



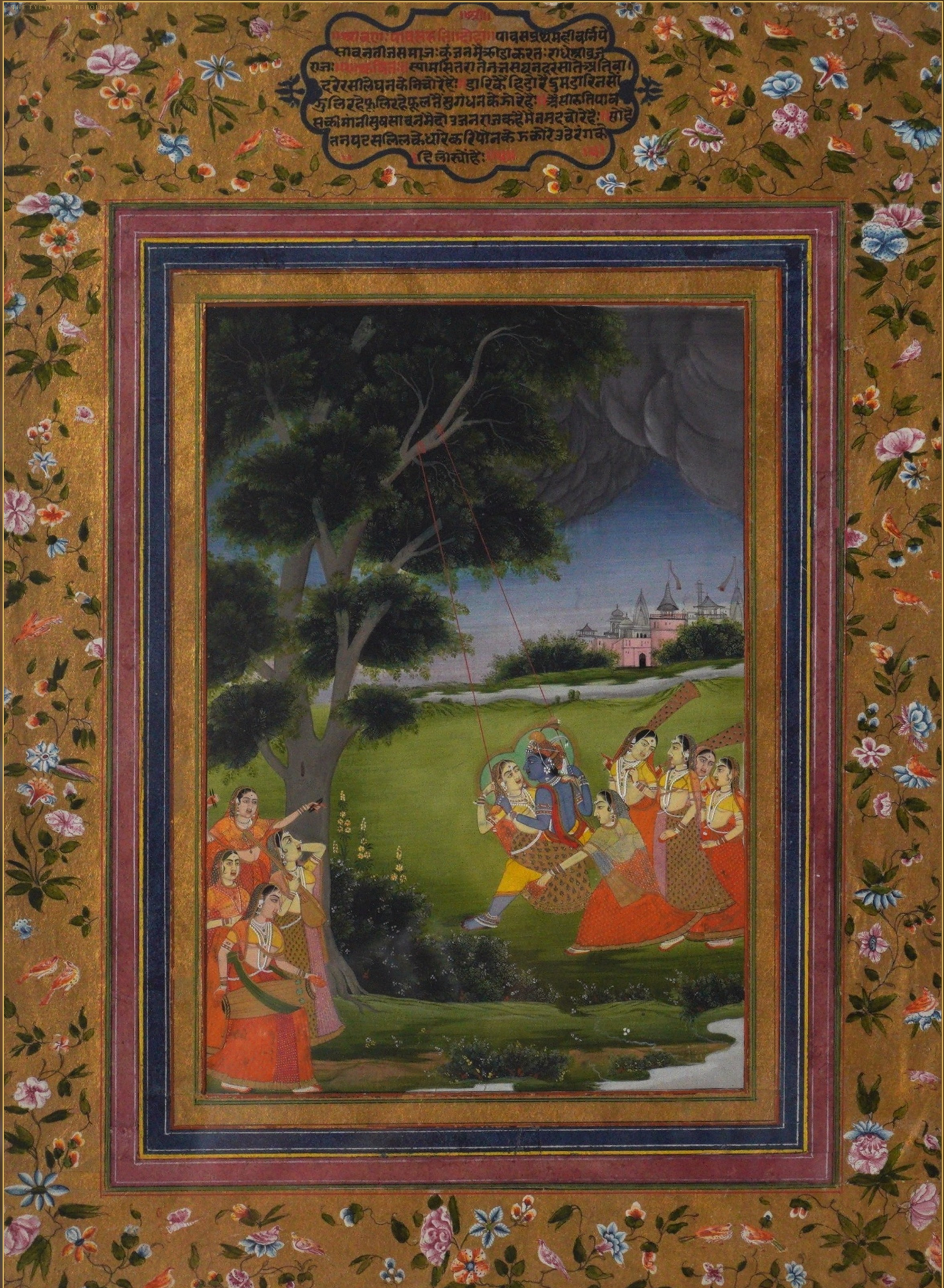
THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Śrī Tīj Līlā in Gold and Monsoon

*A Jaipur Miniature after Chacha Hit Vrindavan Das Ji's
Braj Utsav Bilas*

JAIPUR · CIRCA 1840s

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Śrī Tīj Līlā in Gold and Monsoon

A Jaipur Miniature after Chacha Hit Vrindavan Das Ji's Braj Utsav Bilas

Jaipur, circa 1840s

Opaque watercolor with extensive gold on wasli

33.7 × 24.6 cm

Indian miniature painting is often at its most profound when it is not merely seen, but read. A painted surface may present figures, architecture, landscape, colour and ornament; but an inscription can reveal the conceptual, poetic and devotional world to which the image belongs. Inscriptions in Indian miniatures are therefore not marginal details. They may identify a rāga, a heroine, a season, a mythological episode, a patron, a manuscript cycle, a poetic source, or a ritual moment. Sometimes, a few lines of text can change the entire interpretation of a painting.

The present Jaipur miniature is a striking example. At first glance, the image appears to depict a familiar and beloved theme: Radha and Krishna seated together on a swing beneath a tree, attended by sakhis in a lush monsoon landscape. Yet the inscription above the painting transforms the subject from a general Radha-Krishna swing scene into something much more precise: Śrī Tīj Līlā, the Teej festival of Radha and Śrī Vrajarāj in the bowers of Braj.

The inscription opens with the doha:

पावस प्रथम वर्णिये

सावन तीज समाज।

कुंजन में क्रीड़ा करत

राधे श्री व्रजराज॥

This verse belongs to the Teej Lila section of Braj Utsav Bilas / Vraj Utsav Vilas, attributed to Chacha Hit Vrindavan Das Ji, a revered Braj Rasik poet of the Radha-Vallabh devotional world. Depending on the printed or temple-use edition, this text may be catalogued as Teej Lila, Pad 11, or as a chapter-like section within the larger compendium. The work itself is best understood not as a modern chaptered book in the ordinary sense, but as a vast devotional-festival compendium organized around līlās and utsavs — the sacred pastimes and festivals of Radha and Krishna across the ritual calendar of Braj.

The significance of the inscription is therefore considerable. It anchors the painting in a living religious-poetic tradition. It does not simply say, “Radha and Krishna on a swing.” It says: the rainy season has begun; it is Sāvan Teej; the sakhis are assembled; Radha and Vrajarāj are playing in the kunj. The painting, with its gold, clouds, tree, swing, sakhis, stream and flowering border, becomes a visual counterpart to a sung Braj festival text.

1. A painting to be read as well as seen

The painting is executed in opaque watercolor with extensive application of gold on wasli, measuring 33.7 by 24.6 cm. These material details already place it within a refined courtly-devotional environment. The work is large enough to allow a full composition, a substantial inscriptional cartouche, and a richly ornamented margin, yet still intimate enough to be viewed closely, almost like a manuscript folio.

Wasli, the layered and burnished paper support used in Indian miniature painting, provided artists with a smooth, durable surface on which to build fine line, opaque pigment and gilding. The result in this painting is a highly finished surface, with saturated colour, crisp borders, extensive gold, and carefully arranged inscriptional and pictorial zones.

The miniature's visual structure is hierarchical. The sacred image is placed within layered frames, and the inscription occupies a formal cartouche above it. Around the central field runs a sumptuous gold floral border. This border is not merely decorative. It creates a sense of preciousness and ritual enclosure. The painting is framed like a jewel, or perhaps like a devotional manuscript page intended for reverent viewing.

The first impression is festive and luminous. The gold border shines; the floral sprays bloom; the central scene opens into green and blue monsoon space; dark clouds gather in the upper right; the divine couple



are enthroned on a swing beneath a spreading tree. The viewer is invited to enter not only a landscape, but a season, a festival and a poem.

2. Detailed visual description

The composition is organised around a large tree rising from the left side of the pictorial field. Its trunk is firm and vertical, while its branches spread across the upper portion of the scene, creating the bower — the *kunj* — named in the inscription. The tree is both natural and symbolic. It supports the swing physically, but it also forms the sacred enclosure in which Radha and Krishna's *līlā* unfolds.

From the tree descend the ropes of the swing, rendered as fine red lines. These diagonals are compositionally important: they lead the eye downward from the canopy into the heart of the image, where Radha and Krishna sit together. The swing is not an incidental object. It is the central ritual and poetic device of the painting. It identifies the subject as belonging to the overlapping worlds of Teej, Jhūlan, and Hindola Līlā.

Krishna is shown with his characteristic blue complexion. He is crowned, richly dressed and centrally placed. The inscription identifies him as Śrī Vrajarāj, "the glorious king of Vraja." This epithet matters. It presents Krishna not primarily as a cosmic god of distant metaphysical grandeur, but as the beloved lord of Braj: the Krishna of groves, songs, sakhis, swings and intimate *līlā*.

Radha sits beside him on the swing. The two are shown in close proximity, sharing the seat and the sacred rhythm of the festival. Their pairing is the emotional centre of the painting. The swing does not simply carry two figures; it carries the devotional union of Radha and Vrajarāj.

Around them gather the sakhis, the intimate female companions of Radha. On the right, a group of attendants appears to push or manage the swing. Their gestures create movement and festival energy. On the left, another group balances the scene, adding a sense of musical or devotional participation. These figures are crucial. In Braj Rasik literature, the sakhis are not background servants. They are the arrangers of *līlā*. They prepare the bower, decorate the swing, dress the divine couple, sing the proper songs, and intensify the *rasa* of the scene.

The middle distance includes a flowing watercourse, perhaps a stream, canal, or Yamuna-like sacred river. Its presence corresponds beautifully to the lower inscriptional fragments that appear to refer to *salil ke dhāre* — streams or currents of water. Above, dark monsoon clouds gather with dramatic weight. They are concentrated especially toward the upper right, creating the sense of a rain-laden sky. A distant pink architectural complex appears beyond the water, perhaps a palace, temple, or idealized Braj settlement. It gives the natural grove a courtly-sacred horizon.

The painting is framed by multiple borders before reaching the broad gold floral margin. This creates a visual movement from outside to inside, from ornament to image, from gold to green, from frame to grove. The outer floral border is one of the painting's most attractive features. Flowers in pink, blue, red, white and orange bloom against the gold ground. They echo the theme of Sāvan, fragrance and flowering abundance. In effect, the border becomes a second garden surrounding the painted grove.

3. The inscription: Devanagari, transliteration and translation

The inscription begins:

पावस प्रथम वर्णिये

सावन तीज समाज।

कुंजन में क्रीड़ा करत

राधे श्री ब्रजराज॥

Transliteration:

Pāvas pratham varṇiye,

Sāvan Tīj samāj;

Kunjan meṃ krīḍā karat,

Rādhe Śrī Vrajarāj.

Translation:

"First let the rainy season be described:

the Sāvan Teej assembly,



where Radha and Śrī Vrajarāj
delight in play within the bowers.”

A more literal version:

“The rainy season is first to be described:
the gathering of Sāvan Teej.
In the bowers they engage in play —
Radha and Śrī Vrajarāj.”

Every phrase has interpretive importance.

पावस / Pāvas means the rainy season, the monsoon. In north Indian poetic culture, the monsoon is much more than weather. It is a full aesthetic and emotional season: dark clouds, peacocks, lightning, wet earth, swelling rivers, cool breezes, separation, longing, union and renewed vegetation.

प्रथम वर्णिये / Pratham varṇiye means “let it first be described.” This phrase has the character of an opening rubric. It announces that the poet is beginning with a description of the season. In the context of Teej, this is entirely appropriate: the festival cannot be understood apart from Sāvan and the rains.

सावन / Sāvan is the north Indian name for the month of Śrāvaṇa, the great monsoon month. In devotional and folk culture it is associated with greenery, swings, song, love, longing and festival.

तीज / Tīj refers to the festival of Teej, especially Hariyali Teej in the monsoon context. Socially, Teej is associated with women’s celebration, swings, mehndi, green garments, songs, marital blessing and the joy of rain. In Rajasthan, especially Jaipur, it has a strong public ceremonial presence. In Braj poetry, it is transformed into a festival of Radha-Krishna līlā.

समाज / Samāj means assembly, gathering, congregation or festive company. In devotional usage it may also suggest collective singing. Thus Sāvan Tīj samāj refers to the festive assembly of Teej: Radha, Krishna, sakhis and the devotional community of the festival.

कुंजन / Kunjan means in the bowers or groves. The kunj is one of the most important spaces in Braj devotional poetry: a shaded, intimate, fragrant, secluded grove where Radha and Krishna meet and play.

क्रीड़ा करत / Kriḍā karat means “engaged in play.” This is close to līlā, divine play. It does not imply trivial amusement; it refers to sacred, aesthetic, love-filled sport.

राधे श्री ब्रजराज / Rādhe Śrī Vrajarāj names Radha and Krishna. Vrajarāj, “king of Vraja,” is Krishna in his Braj identity. He is not presented here as a distant cosmic deity but as the lord of the intimate pastoral world of Vrindavan.

The doha therefore identifies the image with precision. This is not a generic rainy-season scene. It is Radha and Śrī Vrajarāj celebrating Sāvan Teej in the bowers of Braj.

The rest of the inscription reads as follows:

श्याम सित रतन सघन दरसते अतीव,
डररि / दररि तले घन के नीचे रहे।



डारि कै हिंडोरे द्रुम डारिन सो,
झूली रहे, फूली रहे, फूलते सुगंधन के झोंके।
ऐसी ऋतु अति पावन सकल मनि,
सुवासितन में दोऊ जुगल राज कहैं...
मोद / मद छोड़ि है...
सोहे तृण-पात, सलिल के धारे करि,
पौन के टकोरे उठे, रंग के दिलो रचो है॥

Some words remain doubtful, but the poem's broad sense is now unmistakable.

A polished interpretive translation would be:

“Dark and pale, jewel-like masses of dense cloud appear exceedingly beautiful.
Beneath the heavy clouds, swings are tied from the branches of trees.
They sway and bloom amid the flowering groves, while waves of fragrance spread.
Such is this pure and blessed season, filled with beauty and scent.
The leaves and grasses shine; streams of water flow.
At the gusts of the wind, colour and delight arise everywhere.”

Or, more lyrically:

“Dark, dense clouds gather above, shining like jewels.
Beneath them, swings are hung from the branches of trees.
The groves sway and blossom; flowers open and pour out fragrance.
Blessed is this season, filled with beauty and scent.
Leaves, grasses and flowing streams shine in the rain,
while gusts of wind awaken colour, movement and delight.”

This is almost certainly a monsoon-setting kavitt preparing the scene for Radha and Krishna's Teej/Jhūlan play.

4. The textual source: Braj Utsav Bilas and the Teej Lila section

The verse belongs to the Teej Lila section of Braj Utsav Bilas / Vraj Utsav Vilas, attributed to Chacha Hit Vrindavan Das Ji. This is an important clarification. The work should be understood as a large compendium of festival poetry rather than simply as a book divided into modern numbered chapters. Its structure follows the devotional calendar of Braj: specific līlās, utsavs, seasons, rituals and moods.

Depending on the edition or temple-use system, the relevant section may be referred to as Teej Lila, Chapter 11, or Pad 11. Such variation is not unusual in devotional and liturgical texts, where oral, temple and printed traditions may organize material differently. What matters for the painting is the substance: the inscription quotes the opening doha of the Teej Lila section, which describes the rainy season and the Sāvan Teej gathering of Radha and Vrajarāj.

Braj Utsav Bilas may be understood as a poetic calendar of the sacred festivals of Braj. It does not merely describe events; it evokes the appropriate mood, setting, colours, music, adornment and devotional feeling for each festival. In this sense, it is both literary and liturgical. It is a text to be read, sung, remembered and visualized.

The Teej Lila section captures the monsoon swing celebrations associated with Sāvan. It belongs to the same emotional world as Jhūlan Utsav, the swing festival in which Radha and Krishna are placed on a decorated swing while sakhis sing, attend and push the swing. The painting appears to visualize precisely this moment.

5. Samāj Gāyan: the sung life of the text

A particularly important feature of Braj Utsav Bilas is its relationship to Samāj Gāyan. In the Radha-Vallabh and broader Braj temple world, samāj gāyan refers to congregational devotional singing. It is not merely musical performance. It is a form of worship, remembrance, participation and sevā.

In such contexts, a festival text is not a dead literary object. It is activated through singing. During Sāvan and Teej, temple musicians and devotees may turn to the Teej Lila section to sing verses



appropriate to the season and festival. These verses create the atmosphere in front of the deities: monsoon, green decoration, swings, sakhis, Radha, Krishna, fragrance, clouds and devotional joy.

The painting can therefore be understood as the visual counterpart of a sung tradition. The verse that appears in the inscription is not only something to be read. It is something that could be sung before the divine couple. The painting translates this sung festival mood into image.

This is an important point. The miniature is not merely “after a poem.” It is related to a liturgical-aesthetic ecology in which poetry, painting, song, ritual, season and temple service are intertwined.

6. Chacha Hit Vrindavan Das Ji: poet of festival and intimacy

Chacha Hit Vrindavan Das Ji, often affectionately called Chacha Ji, is remembered as a significant Braj Rasik poet associated with the Radha-Vallabh devotional tradition. Traditional accounts place his birth around Vikram Samvat 1751, corresponding approximately to 1694 CE. This places him in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century world of Braj, when Vrindavan had become a major centre of Krishna devotion, temple ritual, Braj Bhasha poetry, samāj singing and devotional aesthetics.

The title “Chacha” — uncle — is unusually intimate. It suggests a devotional persona of affection, nearness and familial participation. Rather than speaking as a remote theologian, Chacha Vrindavan Das writes as if he belongs to the household and festival world of Radha and Krishna. He is an observer, arranger and celebrant of their pleasures.

His wider corpus is often referred to in devotional circles as Chacha Ji ki Vāṇī — the sayings or poetic compositions of Chacha Ji. These include pads, dohas and festival compositions devoted to Radha-Krishna’s daily, seasonal and ceremonial līlās. Braj Utsav Bilas is one of the key works associated with this world because it maps the festivals of Braj in poetic form.

Chacha Ji’s poetic importance lies in his ability to make the ritual calendar emotionally vivid. His poetry does not treat festivals as external ceremonies. It internalizes them as līlā. Teej is not only a date; it is a mood. Jhūlan is not merely the physical act of swinging; it is the rhythm of divine love. The monsoon is not only rain; it is rasa.

7. Radha-Vallabh, Pushtimarg and the Braj devotional landscape

The painting belongs broadly to the devotional landscape of Braj, where several Vaishnava traditions developed rich poetic, ritual and visual cultures around Radha and Krishna.

The Radha-Vallabh Sampradaya, founded by Hita Harivansh in sixteenth-century Vrindavan, is especially relevant. It is a Radha-centred tradition, emphasizing Radha’s supreme devotional position and the intimate nikunj līlā of Radha and Krishna in the bowers of Vrindavan. In this tradition, Braj Bhasha poetry, song and Rasik meditation play a central role.

The Pushtimarg, founded by Vallabhacharya, is another major Krishna-centred Vaishnava tradition, especially associated with sevā — the loving service of the deity through food, dress, music, ornament, seasonal decoration and festival celebration. Pushtimarg and Radha-Vallabh are distinct traditions, but they inhabit the same larger world of Braj devotion, where divine presence is experienced through festival, season, music, image and ritual beauty.

The painting’s inscription is specifically tied to the Radha-Vallabh/Rasik world through Chacha Hit Vrindavan Das Ji and Braj Utsav Bilas. At the same time, its wider aesthetic — Radha-Krishna, swing, monsoon, sakhis, floral decoration, festival atmosphere — would have been intelligible across many Braj and Rajasthani devotional settings.

8. Rīti-kāvya and the refined language of description

The painting also belongs to the world of Rīti-kāvya, or at least draws upon its descriptive and aesthetic resources.

Rīti-kāvya refers to a major current of early modern Hindi and Braj literature, flourishing especially from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. The word rīti means method, style, convention or codified poetic manner. Rīti literature is associated with refined poetic technique, ornamentation, descriptions of love, classifications of heroines, emotional nuance and elaborate treatment of śṛṅgāra rasa, the rasa of love and beauty.

It is sometimes tempting to separate Bhakti and Rīti too sharply: Bhakti as devotional, Rīti as courtly or aesthetic. But in practice, the two often overlap. Radha-Krishna poetry can be deeply devotional while also using the refined descriptive language of Rīti poetics. A temple song can be filled with



aesthetic ornament. A courtly painting can illustrate devotional līlā. A miniature can be both religious and elegant, both literary and visual, both sensuous and sacred.

This painting stands at precisely that intersection. The subject is devotional: Radha and Vrajarāj in Teej Līlā. The source is a festival text. The use of gold, formal borders and courtly polish belongs to the Jaipur atelier. The descriptive lower inscription, with its clouds, branches, swings, flowers, water and wind, uses the language of refined Braj poetic description.

Thus, the painting may be read as a convergence of Bhakti, Rīti-kāvya, Braj festival poetry and Jaipur court painting.

9. Doha and kavitt: compact statement and expanded atmosphere

The inscription appears to move from a compact doha into a longer descriptive passage.

The doha states the subject. It is brief, memorable and structurally clear:

The rainy season is to be described.

It is Sāvan Teej.

The gathering is assembled.

Radha and Vrajarāj play in the bowers.

Below it, the inscription seems to continue in a more expansive, possibly kavitt-like register.

Kavitt — कवित्त — is a Braj poetic metre especially suited to elaborate description. It was widely used in courtly and devotional poetry. If the doha is a doorway, the kavitt is a painted chamber. It allows accumulation: clouds, lightning, branches, flowers, ornaments, wind, water, garments, glances, fragrance, movement.

The lower portion of the inscription is not yet fully deciphered, but several words and phrases have been read or plausibly identified:

श्याम / syām — dark, blue-black, cloud-coloured.

सघन / saghan — dense, thick, massed.

घन / ghan — rain-cloud.

डारि / ḍāri — branch.

हिंडोरे / hiṇḍore — swings.

द्रुम डारिन सो / drum ḍārin so — from the branches of trees.

फूली रहे / phūlī rahe — blooming.

सुगंधन / sugandhan — fragrances.

सलिल के धारे / salil ke dhāre — streams or currents of water.

पौन / pavan / paun — wind or breeze.

टकोरे / ṭakore — gusts, touches, taps or blows.

These fragments suggest a lush monsoon description. A cautious reconstruction of the sense would be:

Dark, dense clouds appear overhead. Beneath them, swings are tied to the branches of trees. The groves are lush and blooming; fragrance spreads. The leaves shine beautifully; streams of water flow, and gusts of wind stir the monsoon bower.

This lower inscription may be a direct continuation from the Teej Lila section of Braj Utsav Bilas, or it may be a scribal excerpt or paraphrase. Either way, its function is clear. It expands the doha into a sensory landscape. The painting then renders that landscape visually.

10. Teej: from social festival to divine līlā

Teej is one of the most evocative festivals of northern India. It is closely associated with the monsoon, greenery, women's celebration, swings, songs, mehndi, ornaments and festive dress. In many regions, Teej is linked with Parvati and her union with Shiva. In Rajasthan, especially Jaipur, it also has a strong public dimension, including processions, images of Teej Mata, music and civic celebration.



But in Braj devotional poetry, Teej is transformed. It becomes Śrī Tīj Līlā — the Teej festival of Radha and Krishna. The social festival becomes divine play. The women's gathering becomes the circle of sakhis. The swing becomes Radha and Krishna's hindola. The green world becomes Vrindavan. The rain becomes rasa.

This transformation is exactly what the painting shows. It does not depict Parvati. It does not show a Jaipur public procession. It shows Radha and Krishna in the grove, attended by sakhis, seated on a swing beneath monsoon clouds. The festival has been internalized into Braj līlā.

This is one reason the painting is so compelling: it joins Rajasthani festival culture with Braj devotional imagination. A Jaipur viewer would have known Teej as a lived festival. A Rasik viewer would have seen it as Radha-Krishna līlā. The painting allows both meanings to coexist.

11. Jhūlan, Hindola and the swing

The swing is the central object of the painting. In the broader culture of Sāvan and Teej, swings are hung from trees to celebrate the monsoon. In Braj devotion, the swing becomes a sacred stage.

The terms jhūlā, hindola and hiṇḍorā all belong to this world. During Jhūlan Utsav, Radha and Krishna are imagined or ritually placed on a swing, often decorated with flowers, vines, pearls or jewels. Sakhis push the swing and sing monsoon songs, sometimes in ragas associated with rain, such as Malhar.

The swing's movement is symbolically rich. It is rhythmic, intimate and reciprocal. It brings the divine couple into gentle motion. It allows the sakhis to serve. It gives visible form to the oscillation of rasa. The swing is not only an object in the picture; it is the image's emotional engine.

In the present painting, the swing is suspended from the living branches of the tree. This is important. The līlā is not staged in an artificial court pavilion. It is rooted in the natural bower of Braj. Nature itself has become the festival architecture.

12. Iconographic elements

The painting's iconography is unusually coherent.

Radha and Krishna

They sit together on the swing. Krishna's blue complexion identifies him visually, while the inscription names him as Śrī Vrajarāj. Radha sits beside him as the emotional centre of the līlā.

Sakhis

The sakhis are gathered around the swing. Some appear to push or attend; others participate from the side. They are the samāj of the doha — the festive devotional assembly.

The swing

The swing marks the scene as Teej/Jhūlan/Hindola. It is the ritual focus of the image.

The tree and bower

The large tree forms the kunj. Its branches support the swing, and its canopy shelters the divine couple.

Clouds

The dark clouds visualize pāvas, the rainy season. They also echo Krishna's dark-blue body.

Water

The watercourse evokes monsoon flow and may correspond to the inscriptional phrase salil ke dhāre.

Flowers and fragrance

The floral border, and perhaps the vegetation within the scene, correspond to the lower inscription's references to blooming and fragrance.

Distant architecture

The pink palace or temple complex situates the grove within an idealized sacred-courtly Braj landscape.

The image is therefore not an arbitrary composition. It is carefully aligned with the inscriptional text.



13. Jaipur, circa 1840s: attribution and style

The attribution to Jaipur, circa 1840s is persuasive. Jaipur painting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries often combined Rajput devotional subjects with Mughal-derived refinement, polished surfaces, formal borders, architectural order and decorative splendour.

Several features support the attribution.

First, the painting has a strong sense of formal framing. Multiple coloured borders surround the central image, and the inscription is placed in a carefully shaped cartouche. This structured presentation suits Jaipur court taste.

Second, the floral gold border reflects Mughal album aesthetics adapted into a Rajasthani devotional context. Jaipur artists frequently incorporated Mughal decorative refinement into Hindu devotional subjects.

Third, the figure style is graceful, ornamental and polished, consistent with later Rajput courtly work rather than early rustic Mewar or vigorous seventeenth-century idioms.

Fourth, the landscape shows a nineteenth-century balance between stylization and atmosphere: large tree, receding water, distant architecture and storm clouds.

Fifth, the extensive use of gold suggests an elite devotional or courtly commission.

The painting does not look like a crude late bazaar copy. Nor does it claim the radical finesse of an early Mughal or masterly eighteenth-century Pahari work. Its character is that of a refined nineteenth-century Jaipur devotional miniature: literary, ornamental, courtly and pious.

14. Jaipur within the wider Rajasthani schools

The painting can be better understood by comparing Jaipur with other Rajasthani and related schools.

Mewar often favours bold colour, strong outlines and powerful narrative clarity. Earlier Mewar works are more direct and architectonic than this painting.

Bundi and Kota are famous for dramatic landscapes, lush vegetation, water, hunting scenes and monsoon skies. The present painting shares a love of nature and clouds but is more controlled and courtly in its framing.

Kishangarh is deeply associated with Radha-Krishna devotion and refined idealized beauty, especially elongated eyes and delicate profiles. The present painting shares the devotional subject but not the extreme Kishangarh physiognomy.

Bikaner often shows Persianate and Mughal delicacy. The gold floral border here has some Mughal-derived elegance, but the overall composition is more comfortably Jaipur.

Nathdwara is associated with Pushtimarg devotional painting, especially Shrinathji and temple festival imagery. The present painting shares the festival-devotional spirit but is not a typical Nathdwara pichwai subject.

Pahari painting, especially Kangra and Guler, produced exquisite Radha-Krishna scenes of lyrical softness. The present work is more Rajasthani in border, colour and decorative structure.

Jaipur is therefore an appropriate attribution because the painting combines courtly polish, structured borders, Mughal-inspired floral gold decoration and a devotional Braj subject in a way characteristic of the Jaipur orbit.

15. The meaning of gold

The extensive use of gold is central to the painting's effect. Gold appears most prominently in the broad floral border, but it also contributes to the overall sense of sacred luxury.

Gold marks the painting as precious. It converts the page into a jewel-like object. It also creates sacred radiance. In devotional art, gold is never only material wealth; it suggests light, value, ritual splendour and divine presence.

The gold floral border performs an especially subtle function. The central image is a monsoon grove; the border is another grove, but ornamental and luminous. The flowers in the border echo the flowering and fragrance described in the inscription. They make the whole painting bloom.

There is also a powerful contrast between the gold border and the storm-filled interior. The border is radiant and timeless; the central image is seasonal and atmospheric. The eternal splendour of devotion surrounds the passing beauty of Sāvan. The result is visually and conceptually satisfying.



16. Comparable works and market context

Paintings of Radha and Krishna on a swing are well established in the market for Indian miniatures. They appear across Jaipur, Kishangarh, Mewar, Bundi, Kota, Bikaner, Nathdwara-related ateliers and Pahari schools. The subject is popular because it combines several desirable elements: Radha-Krishna intimacy, monsoon atmosphere, sakhis, music, garden setting, swing movement and festival joy.

Many market examples are catalogued generically as “Radha and Krishna on a swing,” “Jhūlan Līlā,” or “Radha-Krishna in a garden.” Such works can be attractive, but many lack a specific inscription or textual connection. Their value depends on school, date, quality, condition and provenance.

The present painting is stronger than many generic swing scenes because its inscription anchors it to the Teej Lila section of Braj Utsav Bilas. This gives it literary and liturgical specificity. It is not merely a nice Radha-Krishna swing image; it is a painted visualization of a named Braj festival text.

Comparable works include several categories:

Generic Radha-Krishna swing paintings

These establish the broad iconographic field, but often lack textual specificity.

Jhūlan/Hindola festival paintings

These are closer comparables, especially when they include sakhis, monsoon clouds and a tree-hung swing.

Monsoon Radha-Krishna scenes

These share the varṣā-rasa mood but may not be specifically Teej.

Inscribed literary folios

These are the most relevant comparables. A painting connected to a named text is generally more interesting to scholars and serious collectors than an anonymous devotional scene.

Nineteenth-century Jaipur devotional miniatures

These provide the closest stylistic and market context. Jaipur paintings of this date usually do not command the prices of the finest eighteenth-century Kishangarh, Bundi, Kota, early Mewar or Pahari works, but examples with strong subject matter, gold borders, good condition and meaningful inscriptions can command a premium.

The painting’s market strengths are clear: desirable subject, good size, extensive gold, attractive border, plausible Jaipur attribution, and a meaningful inscription linked to a named Braj text. Its limitations are also clear: it is nineteenth century, not eighteenth; condition and provenance must be checked; and the full inscription should ideally be verified against a printed or manuscript copy of Braj Utsav Bilas.

Its proper positioning is therefore as a highly attractive and textually significant Jaipur devotional miniature, not as a generic decorative Radha-Krishna painting.

17. A possible festival-series folio

The formal inscription raises an intriguing possibility: the painting may have belonged to a larger illustrated cycle of Braj festivals. Since Braj Utsav Bilas is a compendium of Radha-Krishna utsavs, a full illustrated series could have included Teej, Jhūlan, Holi, Vasant, Janmashtami, Sharad, Annakut, Phūl Bangla and other seasonal celebrations.

The painting’s format supports this possibility. The inscription is integrated into the front of the work, not added casually. The verse corresponds to a specific festival section. The visual content follows the text closely.

If companion folios from the same series were ever identified, the painting’s importance would increase considerably. It would then be possible to reconstruct a larger visual-literary project around the annual festival calendar of Braj.

Even as a single surviving work, however, the painting preserves the logic of such a cycle. It represents one moment in the sacred year: Sāvan Teej, the monsoon swing festival of Radha and Vrajarāj.

18. Catalogue-style description

Śrī Tīj Līlā: Radha and Śrī Vrajarāj on a Swing in the Monsoon Groves of Braj
Jaipur, circa 1840s



Opaque watercolor with extensive gold on wasli

33.7 × 24.6 cm

This refined Jaipur miniature depicts Radha and Krishna seated together on a swing suspended from a large tree in the monsoon groves of Braj. Sakhis gather around the divine couple, pushing and attending the swing as part of the Sāvan Teej celebration. Dark rain clouds gather above, a watercourse flows through the middle distance, and a distant palace or temple complex marks the sacred-courtly landscape. The central scene is enclosed within layered borders and a broad gold floral margin, whose blossoming sprays echo the verdant and fragrant abundance of the rainy season.

The upper cartouche contains a Braj inscription beginning with the opening doha of the Teej Lila section of Braj Utsav Bilas / Vraj Utsav Vilas, attributed to Chacha Hit Vrindavan Das Ji:

पावस प्रथम वर्णिये

सावन तीज समाज।

कुंजन में क्रीड़ा करत

राधे श्री व्रजराज॥

Pāvas pratham varṇiye,
Sāvan Tīj samāj;
Kunjan meṃ krīḍā karat,
Rādhe Śrī Vrajarāj.

“First let the rainy season be described: the Sāvan Teej assembly, where Radha and Śrī Vrajarāj delight in play within the bowers.”

The inscription identifies the subject not as a generic monsoon swing scene, but as Śrī Tīj Lilā, the sacred Teej festival of Radha and Krishna in the bowers of Braj. The lower inscription appears to continue in a kavitt-like Braj descriptive mode, elaborating the monsoon atmosphere through references to dense clouds, swings tied to tree branches, blooming flowers, fragrance, flowing water and gusts of wind. The painting thus represents a sophisticated fusion of Jaipur courtly refinement, Braj festival poetry, Rīti-kāvya description, Radha-Vallabh liturgical culture and Radha-Krishna devotional imagination.

19. Conclusion: a festival made visible

This Jaipur miniature is a luminous example of the way Indian painting can hold together image, inscription, poetry, music, ritual and theology. Its subject is not merely Radha and Krishna on a swing. It is the arrival of the rainy season in Braj. It is Sāvan. It is Teej. It is the gathering of sakhis. It is the swing tied to the tree. It is the fragrance of flowers, the flowing of water, the touch of wind and the darkening of the sky.

The inscription begins:

पावस प्रथम वर्णिये — first, let the rainy season be described.

The painting answers: the rainy season has arrived. The clouds are gathering. The grove is green. The swing has been hung. The sakhis have assembled. Radha and Śrī Vrajarāj are seated together in the bower.

The attribution to Jaipur, circa 1840s, is strengthened by the painting's refined surface, formal border structure, Mughal-derived floral gold margin, devotional subject and polished late Rajput handling. Yet the painting's deepest identity lies in Braj: in the poetic and liturgical imagination of Teej Lila as preserved in Braj Utsav Bilas.

Its importance lies in the convergence of multiple worlds. It is a Jaipur courtly miniature. It is a Radha-Krishna devotional image. It is a Teej festival painting. It is a visual expression of Samāj Gāyan culture. It is a document of Braj poetic tradition. It is also an object of gold, colour and refined aesthetic pleasure.

The image shows the lilā.

The inscription names it.

Together, they preserve the monsoon joy of Braj.





APPENDIX

Deciphering the Inscription.

The inscription begins with the doha:

पावस प्रथम वर्णिये
सावन तीज समाज।
कुंजन में क्रीड़ा करत
राधे श्री व्रजराज॥

Transliteration:

Pāvas pratham varṇiye,
Sāvan Tīj samāj;
Kunjan meṃ krīḍā karat,
Rādhe Śrī Vrajarāj.

Translation:

“First let the rainy season be described:
the Sāvan Teej assembly,
where Radha and Śrī Vrajarāj
delight in play within the bowers.”

The image and the inscription correspond very closely

The inscription says “पावस प्रथम वर्णिये” — “first let the rainy season be described.” In the painting, the rainy season is visually established by the dramatic dark clouds in the upper right. They are not merely decorative; they are the atmospheric foundation of the image. The sky is heavy and grey-blue, with a darker storm mass pressing into the scene.

The inscription says “सावन तीज समाज” — the Sāvan Teej gathering. The painting shows precisely such a gathering. This is not an isolated Radha-Krishna pair. It is a festive assembly. The sakhis gather around, some pushing or attending the swing, others singing or participating from the side. The composition conveys collective celebration.

The inscription says “कुंजन में क्रीड़ा करत” — “playing in the bowers.” The great tree dominates the composition. Its branches fill the upper left and centre, creating the sheltered grove or kunj beneath which the swing hangs. The bower is not a minor background detail; it is the stage of the līlā.

The inscription says “राधे श्री व्रजराज” — Radha and Śrī Vrajarāj. At the centre, Krishna, dark-blue and crowned, sits with Radha on the swing. Krishna’s identity as Vrajarāj, the lord of Braj, is visually marked by his blue complexion, crown and central position.

The lower inscriptional fragments we discussed — clouds, swings, branches, flowers, fragrance, water, wind — are also present visually. The swing is tied from the tree. The foliage is lush. A stream or watercourse runs across the middle distance. The floral border is filled with blossoms. The sense of wind is implied by the motion of the swing, the diagonal ropes, the gathering clouds and the active gestures of the sakhis.

In short, the painting is almost a painted commentary on the inscription.

This verse has now been identified as the opening doha of Chapter 11, “Śrī Tīj Līlā,” from Braj Utsav Bilas / Vraj Utsav Vilas, attributed to Chacha Vrindavandas Ji. That identification is crucial. The painting is not simply illustrating a conventional Radha-Krishna swing scene. It appears to visualize a specific Braj devotional festival text.



The doha performs the same function that an opening shot performs in cinema. It establishes the season, place, occasion and protagonists. Pāvas announces the rainy season. Sāvan Tīj names the festival. Samāj evokes the festive assembly. Kunjan locates the action in the bowers. Kṛīḍā declares that what unfolds is playful līlā. Rādhe and Śrī Vrajarāj identify the divine couple.

The lower part is not a random prose explanation, but a highly pictorial Braj kavitt-style description of the rainy season setting. It is doing exactly what the opening doha announces: “पावस प्रथम वर्णिये” — first, let the rainy season be described.

The words are distorted because they are being read through old handwriting, regional Braj/Rajasthani spelling, and perhaps some scribal compression. But the meaning is now quite clear.

The heading

The lower passage is probably introduced as कवित्त, not merely “कविता.” In Braj literary manuscripts, कवित्त is a common metre used for descriptive, ornate, image-rich poetry. It would be entirely appropriate after a doha.

So the structure is probably:

Sāvan / Pāvas R̥tu

Doha — the opening couplet

Kavitt — the descriptive monsoon expansion

That is a very elegant literary structure.

2. The opening doha, now securely understood

पावस प्रथम वर्णिये

सावन तीज समाज।

कुंजन में क्रीड़ा करत

राधे श्री ब्रजराज॥

Pāvas pratham varṇiye,
Sāvan Tīj samāj;
Kunjan meṃ kṛīḍā karat,
Rādhe Śrī Vrajarāj.

“First let the rainy season be described:
the Sāvan Teej assembly,
where Radha and Śrī Vrajarāj
delight in play within the bowers.”

Then the kavitt begins to fulfil that promise by describing the monsoon atmosphere.

3. Making sense of the kavitt

Your transliteration:

Syama Sita Ratena Nasaghana Darsate
Ativa
Dara Ratile Ghanake Nicho Rahe
Darikai Hidorei Drumadarinasa
Juli Rahe Fuli Rahe Fultai Siyandhana
Kejomhei
Aise Ritu Ati Pavana Sakamani
Suvasatan Me Do Ujin Raj kahe
Maine Mada chor Hai .4
Sohe Tana Pata Salila Ke Dhari Kari



Pauna Ke Takore uthe Rang ke
Dilo Racho He.

I would cautiously normalize this into something like the following. This is not a final transcription, but a working reconstruction of meaning:

श्याम सित रतन सघन दरसते अतीव,
डररि / दररि तले घन के नीचे रहे।
डारि कै हिंडोरे द्रुम डारिन सो,
झूली रहे, फूली रहे, फूलते सुगंधन के झोंके।
ऐसी ऋतु अति पावन सकल मनि,
सुवासितन में दोऊ जुगल राज कहैं...
मोद / मद छोड़ि है...
सोहे तृण-पात, सलिल के धारे करि,
पौन के टकोरे उठे, रंग के दिलो रचो है॥

Some words remain doubtful, but the poem's broad sense is now unmistakable.

4. A likely interpretive translation

A polished interpretive translation would be:

“Dark and pale, jewel-like masses of dense cloud appear exceedingly beautiful.
Beneath the heavy clouds, swings are tied from the branches of trees.
They sway and bloom amid the flowering groves, while waves of fragrance spread.
Such is this pure and blessed season, filled with beauty and scent.
The leaves and grasses shine; streams of water flow.
At the gusts of the wind, colour and delight arise everywhere.”

Or, more lyrically:

“Dark, dense clouds gather above, shining like jewels.
Beneath them, swings are hung from the branches of trees.
The groves sway and blossom; flowers open and pour out fragrance.
Blessed is this season, filled with beauty and scent.
Leaves, grasses and flowing streams shine in the rain,
while gusts of wind awaken colour, movement and delight.”

This is almost certainly a monsoon-setting kavitt preparing the scene for Radha and Krishna's Teej/Jhūlan play.

5. Phrase-by-phrase interpretation

Syama Sita Ratena Nasaghana Darsate

This is difficult but probably contains:

श्याम — dark, blue-black, cloud-coloured

सित / सीत — white, pale, bright, cool, or perhaps lightning-like brightness

रतन / रत्न — jewel-like

सघन — dense, thick

दरसते / दरसतें — are seen, appear

A possible underlying phrase:

श्याम सित रतन सघन दरसते अतीव

Meaning:

“Dark and bright jewel-like dense forms appear exceedingly beautiful.”



This may describe the monsoon sky: dark clouds, pale flashes, jewel-like contrasts. The pairing श्याम-सित — dark and light — is visually appropriate: black clouds and white lightning, or dark clouds against pale sky.

Ativa

Almost certainly:

अतीव — extremely, exceedingly.

This is a common poetic intensifier.

Dara Ratile Ghanake Nicho Rahe

This is hard, but ghanake nicho rahe likely means:

घन के नीचे रहे — “beneath the clouds remain / are placed / appear.”

The prior words may refer to the earth, banks, low ground, or spreading shade. The meaning is probably that the landscape lies under the heavy clouds.

Darikai Hidorei Drumadarinasa

This is one of the clearest and most important lines.

Likely:

डारि कै हिंदोरे द्रुम डारिन सो

Meaning:

“Swings are tied to the branches of trees.”

Breaking it down:

डारि कै / dāri kai — on the branch / having tied to the branch

हिंदोरे / hiṇḍore — swings

द्रुम / drum — tree

डारिन सो / dārin so — from the branches

This line directly matches the painting: the swing hangs from a tree branch.

Juli Rahe Fuli Rahe Fultai Siyandhana Kejomhei

This probably contains:

झूली रहे / jhūli rahe — are swinging / swaying

फूली रहे / phūli rahe — are blooming

फूलते / phūlate — blossoming

सुगंधन / sugandhan — fragrance

के झोंके / ke jhonke — gusts, waves, wafts

Your “Siyandhana Kejomhei” is very likely something like:

सुगंधन के झोंके

Meaning:

“wafts of fragrance.”

So the line may mean:

“They sway and bloom; flowers blossom, sending out waves of fragrance.”

This is beautiful and perfectly appropriate to Sāvan Teej.

Aise Ritu Ati Pavana Sakamani

Likely:

ऐसी ऋतु अति पावन सकल मनि / सकल मानी

**Meaning:**

“Such is this most pure/blessed season, esteemed by all,”

or

“Such a season, exceedingly pure, jewel-like in every way.”

ऋतु / ritu — season

अति / ati — very

पावन / pāvan — pure, sacred, blessed

सकल / sakal — all, entire

मनि / maṇi — jewel, perhaps “like jewels”; uncertain

This may be praising the rainy season as a sacred and beautiful time.

Suvasatan Me Do Ujin Raj kahe

This is uncertain but likely contains:

सुवासितन / suvāsitan — fragrant things, perfumed surroundings

दोऊ / doū — the two, the divine couple

जुगल / jugal — the pair, Radha-Krishna

राज / rāj — kingly, radiant, or perhaps “Vrajaraj” in abbreviated sense

कहै / kahe — says; a poet’s signature-like narrative phrase

A possible reconstruction:

सुवासितन में दोऊ जुगलराज कहै...

Meaning:

“Amid these fragrances, the two — the divine pair — appear in royal beauty...”

Or:

“The poet says: in this fragrant setting, the two sovereign lovers...”

This line may introduce Radha and Krishna again after the nature description.

Maine Mada chor Hai .4

Very uncertain. It could be:

मैन मद छोड़ि है

or

मैन-मद छोरि है

or

मदन मद छोड़ि है

If मदन is involved, it could refer to Kāma/Madan, the god of love, whose pride is defeated by the beauty of the divine couple or the season. A common poetic idea is that Radha-Krishna’s beauty makes even Manmatha/Madan ashamed.

Possible sense:

“Madan’s pride is cast aside,”

or

“Love’s intoxication overflows,”

or

“All pride of beauty is abandoned.”

But this is one of the least secure lines. I would leave it bracketed in any formal transcription.

Sohe Tana Pata Salila Ke Dhari Kari



This is clearer. Your “Tana Pata” is likely:

तृण-पात or तरु-पात

Two possibilities:

तृण-पात — grasses and leaves

तरु-पात — tree leaves

सलिल के धारे means streams of water.

So:

सोहे तृण-पात, सलिल के धारे करि...

Meaning:

“The grasses and leaves shine beautifully, with streams of water flowing...”

or:

“The tree-leaves look beautiful, as streams of water run...”

This matches the monsoon landscape.

Pauna Ke Takore uthe Rang ke

Almost certainly:

पौन के टकोरे उठे रंग के...

पौन / पवन — wind, breeze

टकोरे — blows, taps, gusts, knocks

उठे — arise

रंग — colour, delight, festive mood

Meaning:

“With the gusts of the wind, colours/delights arise...”

This is a vivid tactile and visual phrase. It describes wind striking leaves, flowers, water, garments and swing ropes.

Dilo Racho He

Possibly:

दिलो रचो है / दिलो रच्यो है

or

रंग के दिलो रचो है

Meaning:

“the heart is coloured/dyed,”

or

“the heart is filled with colour/delight,”

or

“the scene is richly coloured.”

In Braj/Hindi, रंग रचना can mean to create colour, arrange festivity, or imbue the heart with rasa. This ending may mean the season has coloured the heart with delight.

6. What the kavitt is doing

The kavitt is not simply saying “there are clouds and flowers.” It is creating the sensory world of Teej:

Sight: dark clouds, bright flashes, green leaves, flowing water, coloured flowers.

Smell: fragrance, scented blossoms.

Touch: gusts of wind, cool rain, movement of the swing.



Movement: swinging, flowing, blooming, rising.

Emotion: delight, sacredness, colour, rasa.

It creates the world in which Radha and Vrajarāj's play becomes possible.

The doha gives the devotional subject.

The kavitt gives the atmosphere.

The painting gives the visual embodiment.

7. A better working reconstruction

Here is a cautious, cleaned-up reconstruction, with uncertain words kept flexible:

॥ कवित्त ॥

श्याम सित रतन सघन दरसते अतीव,

... घन के नीचे रहे।

डारि कै हिंडोरे द्रुम डारिन सो,

झूली रहे, फूली रहे, फूलते सुगंधन के झोंके।

ऐसी ऋतु अति पावन सकल मनि,

सुवासितन में दोऊ जुगलराज कहै ...

... मदन-मद छोड़ि है।

सोहे तृण-पात, सलिल के धारे करि,

पौन के टकोरे उठे, रंग के दिलो रचो है॥

Again, this is not final, but it is now close enough to interpret.

8. The meaning in relation to the painting

This lower passage fits the painting extremely well.

“घन” / clouds — visible in the upper right.

“हिंडोरे” / swings — the central object of the image.

“द्रुम डारिन” / tree branches — the swing is tied to the tree.

“फूली रहे” / blooming — echoed in the floral border and landscape.

“सुगंधन” / fragrance — implied by the flowers.

“सलिल के धारे” / streams of water — visible as the watercourse in the middle ground.

“पौन के टकोरे” / gusts of wind — implied by the monsoon mood and movement of the swing.

This is strong evidence that the painting and inscription were intended together. The lower text is almost an inventory of the visual world painted below it.

9. Final interpretive translation of the lower part

A polished translation suitable for an article or catalogue note could be:

“Dark and bright, jewel-like, the dense monsoon forms appear exceedingly beautiful. Beneath the clouds, swings are tied from the branches of trees. The groves sway and blossom; flowers open, sending out wafts of fragrance. Such is this blessed season, filled with sweetness and scent. Leaves and grasses shine; streams of water flow; and as gusts of wind strike through the grove, colour and delight rise everywhere.”

This captures the meaning without pretending every word has been read with certainty.

A more cautious scholarly version:

“The lower kavitt-like passage elaborates the rainy-season setting through a series of sensory images: dense dark clouds overhead, swings suspended from tree branches, blooming flowers, wafts of fragrance, flowing water, and gusts of wind stirring the landscape. These details correspond closely to the visual elements of the painting itself.”



That is the safest form for publication.

10. Why this is important

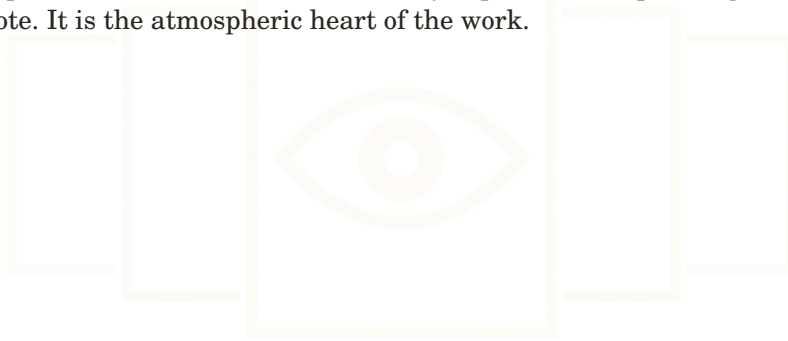
This lower inscription reinforces the painting's significance in three ways.

First, it confirms the Teej/Jhūlan subject. The swing and monsoon vocabulary are explicit.

Second, it strengthens the connection with Braj festival poetry. The language is not a modern label. It is literary, poetic and devotional.

Third, it deepens the image's interpretation. The painting is not merely showing Radha and Krishna on a swing; it is visualizing a complete monsoon rasa environment: cloud, flower, scent, stream, wind, movement, colour and sacred play.

So the lower inscription should be treated as a major part of the painting's importance, not as a secondary scribal note. It is the atmospheric heart of the work.



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