



The Cowherd Krishna

Signed T. Siddalingiah, Tumkur, 1929

Oil on canvas

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An oil painting of a young Krishna being nuzzled by a cow. The rest of the herd graze in the middle ground. In the foreground, a peacock looks up at the deity. Swans swim in a pond filled with water lilies. The painting is signed lower left in red 'T. Siddalingiah, Tumkur, 1929'. Though no artist of this name can be identified, the date and location, alongside the style, aligns Siddalingiah with the School of Ravi Varma. Varma was one of the first Indian artists to work in oil, using European techniques to depict traditional Hindu mythology.

The painting was likely intended to be turned into an oleograph or chromolithograph. Ravi Varma founded India's first chromolithographic press in Bombay in 1894. Though he sold it in 1901, his name remained attached. Under new ownership, the press continued to print Ravi Varma's work but also employed several new artists. The images were sold as postcards and souvenirs, but also licensed for advertising and brand names worldwide. The likeness of Krishna was often used for dairy campaigns, due to his association with cows.

Siddalingiah may have been employed by the Ravi Varma Press, or others such as the Chitrashala Press or S. S. Brisbaji & Sons. A fire devastated the Ravi Varma factory in 1972, so it is possible that other examples of Siddalingiah's work were lost. Records exist of an artist called Shilpi Siddalingaswamy or K. S. Siddalingaswamy who was employed by the Ravi Varma Press in the early 1930s. Siddalingaswamy was born in Mysore, not far from Tumkur. His work shares stylistic similarities

with the present work by Siddalingiah, and the similarity of their names might suggest a familial relationship.