

Indigenous Influences on Ajanta Paintings and Expansion of Ajanta influence on subsequent Indian cultures and tradition of wall painting in Rajasthan

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Abstract

This study investigates indigenous influences on Ajanta Paintings which is also known as Ajanta Style and by some historians Gupta Style. When Ajanta paintings are considered as Gupta style that are described in reference to northern Indian Influences from 4th to 8th century whereas before Guptas Ajanta paintings had many indigenous influences to reach its perfect form. Madanjeet Singh asserts that Ajanta paintings have regional influences and considering them Gupta style is half truth. The term refers only to the northern Indian influences, the more precisely to the drawing of sacred images in a broad-spectrum, nonetheless based on facts numerous influences shaped the art of Ajanta paintings and present whole life of India in panorama. Empirical analysis clearly shows the contribution of regional styles before appellation of Ajanta style which further influenced later styles of Indian Paintings and murals and can be analyzed in Rajputana paintings as well as murals. Satavahanas Vakatakas, Guptas, and Chalukyas of Badami all contributed in shaping marvels of Ajanta cave art. Though historical sources are not enough to be decisive to label Ajanta paintings any specific style but one can pursue the periods to know the origin, existence and expansion during which caves were carved. To reach a point that how various dynasties that were in power, based on religious, cultural, and artistic reasons contributed in this art and made Ajanta paintings prominent. Today Ajanta paintings elucidate the history of contributors and also prove that how Ajanta paintings influenced paintings and murals of later periods and cultures and contributed in shaping and affecting them till today.

Keywords: Ajanta Paintings, Gupta Style, Jātaka, *Shadangā*, Indigenous Influences.

Introduction

“A man continues to enjoy himself in Paradise as long as his memory is green in the world; one should (therefore) set up a memorial on the mountain that will endure for as long as the moon and the sun shine.”

Ajanta inscription in Cave XXVI (Singh 1965, p. 19)

The 30 Buddhist caves including of sanctuaries and monastic compounds at Ajanta are datable from c. 2nd century – 1st century B.C which is known as Phase I and 4th – 6th century A.D caves are included in Phase II. In the first Phase the Hinayana sect excavated 6 caves (Cave Nos. 8, 9, 10, 12, 13 & 15A) where simple, abstemious and carrying meagerly mural paintings can be seen. In the second phase the Mahayanists greatly enhanced the remaining caves, and few of them were richly decorated with sculptures, sculpted ornamental motifs, craft pillars, brackets, facades and all significantly the mural paintings representing the Jātaka stories and other Buddhist

religious arts. It would not be out of milieu to call the second phase being Ajanta School of Art.

Very few people comprehend that art of India has an extended history. Regrettably the incompleteness of the records induces the historians to leave many gaps in unfolding the complete history. The ancient literature of India contains many orientations in Pali Buddhist principle that is the initial art dating some three or four centuries before the Christian era. Several pages in these books reveal the delight houses belonging to the kings of Magadha festooned with paintings of figures, decorative designs analogous to the Ajanta paintings.

The oldest Indian pictures found in the Jogimara Cave of the Ramgarh. The untimely date of the paintings, which are fairly well preserved, is attested by inscription, manifestly contemporary, and by the approach, which bring to mind the sculptures at Sanchi and Bharhut. They in all probability date from the second century, and cannot well be later than the first century before Christ. The subjects cannot be interpreted at present, but the nudity of the primary figures suggests a connection with the Jain rather than the Buddhist religion, if the cave and

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paintings had any spiritual and religious implication, which is doubtful. (Smith. 1930, p. 95)

The world of Ajanta princes in their palace, royal processions with ornamented elephants and horses, hunting scenes, loving couples, shopkeepers, porters with loads hung over their shoulders, ascetics in monasteries, peasants, beggars and hosts of other people, surrounded by a far-fetched variety of beasts and birds and flowers, were carried on by the trained hands of many craftsmen. The conception and construal of all this is masterfully drawn pictures on precisely painted walls are unquestionably an indigenous contribution of Ajanta. (Smith. 1930, p. 103) The paintings represent Jātakas, as well as scenes from Buddha's life and ornate designs on the ceilings are also well captured and explained.

After analysis of paintings from different caves it is accomplished that the dates of paintings differ from the dates of the caves. The paintings are not necessarily of exactly the same age as the caves which they ornamented. The most categorical are certain works in Caves IX and X, to some extent superimposed by later pictures. These earliest pictures are so closely connected to the Sanchi sculptures that they may be referred to more or less the same age, about the beginning of the Christ era, or former. They may, perhaps, be credited to the benefaction of the powerful Andhra kings of the Deccan, who, even if not themselves Buddhists certainly put any hindrance in the way of Buddhist worship. (Smith. 1930, p. 95)

To prove the indigenous influences on Ajanta style the focus of this research is on Satavahana and Vakataka influences. Paintings and sculptures of Ajanta, both are considered masterpieces of Buddhist religious art, have had a substantial artistic influence of Satavahana (230 BC–220CE) and Vakatakas (CE 250s–CE 500s).

It is clear that Caves X and IX are the earliest, and according to the archeological survey of India (ASI), Cave X could have been excavated in the second century BC. There is however a great deal of disagreement about the exact period of excavation and painting of Vakataka Caves. Spink believes that with the exception of Caves IX and X, the caves were painted during the reign of king Harisena of the Vatsagulam branch of the Vakatakas, which he believes started in AD 460 and was over well before AD 480. (Seth 2006, p. 29) The patronage of the caves at Ajanta was done during the period of Satavahanas and Vakatakas. No existing knowledge about the artists of these paintings. Due to the remoteness of the Ajanta caves site this is believed that the artists came from all over Vakataka territories and Satavahana empires and were deeply precipitous in Buddhist philosophy and their contribution is evident in Ajanta style of painting.

Indigenous Influences on Ajanta Paintings

"Blossoms are the ornaments of trees; it is flashes of lightning that adorn the big rain clouds, the lakes are

adorned by lotuses and water lilies with their intoxicated bees: but virtues brought to perfection are the proper ornaments of living being." (Singh 1965, p. 6)

An Ajanta inscription

Ajanta caves of 1st and 2nd century B.C are considered the oldest ones whereas initially sanctuaries were built that are known as *chaytia-grihas*, this period is marked as first phase of Ajanta. Walter M. Spink asserts that these *chaytia-grihas* were built during the time period of most probably 100 BCE to 100 CE, in all prospects under the patronage of Satavahana dynasty that lasted from 230 BCE - c. 220 CE. This dynasty flourished in the Canyon of Waghora River and construction of caves number 9, 10, 12 and 15 A is determined during the period of Satavahanas' and the paintings are the oldest ones comparative to other caves. (Spink 2006, p. 3)

Mira Seth supporting the claim of Walter M. Spink affirms that the benefaction of Ajanta caves was done during the period of Satavahanas and the Vakataka dynasties. The Satavahanas rose to power during first century BC and had widespread territory by the time of Gautami Putra Satkarni (AD 108-130) expanding over Maharashtra, Northern District of Karnataka and some parts of Madhya Pradesh. Decline of Satavahan dynasty started from 3rd century AD. (Seth 2006, p. 29)

Satavahanas under benefaction of Mauryans held lands by feudal tenure but confirmed independence with its rejection. After the fall of Mauryan Empire the Satavahanas were acknowledged for establishing peace in the country, defending against the attacks of intruders. They appeared to have been under the command of Emperor Ashoka, who claims that Satavahanas were in his sphere. Emperor Ashoka introduced Buddhism among them when Satavahans were acknowledged for their support to Buddhism which resulted in Buddhist monuments from Ellora to Amaravati. (Plate.1)

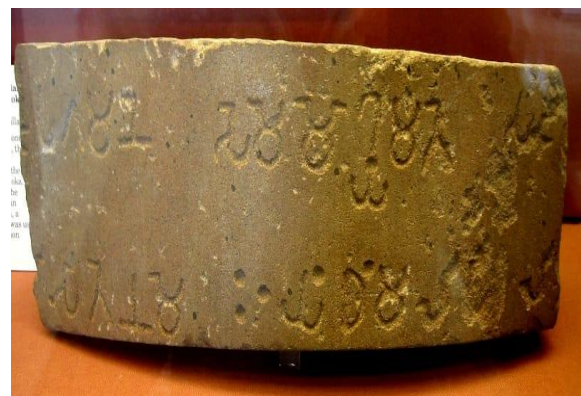


Plate.1 The Edicts of Ashoka mention the Satavahanas as feudatories of Emperor Ashoka. Fragment of the 6th Pillar Edicts of Ashoka (238 BCE), in Telugu (Brahmi), Sandstone. British Museum.

Source: <https://web.facebook.com/The-Great-Patron-Of-Buddhism->, accessed November 26, 2020.

Satavahanas and the Vakatakas were not only worshipers of Vishnu and Shiva but also respected Buddha, but also other incarnations of Gauri, Indra, the sun and moon. They were mostly Buddhist Vaishnavites. Under their reign, Buddha had been worshiped as a form of Vishnu in Amaravati.

Contrary circumstances regarding Buddhist existence in Satavahanas' territories revealed by Madanjeet Singh in *The Cave paintings of Ajanta* highlights that the Satavahana king Satakarni II whose territory enclosed generally the contemporary state of Maharashtra was renowned for execution of costly Vedic sacrifices. Same standard of sacrifices was adopted by Gautamiputra Satakarni who established particular laws in addition to tradition of sacrifices in his supremacy such as restricting mingling of the four classes of the Hindu caste system which ran divergent to Buddhist conviction. Devout benefaction to one side, in the wake of the expanding Satavahana during first century AD Buddhist monks shortly established their abodes insecurely suspending on the frontiers between the territories of the Satavahana. (Singh 1965, p. 81) Whatever the facts have been regarding Buddhist existence in Satavahana territories one cannot ignore the benefaction of Indian art during Satavahana dynasty.

Amaravathi sculpture art during Satavahanas excelled in the creation of delicate beauty of human form and in the representation of subtle human feelings side by side. Slim and curvy female figures with full breasts, in different poses are superb. They speak of naturalism and sensuousness of Amaravathi artists who were known to the principles of *Shadanga*. (Plate.2)



Plate.2 Satavahana art of sculpture – relief from stupa at Amaravati

Source:

<https://www.pbase.com/bmcmorrow/image/126243387>, accessed October 12, 2021.

Based on factual historic records accounts divulge that when Ajanta paintings reached its apex was the one when most advanced parts of cave art are credited to Gupta dynasty that was ruling in Northern India and had connections with Vakataka dynasty of Deccan. This period witnesses as the period of culmination. Collation between

both dynasties was due to inter-marriages among them. Daughter of Gupta Emperor Chandragupta II was married to Vakataka royal family and with their support took control of Gujarat from the Saka Satraps in fourth century CE. Painting was supported by Satavahanas and they contributed a few Ajanta paintings. Vakatakas, Guptas and early Chalukyas of Badami also contributed for the expansion of Ajanta paintings.

Many scholars disagree about the date of the Ajanta Caves' second epoch but Walter M. Spink stated that, Most of the effort was made over diminutive time period, from 460 to 480 CE, during the reign of Emperor Harishena of the Vakataka dynasty. Some 20 cave temples were concurrently created, for the most part *viharas*: monasteries with a sanctuary in the structure's back centre. Each of cave temples seem to be supported by leading authority, several best accessible artists had been involved in the work with rewarding rivalry between the neighbouring construction sites. (Spink 2006, p. 4-6)

The Vakatakas rose by turning down of Satavahanas and both were Hindu dynasties and were not the patrons of Ajanta paintings, funds for which came from Buddhist supporters and aristocrats and state officials. An inscription in the cave states that Buddhist monks donated the money for excavation. The Buddhist laity was well established here by this time, as Buddhism seems to have arrived here from Mauryan Times. (Seth 2006, p. 29) In fact the advent of the Vakataka dynasty once again made it possible for the Ajanta inhabitants to renew their contacts with Indian northern cultural centers. (Singh 1965, p. 106)

Ajanta paintings portray influences from Satavahanas and Vakatakas art. Under the patronage of the Satavahana dynasty (230 BCE - c. 220 CE) in the canyons of the Waghora River, Caves IX, X, XII and XVA were constructed. Murals preserved from this time belong to the oldest monuments of painted art in India. Spink affirms that after the fall of Harishena c. 480 CE due to negligence Ajanta caves were left deserted and many of the temples forgotten. With the passage of time jungle grew and the caves were veiled from the sight of people. Mario Bussagli, confirms that the Satavahana rulers are also remarkable for their contributions to Buddhist art and architecture. They built great stupas in the Krishna River Valley, including the stupa at Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh. The most important monument for the study of Satavahana art in the region of Krishna valley is, however, the Amravati Stupa. The rail around it represents the perfection of the art of sculpture. At that time both sides of the rail were richly embellished with scenes illustrating Jataka stories, Avadanas, and scenes from Buddha's life. (Bussagli 1971, p. 105) We have next to no knowledge about the artist of Ajanta paintings. Due to the remoteness of the place and its distance from urban centers, it is likely that the artists came from all over the Vakataka territories and Satavahana Empire. We do not have any inscriptional or

literary evidence that these artists belong to any guild. (Seth 2006, p. 53)

Satavahana painting has very few fragments left in cave 9 and 10 at Ajanta. But these represent earlier phase. In these paintings, the forms, features, poses, ornamentations, dresses, furniture, architectural setting, and other details resemble those shown in sculpture. The colourful depiction of jewels and decorations on garments is particularly noteworthy; so also in the *Chatula-tilaka* gem that runs over the hair to rest on the forehead. (Plate.3) Turbans and feminine coiffures of sculpted heads by Satavahana sculptors were beautifully decorated. The fan shaped coiffure occurring at both Sanchi and Amaravati appears also in paintings of cave 9 and 10.



Plate.3 Painting at Ajanta during Satavahana period

Source:

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/412149803404587064/>,
accessed February 24, 2021

The Vakatakas are noted for having been great patrons of arts, architecture and literature. They led great amount of public work and their monuments are a visible legacy. The rock-cut Buddhist *viharas* and *chaityas* of Ajanta Caves were built under the patronage of Vakataka Emperor Harishena. The roots of Vakataka art can be seen in the many echoes of Amaravati carvings both in painting and in sculpture at Ajanta and Ellora. The Vakataka Princess at Ajanta depicted in almost identical fashion, illustrates the persistence of tradition. There is a misconception regarding artist of this magnificent and impressive art in Ajanta caves, this has been thought that the Ajanta paintings were made by the Buddhist monks. An inscription in cave 16 at Ajanta records its dedication to monks by Varahavadeva, the minister of the Vakataka king Harishena, in the fifth century AD. Another inscription in cave 26 mentions its gift by Bhaviraja, the minister of Asmaka. These inscriptions clearly being in the box-headed type of Vakataka script, there can be no doubt as to who created these Ajanta caves, their sculptures and paintings. It is distinct Vakataka phase. (Bussagli 1971, p. 113-118)

During 5th and 6th centuries A.D several magnificently ornamented caves were supplemented to the novel

group. The paintings as well as sculptures of Ajanta are measured spectacular accomplishment of Buddhist divine art with momentous inventive manipulation of Satavahana and Vakataka period. The later caves at Ajanta, of the fifth and sixth centuries AD present Vakataka art in Deccan, is contemporaneous with Gupta art in the north. Under the inclination of the Gupta dynasty, Indian art in effect reached its highest point. The Ajanta Caves are generally decorated with painted or sculpted figures of agile form and classic balance with which the name of the dynasty has remained identical. The refined lightness of the decoration, the balance of the compositions, the marvelous beauty of the feminine figures place the paintings of Ajanta among the major achievements of the Gupta and post-Gupta style and award on them the ranking of a masterpiece of universal pictorial art.

The subject matter of the paintings at Ajanta as of most surviving examples from Ajanta is the various lives and incarnations of Buddha, told in the *jātaka* tales. As in Flemish Renaissance paintings, the stories are richly depicted in the settings of the artists' world. (Craven 1976, p. 125)(Plate.4) Same style of figurative representation is noted of setting figures in compositions presenting a specific mood of life and activities in various Ajanta paintings. So style did not only influence Indian later cultures rather influences seem wide spread.



Plate. 4 The Prodigal Son - Hemessen, Jan Sanders van, c.1500 - c.1566.

Source:[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Prodigal_Son_\(painting,_Van_Hemessen\)#/media/File:Jan_Sanders_van_Hemessen-Enfant_Prodigue_IMG_1469.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Prodigal_Son_(painting,_Van_Hemessen)#/media/File:Jan_Sanders_van_Hemessen-Enfant_Prodigue_IMG_1469.JPG), accessed on March 10, 2021.

Aesthetically treated calligraphic lines rendering bodies or drawing any part of composition or floral designs create a lyrical impact in the whole visual. Paintings can be categorized as narrative, portraits, composition or decorative ornamentation, by all means offer variety to analyze the notions or explanations of subject matter. The artist also displays excellent compositional skills, with the ability to pick up the essential parts of the story for

depiction. They also succeed in communicating the Buddhist belief and value system. (Seth 2006, p. 50) (Plate.5)

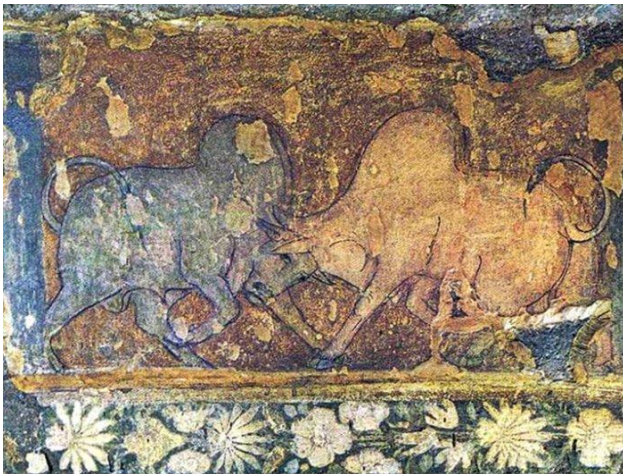


Plate.5 Decorative and narrative illustration

Source: <https://www.openart.in/general-topics/importance-animals-ancient-indian-art/>, accessed on March 8, 2021

In the Ajanta caves there are excellent illustrations of the six branches of painting, the *Shadangā*: variety of form (*rupabheda*), correct proportion (*pramanam*), depiction of emotion (*bhava*), infusion of grace (*lavanya-yojanam*), verisimilitude (*sadrisyam*), and mixing colour to produce an effect of modeling (*vernika bhanga*). The Vakataka painter was an adept in his art, with both creative instinct and great literary taste, and that accounts for several splendid lyrical creations. It is the painter at Ajanta who excelled in presenting jātaka episodes effectively in subdivided bands. The Hamsa Jātaka here is more vivid than at Amaravati, reverently portraying the golden bird preaching the law from a golden throne to the attentive royal devotee. The Vessantara Jātaka is narrated in Ajanta painting with such effect that it excels the narration everywhere else, even the depiction at Goli and Sanchi. The Matiposaka Jātaka is touchingly depicted and differs from the tame representation at Goli. The valahassa Jātaka painted at Ajanta follows the story of Divyavadana and is more detailed than the representation on the Kushan rail pillar. The Sibi Jātaka at Ajanta is unlike the story of Sibi at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda, for it presents a different version. It is no wonder that these stories appealed immensely to the painter of Ajanta, and similar elaborate narration marks the genius of Vakataka painters. (Bussagli 1971, p. 111-125)

The spiritual quality of the paintings further indicates that the artists were deeply steeped in the Buddhist philosophy as well as the folklore of the jātakas. (Seth 2006, p. 59) One painting from Cave 17, shows

Vessantara and his family (under the umbrella) leaving the palace to take up a life of hardship, in order that Vessantara's fabled bounty may remain flawless. (Plate.6) various jātakas are also communicate in the sculptural reliefs at Sanchi and Amaravati (Plate.7) where one can observe that innovative quality while dealing with same subject matter in later periods, followed same spirit in compositional superiority and remained consistent on established principles set by Satavahanas.



Plate.6 Vessantara and Princess Mandri after giving away their procession, Vessantara Jātaka, Ajanta.

Source: <https://ramaarya.blog/2019/03/30/maharashtra-ajanta-cave-paintings-sculptures/>, accessed January 16, 2021.

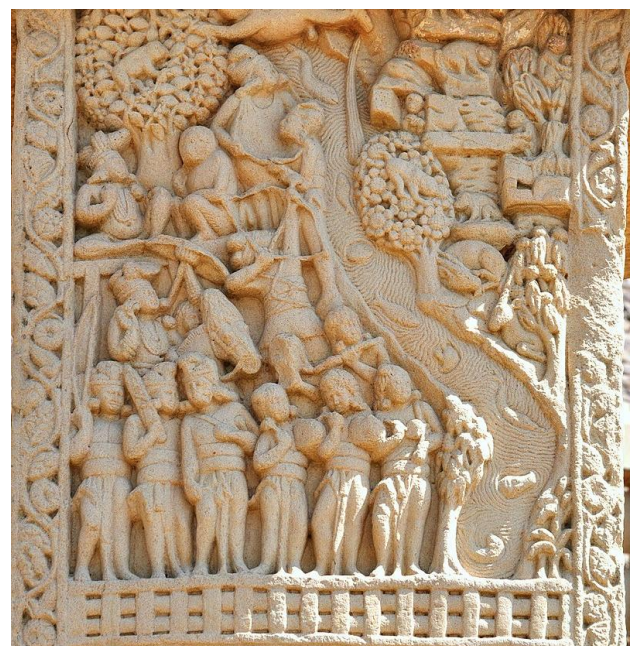


Plate.7 Mahakapi Jātaka in relief from Sanchi, Satavahana dynasty. Finest examples of narrative sculpture.

Source: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-asia/beginners-guide-asian-culture/buddhist-art-culture/a/jatakas-the-many-lives-of-buddha-as-bodhisattva>, accessed February 19, 2021.

Ethnic Paintings made an indisputable exertion to take from beginning to end the expedition of Ajanta Paintings in meticulous application and Indian paintings in general. The paintings as well as sculpture at Ajanta appeared to be part of an intangible intact. The artists of Ajanta were the initiators of the epic style of painting in which painting stretches from one wall to another without disturbing the continuity of the story. (Seth 2006, p. 50) (Plate.8)



Plate.8 Continuity of story from one wall to another
Source:

<https://www.talesofanomad.com/2016/10/ajanta-paintings-and-sculptures-from.html>, Accessed March 10, 2021.

The spectacular musical scene from the Mahajanaka Jātaka (Plate.9) in cave 1 at Ajanta recalls the description in the Maghaduta, and also *Flying Vidyadhara* in Cave 17. (Bussagli 1971, p.124) (Plate.10) Vakataka painter was remarkable connoisseur in his art, with both creative impulse and great legendary taste, and that records numerous outstanding romantic creations.

Traditional *Chatula-tilaka* in representation of Mahajanaka Jātaka "*King Mahajanaka listening to Queen Sivali*," is crowning the heads of female figures. An old tradition of beautification with jewels and jewelry in representation of female figures was equally evident in Satavahanas paintings. Either it is "*King Mahajanaka listening to Queen Sivali*," or "*Flying Vidyadhara*" the body gestures and directions of gaze are playing incredible role. In both paintings direction of faces as well as gaze towards each other or to the focal figures express essential emotional response. These aspects create sense of pleasure, peace or joy. On the other hand eye contact equally plays considerable role in portraying emotions. Very conscious effort of distribution of figure is opted in compositions that dose not only create harmony within all components of visual rather create a sense of pleasure one feels after seeing such an implausible art work.

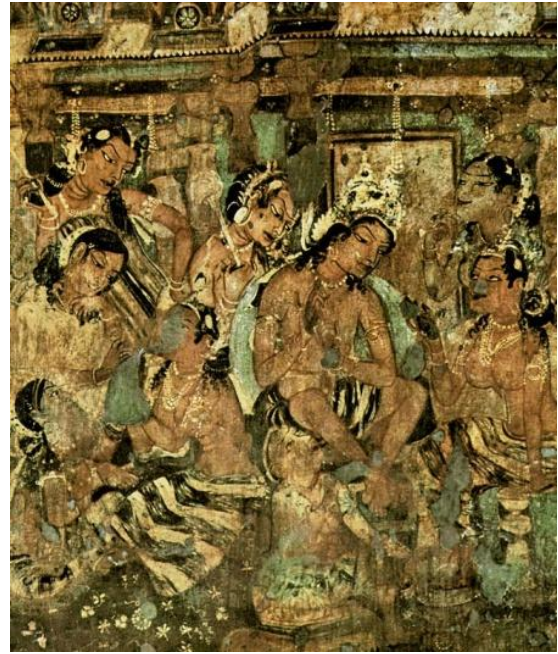


Plate.9 King Mahajanaka listening to Queen Sivali,
Mahajanaka Jātaka.

The pre-birth story of lord Buddha, Vakataka, fifth century A.D.

Source: <http://gud2travel.com/travel-maharashtra>, accessed February 26, 2020.

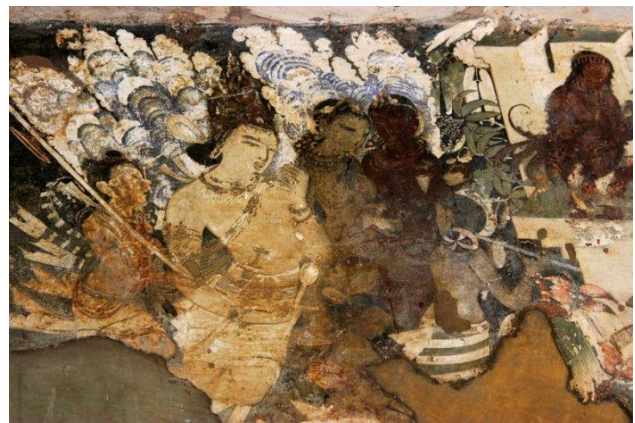


Plate.10 Flying Vidyadhara, Vakataka, fifth century A.D.

Source: <https://sudhagee.com/2015/01/04/travel-ajanta-caves-where-all-the-fine-arts-converge/>, accessed February 26, 2020.

Mira Seth in "*Indian Painting, the Great Mural Tradition*" elucidates that rock paintings of Mesolithic period that belong to prehistoric derivation of traditional Indian paintings. There are abundant rock cut paintings that can be accessed in the states such as Bihar, Karnatka, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Utter Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and prehistoric painting sites include Bhimbetka, Lakhajaoar, Ramchaja, Kathotia. Other than these prehistoric paintings in rock cuts painting of this genre continued for several centuries in various centres. (Seth 2006, p. 27) The earliest preserved wall paintings at

Ajanta and the excellence of the style of these paintings would not have been possible without contribution of previously existing styles. Besides, Classical tradition of Ajanta paintings indicates a long period of development and evolution.

The style of Ajanta paintings has been exercised with substantial manipulation in India and another places and the Ajanta cave art gave foundation to exceptional suggestions in the development of subsequent Indian paintings.

Expansion of Ajanta influence on subsequent Indian cultures and tradition of wall painting in Rajasthan.

Ajanta caves are considered historic galleries of art that is still preserved and appreciated. Most of the art reflects the growth of different periods and influences of Buddhism in India are evident in Indian art. Ajanta art possesses a spiritual attitude and religious connection of the region. Historical facts are fundamental in comprehending the interpretations of subject as well as technique.

Indian Paintings that can be dated back to the pre-historic times where one can witness tribal form of painting which are spontaneous of the tribe that existed in each part of the country. Indian Cave paintings can be held as the first and foremost form of arts that started. Cave paintings are usually seen to have depiction of daily life on the cave walls, as present in Bhimbetka caves that represent the prehistoric origin of India's painting tradition. These paintings are a mix of extremely sophisticated line and an understanding of the principles of movement. The artist also displays excellent compositional skills, with the ability to pick up the essential parts of the story for depiction. They also succeed in communicating the Buddhist belief and value system. Golden age of Indian history is credited to Guptas and art produced in this period is considered incredible. Vishnudharmottara Purana's Chitrastotra as an oral tradition was documented in fifth century gave basis to inspiration for Ajanta artists for aesthetical measures and technique. Those standards were passed with purity to the successive generations. The artists of Ajanta were the inheritors of a primordial institution that painted these caves.

Many smaller kingdoms in Deccan and in the south Satavahana (1st century BC to 4th century AD), Vakatas (4th century to 5th century AD), Chalukyas (6th to 8th century AD) and Rashtrakutas (8th century AD) contributed in the development of wall paintings. Further south in Tamil Nadu were Cholas (1st century BC), The Pallavas (4th century AD) and the Pandyas (During Ashoka times and later in the 9th century), while in Kerala were Cheras (3rd century BC), and in Rajasthan many rajas of states like Mewar, Jhalas, Marwar, Jaisalmer were the patrons of wall paintings. There was a continuous tradition of wall painting in the Indian Himalayan region from the 11th to the 20th century, but though the great

plains of North India may have had earlier wall painting tradition, the earlier extent examples belong to the 17th century. This tradition was more prolific in the 18th and 19th centuries and is for the most part concentrated in Rajasthan, the Pahari region of Himachal Pradesh. Remains are also found in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, west Bengal and Orissa. (Seth 2006, p. 27-50)

Ajanta artist knew the art of subdividing composition in different bands. The classical epic tradition of Ajanta shows different episodes of the same story in different sections of the painting. (Plates.11, 12) Influences of Ajanta style are evident in Indian paintings of subsequent painting traditions. In Pahari wall painting the space available for execution of themes is limited, hence artist tended to compose less complex composition showing few subdivisions. (Seth 2006, p. 396, 397) Whereas Ajanta artists were expert in subdividing spaces with or without drawing boundaries. Rajasthani artist followed identical consciousness in their murals. Paintings share same standards of formal and informal subdivisions that create spiritual space by over layering varied images in specified space of compositions that can be observed in the murals of Shekhavati havelis-Rajasthan. (Plate. 13)



Plate.11 Different episodes of the same story, Ajanta.
Source: https://sjoneall.net/galleries/india-2012/05-ajanta/index.html#in12_021511371_j_b.jpg, accessed February 18, 2021.

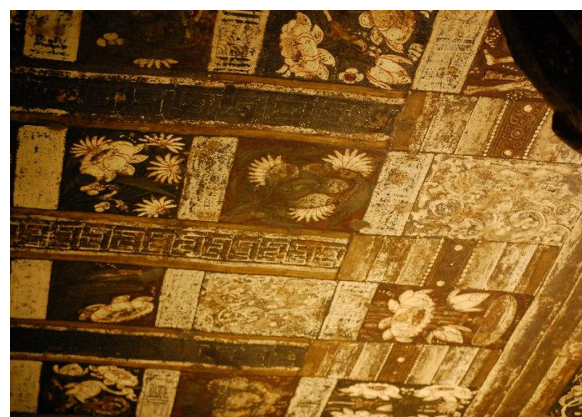


Plate.12 Subdivision in Ajanta Paintings.
Source: <https://www.indiamike.com/india-images/pictures/ceiling-cave-2-ajanta>, March 16, 2021.



Plate.13 Regular subdivision in bands, Shekhavati havelis-Rajasthan.

Source: <https://www.inditales.com/shekhawati-haveli-paintings-art-rajasthan/>, accessed on November 19, 2021.

Indian Paintings have been practiced on the impression and influence of the ancient paintings. Verities of wall surfaces have been painted, with a wide range of colours, in different regions. The artists used preliminary style to relate colours on a range of planes of compositions was also conscious to create spiritual space. This method became in style with the Mughal School of painting and subsequently productively employed in the Rajasthani and Pahari painting.

In wall paintings found in Eastern India and Rajasthan the colours are bright. Concept of space in Indian wall painting is very vast and by the use of subdivisions and creating spiritual space onto the physical space landscapes, animals and architecture are created in composition preferring harmony in the whole visual. In Rajasthani Paintings mountains at the tops of paintings, as it was done in Ajanta and Ladakh and in the Pahari tradition was to add new spatial dimension. (Seth 2006, p. 398-403) (Plates.14-16) Spiritual space is a principle applied in compositions where depth is created by setting object in centrifugal manner. Figures are set in layers or bands above each other to create an impression of perspective. This spatial dimension adds exquisiteness in all compositions of Ajanta Paintings.



Plate.14 Spiritual Space, Ajanta Painting
Source:

https://www.trawell.in/admin/images/upload/467348942Ajanta_Cave1_Main.jpg, accessed on October 21, 2021.



Plate.15 Spiritual Space, Nala-Damayanti theme, from the Mahabharat in Pahari style. ca. 1760 - ca. 1770.

Source:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O432908/nala-and-damayanti-painting-unknown/> accessed October 29, 2021.



Plate.16 Spiritual Space, Shekhavati Mural. Rajasthan.

Source:

<https://alsisarhotelsrajasthan.wordpress.com/2013/02/02/shekhawati-festival-beckons-to-rajasthan/>, accessed on October 29, 2021.

Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism originated in India provided the great thrust to wall painting. We find assorted subject matters in Indian paintings rich with metaphoric interpretations where replication of corporeal and transitory world is avoided. For example in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist paintings there is an endless variety of metaphors such as *chakra*, *padma*, *ananta*, *swastika*, *mriga* show that symbolism is core concern of artists rather replication of temporary world.

Ancient treatises have been great source of inspiration for Indian artist such as Vishnudharmottara's Chitrastutra. Vishnudharmottara provided detailed art practice with technique and measures. Chitrastutra provided instruction regarding preparation of dissimilar surfaces for murals, selection and proportions of colours and ratios, styles of rendering human figures, kinds of shading/rendering and guidelines regarding figurative works in specific environments. Other aspects include implementation of metaphors such as plants, animals and birds as well as a range of other symbols. Ajanta paintings

in their character are appealing due to free flowing liner works demarcating figures with inner expressions, shaded to create three dimensional effects while employing a range of dissimilar colours that spell bound the viewers.

Other than painting techniques Chitrasutra provided more intense instructions on painting expressive eyes and gestures as eyes are described as windows of soul through them one can speak expressively to viewer. Due to significant concern for eyes, mostly eyes were finalized by the masters in paintings and later expressive eyes of Ajanta paintings left their strong impact and influenced generations of Indian artists. (Plate.17)



Ajanta Nur Jahan, Pahari, Rajasthani

Plate.17 Expressive set of eyes of the Ajanta tradition that was followed in later generations of Pahari and Bani Thani, Kishangarh, Rajasthan.

Source Ajanta:

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/413838653230451581/>, accessed on November 12, 2021.

Source Pahari:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nur_Jahan#/media/File:Nurjahan.jpg, accessed on November 12, 2021.

Source Rajasthani:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bani_Thani#/media/File:4_Radha_\(Bani_Thani\),_Kishangarh,_ca._1750,_National_Museum_New_Delhi.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bani_Thani#/media/File:4_Radha_(Bani_Thani),_Kishangarh,_ca._1750,_National_Museum_New_Delhi.jpg), accessed on November 12, 2021.

Correspondingly there were familiar set of gestures (*mudra*) in arrangement of limbs, fingers and hands; and by posture of images in paintings as well as in sculptures. These varied *mudras* made explicit the virtues such as wisdom, strength, generosity, kindness and caring etc. All these characteristics are also evident in Rajasthani Paintings in different regional styles. (Plate.18, 19)

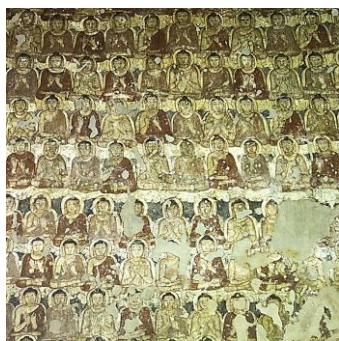


Plate.18 Mudras in Ajanta painting.

Source: <https://www.sahapedia.org/ajanta-paintings-insight>, accessed on November 19, 2021.

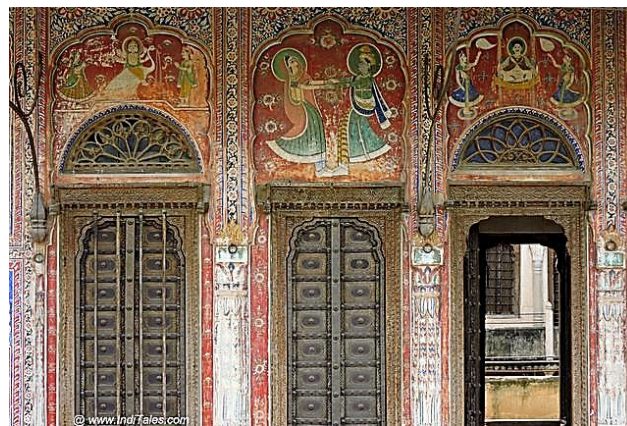


Plate.19 Variation of *Mudras* in Shekhavati Mural. Rajasthan.

Source: <https://www.inditales.com/shekhawati-haveli-paintings-art-rajasthan/>, accessed on November 19, 2021.

Costumes and jewelry are other features that are continuously adopted to enrich paintings to present the ethnic tradition and social status. There is an intimate connection between architecture and sculpture and the Indian wall painting tradition. Similarly, interior walls bereft of any other ornamentation exist in the larger temples of Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh and in many other smaller temples Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. Indian mural painting tradition is a collection of regional styles starting from Prehistoric times. Stylistically, the most profound impact on the Indian tradition of wall painting was that of Ajanta and the Jain school of painting. Both these styles affected almost all the styles across the country and were trendsetters. The Sultanate, Mughal and Deccani School of painting had some impact on the Rajasthani and Pahari schools but in their ethos and technique they continued to hark back to Jain and Ajanta influences. (Seth 2006, p. 422)

Every art work provides potential for analysis to locate and relocate influences from previous and later cultures. Symbolism, colour pallet, attires, jewellery, style of depiction and narratives all help in identification of regional people that belong to specific era when that art was created. Events, people, situations narrated in compositions or visuals also facilitate analysis of characteristics of that art. They also made it probable to know inspirations and influences of various cultures that existed before that art and helped in forming a new dimension in it. Ajanta cave painting is an artistic tradition that flourished along silk route and various religions and cultures that influenced it added into richness of this art. Buddhist rock cut monasteries and *viharas* clearly define the presence of regional influences from previous cultures. Indeed the best preserved murals belong to Gupta period but one cannot ignore the impactful art produced before Guptas that marked its presence in Ajanta paintings. Later Ajanta art left indelible impression on artistic creations of subsequent years and culture of India.

Conclusion

The history of Ajanta art of painting, or rather of Indian art in its Buddhist form, does not really originate until about three and half centuries after the Buddha's life time. The missing links were unpreserved monuments, built of Bamboo and wood, as these were the indispensable building materials of the early Aryan settlers. All the arts, in fact were considered an excess in the tiresome life of luxury, so unfamiliar to Buddhism; monks and nuns were prohibited to see the so called "conversation pictures" or love scenes, which were at that time painted on the walls of royal chambers. For a considerable time the vital Indian tradition of non-representational art, using only geometrical symbols were maintained. This form of self refutation was too abstract to survive for ever among the monks. The need for a representational art grew organically from the spread of religious organization, and Buddhist gave way to figurative art for the spread of faith and later modification of the rule was encouraged during Gupta period.

The sources, method, origin and philosophy behind Ajanta paintings prove that calling it Gupta style is not an accurate term for Ajanta Paintings. It has influence of culture far before Guptas. Very clearly influences can be observed in early phase of Ajanta Paintings where we can analyze Satavahanas and Vakatakas style in its character. Considering Ajanta paintings as Gupta style as term refers to northern Indian style of painting and its impact on Ajanta art. Ajanta paintings also provide whole life of ancient India in panorama.

The Guptas whose rule is considered the golden age of Indian history in art, literature, architecture and sculpture ruled primarily in the north and east of India. Several smaller kingdoms rose in the Deccan and south, the most significant of these were the Satavahanas, the Vakatakas, and the Chalukyas contributing in this rich art, especially Ajanta paintings.

A strong inspiration came from Amaravati in the Vakataka art of Ajanta and its reverberations in the later produced art of the Pallavas at Mahabalipuram in form of striking illustration prove the persistence of art tradition. (Bussagli 1971, p. 120) The style of the later murals of Ajanta divulge an absorption of two streams of art, Satavahanas and Vakatakas of Andhra and Gupta art of North India, which gave way to classical style that had far reaching influence on all the paintings of India for centuries to come.

Though painting of later culture more specifically Sultanate, Mughal and Deccani School of painting had some impact on the Rajasthani and Pahari schools but in their philosophy and technique they sustained to hark back to Jain and Ajanta influences. Indian art tradition as a whole blends naturalism with traditionalism. The forms are usually conventionalized yet the artists always attempt to depict the environment. Expansion of Ajanta style is an evidence of a forceful intercultural interaction that reached cultures far from Ajanta via silk route and the similarities in iconography, manner and practice along with transnational variability reflect that roots of most of the arts belong to Ajanta style.

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