

Leaf from a Gandavyuha Manuscript, late 11th-early 12th century
Unknown artist, Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, Ink and opaque watercolor on palm leaf, 95.86



- This palm leaf manuscript page was once part of a larger sutra called the Gandavyuha, or the Excellent Manifestation Sutra, a Buddhist Mahayana Sutra.
- Gandavyūha Sūtra forms the climax of a larger text, the Avatamsaka Sutra, which was most likely composed in Sanskrit in 300 CE and was first translated into Chinese by the monk Bodhibhadra 400 CE.
- It tells the tale of Sudhana, a young pilgrim who seeks out multiple teachers to attain enlightenment.
- Sudhana is depicted by a tree against a stippled blue background on his way to visit a guru.
- Sudhana’s final visit takes him the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, who teaches him that wisdom only exists for the sake of putting it into practice; that it is only good insofar as it benefits all living beings.
- his quest leads him full circle and he is awakened to teachings of the Buddha
- The painting style reveals connections with northeast India, likely indexing the migration of Indian monks to monasteries in the Himalayas, between the 11th and 13th centuries.
- The manuscript consisted of a stack of multiple leaves bound together through the two holes at the center and would have been easy to transport.
- It is one of the oldest extant examples of South Asian manuscript painting.

Descriptive

Interpretive

Associative