the presence of painters trained in the so called Mewar- Sirohi idiom in Karanja as early as 1733 CE. The seat in Karanja remained unoccupied after the death around 1729 CE of Devendrakirti, the pontiff who has been credited to be the inspiration behind the Sugandha dasami group of manuscripts. *Bhattaraka* records mention Dharmachandra's pontifical period from 1736 to 1776 CE. If one considers that Dharmachandra was indeed the patron, for he appears to be the *bhattaraka* represented frequently in the manuscripts of this group, then he obviously came to power earlier than 1736, perhaps immediately after his superior vacating the seat, or a year or two thereafter.

In the illustrated manuscript of Santinata carita belonging to this group, there is no text, only short captions in support of the illustrations, and these are in Gujarati. These labels, in a language not spoken by the Digambara Jains of the Deccan, were then in all probability meant for the visiting painters as guidelines and were written by them as footnotes and retained as such in the final form. The Gujarati labels trace the origins of the painters to either Surat or some other place in Gujarat. The possibility of Surat being their provenance is remote, as this third group of paintings at Karanja do not display the kind of hybridization of the Mewar, Marwar and Sirohi observed in Surat- Ahmedabad region clearly

discerned in the of Sugandha dasami group painted in Vidarbha region. Though certain stylistic affinities with the Surat style remain, particularly in the compositions, architecture, and landscape, there is substantial difference in the figure types, which recall more of the figures in the indigenous late Mewar manuscripts of the seventeenth century wherein Mughal technique of *nimqalam* is not employed. We must therefore consider the hand of a painter or a group of them from somewhere in Sirohi. Prior to the merger of the old Sirohi state in Rajasthan, the official language of Sirohi was Gujarati.<sup>27</sup> Again Mewar and Sirohi being adjacent geographical areas, shared many stylistic traits. The Sirohi painter, in all likelihood was picked up, not from his home base but from the vicinity of Surat where many of his ilk converged to seek commissions.

The painters obviously did not stay for extended periods in Vidarbha, certainly not enough for them to absorb local traditions, customs, manner of dressing, etc. Perhaps the patron expected them to practice the tradition they, and he himself to some extent were familiar with and therefore a substantial makeover in style may have been out of question. What is seen here is an offshoot of the late Gujarati- Rajasthani school, practiced in a provenance for a patron whose links with western India have already been established earlier. All the same, the paintings are informed with a vivacity and spontaneity of expression that distinguish them from the contemporaneous works of Gujarat and Rajasthan, and give an impression that the painter was indeed taking some artistic liberties which his new location and somewhat novel subject matter offered. At times, the painting activity was even abandoned midway, as the incomplete manuscript of the previous births of Santinatha indicates, whose few pages have been completed while in the majority only the linear drawings are executed. This manuscript too has some admirable linear drawings of animals. The works of this group then on the basis of stylistic factors, could be datable to c. 1730- 1750 CE and attributed to itinerant painters who though owing allegiance to the late Gujarati –Rajasthani school, been positioned in a new environment have succeeded in evolving an idiom with a distinct local identity, limited to the region of Vidarbha.

### THE PROVINCIAL DECCANI IDIOM : ADITYAVARA VRATA KATHA

Unfortunately, only one illustrated manuscript may be identified as belonging to the fourth and last group from northern Deccan or Vidarbha . It is executed in a somewhat coarse style that presages a further departure from influences of Rajasthan or Gujarat. The manuscript in question is of an ‘Adityavrata katha’ a local text, whose colophon mentions the name of the writer as Gangadasa, and the date of copying of the manuscript as 1693 CE. It follows certain familiar conventions such as use of colored compartments and rudimentary use of architecture, but the spontaneous, rough shod draftsmanship and the bright glaring color palette of saturated reds, greens, blues and yellows have no precedent in the schools of Rajasthan or Gujarat. The black outlines of the figures have almost been submerged by the extensive use of white lines, while white dots and short choppy strokes of white have been used extensively as a ‘decorative’ device. The costumes, particularly of the male figures assume significance in this case, for besides the familiar *jama*, turban and *patka* ensemble, many of the figures are seen wearing a transparent white muslin *jama* reaching up to the knees, over a *dhoti*. (Pl. 298) The sheer muslin dress was a popular costume in the Deccan which was preferred by the nobles and may have had a more modest variant worn by the lay man, which doubtlessly served as inspiration for the manuscript painter. ( Pl. 299) It is not observed among the costumes of men in Rajasthan. Seldom, the conventional nine yard sari worn in the northern Deccan is also observed in the manuscript.

The most distinctive Deccani feature is the floral arabesque or *guldasta* motif (Pl. 300) a form directly inspired by the similar patterns employed in Deccani architecture as well as painted and printed cotton wall hangings that were extensively produced in centers such as Burhanpur and Golconda.(Pl.301) Its representation is extremely frequent in the wall paintings of Jamod, not far from Karanja. However, this motif is rarely, if ever, found in manuscripts from the Surat school of the late seventeenth or eighteenth century, and along with the sheer muslin Deccani costume, remain the most indigenous of the traits.

The question that arises is again regarding the identity of the painter who worked on such a distinctly different, albeit unsophisticated style. Curiously, out of the overwhelming number of illustrated manuscripts and paintings painted in Gujarat and Rajasthan, the Adityavara vrata katha relates to only a single manuscript, a Salibhadra carita in the Boston museum painted in 1621CE. (Pl.302) The parallels are observed in the large heads with relatively small bodies, sparse attention paid to landscape and architectural detail, monumentalizing of the figure in the pictorial space, and the predilection for using white dots or similar patterns in the background. Very few works of this type from the Gujarat region have come to light, indicating that this rather crude idiom was perhaps unsuitable for representing narrative themes popular in the Surat area around this time. Moreover, painters in Surat had already adapted to diverse idioms such as Mewar, Sirohi and Marwar. The painter of the solitary Adityavara vrata katha then possibly was an obscure painter who hailed from Gujarat but was not versed in the so called Surat style of that period. He retained a certain robustness in his approach and was innovative enough to introduce regional elements such as the floral motif set in a vase and the transparent muslin Deccani costumes, after setting foot on Deccani soil. It may have been painted several years after it was copied and may be dated sometime around c 1700 CE. Apart from making these conjectures, it would be premature to comment further on this style as one is not aware of other related documents, which may have been painted in this idiom, but are now lost. The paintings though have certain stylistic affinities with the wall paintings in the Digambara temple at Jamod in terms of composition, figure types and employment of decorative motifs such as the *guldasta*, though the costumes differ substantially, and the Jamod murals also display superior draftsmanship.

#### **PATRONAGE IN THE DECCAN : DIGAMBARA JAIN AND MARATHA PAINTING**

The Karanja cauldron, the *shastra bhandaras*, possess illustrated manuscripts of radically different styles from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries which apparently have had no influence on the manuscripts painted in Vidarbha.

They were nothing but consequences of accretion, driven by the need of performing *shastra dana* in which the *bhattarakas*, their disciples as well as the laity, were involved. This desire to donate, collect and preserve saw some rare manuscripts from other provenances, such as the illustrated Yashodhara carita of 1636 CE painted at Idar, inspired by the popular Mughal, Mewar and Caurapancasika styles and the Trisastisalakapurusa carita compendium in the western Indian style becoming a part of the *shastra bhandaras* in Vidarbha. The acquisitions basically remained not an effort at connoisseurship but a statement of religious zeal, they certainly did not serve as role models for the kind of works produced here

It becomes obvious then that the paintings executed for the Digambara Jains of Vidarbha were works of itinerant painters specifically sourced from the Surat region. Although economically consolidated in their new surroundings, the Digambaras were essentially a close knit and isolated community and it is highly unlikely for them to have established contact with that painters employed by Maratha rulers all over the Deccan, who were already fairly active by the middle of the eighteenth century. Maratha murals and illustrated manuscripts, while liberally borrowing from the Rajasthani and Mughal schools, formulated a different aesthetic. It is likely that the Maratha patrons engaged the services of non *odedar*<sup>28</sup> painters from Rajasthan, who were not on the pay roll of the royal ateliers but were versed in all kinds of jobs such as wood carving, interior decorations, and miniature paintings of mythological subjects. Moreover the Maratha idiom developed in western Maharashtra with the capital of the Peshwas, Poona, as its nucleus, spreading to other centers such as Satara, Wai and Nasik. This style expresses itself in two variants; one invokes a nostalgia for the Mughal and Rajasthani ethos, while the other has the exuberance and vitality of a local idiom.<sup>29</sup> The patron's preferences were important, some fine eclectic paintings were produced for Maratha rulers with a discerning eye, such as the court portraits of Shahu, (Pl. 303) which emulate Mughal and Rajasthani schools. The eclecticism mostly yielded indifferent results as the pages of the Nasik Ragamala<sup>30</sup> or Tala paintings from western Deccan, wherein Maratha

influence is particularly apparent in costumes such as the nine yards sari and turban types. On the other hand a robust local idiom in Maratha region derived from Rajasthan schools is observed in the illustrated manuscripts on religious themes such as Bhagwata Purana, Durga Saptasati and Rukmini Swayamvara. Though not alienated geographically from Maratha territory, Vidarbha was never a part of mainstream Maratha culture, which essentially flowered in the courts of the Peshwas at Pune, Wai and Satara, in western Deccan and echoed to a degree in the Bhosala ruling house of Nagpur in Vidarbha, in the north eastern corner of the Deccan.

The paintings executed in Vidarbha for the Digambara Jains stand distinctly apart from either of these styles. The places where Maratha painting flourished were not Digambara centers, the manuscript of Candarajano Rasa, copied at Poona in 1812 CE, <sup>31</sup>being an isolated example of a Jain manuscript executed for the Svetambaras in an area outside the influence of Jainism. Therefore it is highly improbable that artists from these regions were sought after for painting activities. Though painting was patronized to a certain degree in the north eastern Deccan around this time, mainly for the Maratha Bhosales with their capital at Nagpur, the style preferred in their court owed much to the tastes prevalent in Poona, considering the Bhosales' political affinities with the Peshwas of Poona. A dated document from Nagpur, a manuscript of 'Sakuntala', painted in 1789 CE (Pl.304) and presently in the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, displays a style that combines traits from the Rajasthani and Deccani schools, the latter being more prominent, particularly in the use of colors, and delineation of the male and female costumes. The same holds true in case of the illustrated manuscript of Dnyaneswari, dated 1763 CE, also attributed to the Nagpur area, wherein like the Sakuntala manuscript Maratha influence is mainly discerned in the costumes of men and women. Another manuscript, that of the 'Bhagwat Purana' painted for the Bhosales around the late eighteenth century relies more heavily on Rajasthani and Mughal elements, and introduces ornate borders. Several manuscripts and scrolls in the Bhosala collection display a fascination for extravagantly painted floral and geometrical

borders in gold. The possibility of artists working for the Bhosales whose capital, Nagpur, was close to the Digambara nucleus of Karanja, besides itself being home to a fairly large community of Digambara Jains from eighteenth century onwards, seems remote as despite being inconsistent itself, the Nagpur style, which oscillates between the heavily Mughalised to the folk (Pl. 305 a & b, 306) displays no parallels with the idiom of Karanja.

The styles observed in Karanja and its neighborhood thus owe precious little to the contemporaneous Maratha school. It is relevant to note that when painters working in isolated and far off centers in the Deccan working for Digambara patrons, were borrowing substantially from local styles and traditions, as the Sravana Belagola murals, influenced by the Mysore school, or the illustrations in the manuscript on rituals from Kolhapur, echoing the *chitrakathi* style of Sawantwadi exemplify (Pl. 307), the Karanja artist adhered to styles which had virtually become redundant even in their home territory. Again, the northern eastern Deccan had nothing substantially rejuvenating to offer to the visiting painters in terms of stylistic innovations, neither was the patron discerning or demanding enough to inspire the artists to produce anything outstandingly different. The *pancakalyanaka* scroll may be cited as the only exception wherein painting of great aesthetic merit was produced for enlightened patrons. What is significant is that sustained efforts to promote painting activities are visible albeit stemming from solely religious and social intentions. It is paramount that despite the non congenial situation, painting activity persisted, resulting in a body of works identified as belonging to the school of Deccan, related, yet standing apart from contemporaneous paintings.

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