

IDC IIT BOMBAY

AJANTA CAVE PAINTINGS

STUDY AND RESERCH ON SELECTED CAVE PAINTINGS

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ANIMATION AND FILM DESIGN

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APPROVAL SHEET

The Design Research seminar Project entitled 'Ajanta Cave Paintings- A study and research on selected cave paintings' by Govind Janardhanan, 126340013 is approved in partial fulfillment of the Masters Design Degree in Animation and Film Design.

Project Guide:

Chair Person:

Internal Examiner:

External Examiner:

Chairman:

Date and Place:

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I declare that this written submission represents my ideas in my own words and I sincerely extend my deep gratitude towards my Guide: Prof. Shilpa Ranade for her support and guidance throughout my project.

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ABSTRACT

Ajanta is considered as one of the greatest treasure and fine example for rock cut architecture in the world. Its considered as the store house of ideas, beauty morality etc through the Jatakas of Buddha. Ajanta Art has also influenced various religious art in various countries.

This report is an effort to understand the various aspects of the Jatakas from cave 17.

INTRODUCTION

Ajanta Paintings are one of the earliest surviving painting of India. These Caves are located deep inside the Sahayadri hills, is in the form of horse shoe with 29 Caves. The general arrangements of the Cave Paintings were not preplanned but they were accomplished sparingly in different periods. Even the Caves were numbered biased on the physical location.

FEATURES AND DOCUMENTATION OF AJANTA CAVE PAINTINGS;

- The most famous paintings at Ajanta are at Cave-1
- Square shaped hall roof which is supported by the rows of pillars.
- Rock cut image of seated Buddha.
- Complete decoration was done on flat surface.
- Depiction of scenes, from the life of Buddha as well as the number of ornamental motifs.
- Left side of the Cave is a standing figure of Bodhisatva with a blue lotus.
- The Bodhisatva figure is depicted large in scale comparatively to the attendant figures.(this depict iconographic function also providing a dominant vertical axis around which the composition evolved).
- The distinct feature of the depiction of bodhisattva figure is; the pose of the body, communicating a feeling of grace moment in exquisite tilt of head and hand gesture.
- The Paintings here are divided into a number of panels (squares and rectangle form) which comprises of showy designs and subjects.
- Here the artists have used extremely restricted pallets.
- The bodhisatvas, depicted in Cave -1 includes Avalokitesvara which is the symbol of Buddhas compassion, Manjusru which is the manifestation of the Buddhas wisdom and Vajrapani which is the protector and guide, a symbol of Buddha power.
- Ajanta Paintings were executed in two different phase such as;
- Cave 9 and Cave 10 built during 2nd century BC and the second phase of the painting started around 5th and 6th Centuries AD which was continued for next two centuries.
- Female figures in Ajanta Paintings are dusky in complexion, wearing towering head dress which is resembling sophisticated mukuta, crowning Bodhisatva himself. It is likely a representation of Shakthi/ Female of Bodhisatva indicating one of the instructions into Buddhism from Hindu concepts.

-Walter. M. Spink, a Professor Emeritus, History of Art at University of Michigan and a world authority on the Buddhist rock cut caves at Ajanta, Stated that , the talented artists may have painted in palaces and temples, hence the great familiarity that the artists show with the details of a wealthy court.

-Ajanta Paintings comprises the episodes from 'Life of Buddha', which is regarded as one of the finest wall frescoes of the world.

-Some of the Ajanta Paintings depict Jataka Stories.

-The main focus of Ajanta Paintings are on religious, romanticism, reflecting every aspect of life with simultaneous giving importance in the spiritual as an aspect of divine.

TECHNIQUE ON PAINTING:

-The Paintings are done by applying a layer of clay/ cow dung, which is mixed with chopped straw or animal hair on the rough surface. After smoothing the surface, a coat of fine varnish of white clay or gypsum is applied and there after the painting was done on top of it. In painting, the image were drawn in pink/ brown/ black and the colors were applied with handmade brushes from squirrel hair. Colors are mainly made from pebbles and vegetables found from nearby hillside which are grounded and crushed mixed with adequate amount of glue. The prominent colors used where; red, Ochre, Yellow Ochre, Brown Ochre, Lamp black, white and Lapis Lazuli which was imported from Northern India, Central Asia and Persia. Green color was produced by mixing Lapis Lazuli with Indian Yellow Ochre. In the Paintings, all the characters are depicted in bright and multi colors and also, the ceilings, walls and the plasters are majorly covered with overlapping figures brought to life by the painters with strong contrasting colors which is a fundamental property in Indian Art.

-Importantly the base was kept moist throught the application of the dye, which gave a lustrous finish to the whole surface.

-Paintings of Ajanta dated from the late Gupta period to the early Chalukya Period, i.e.' 5th to early 7th century.

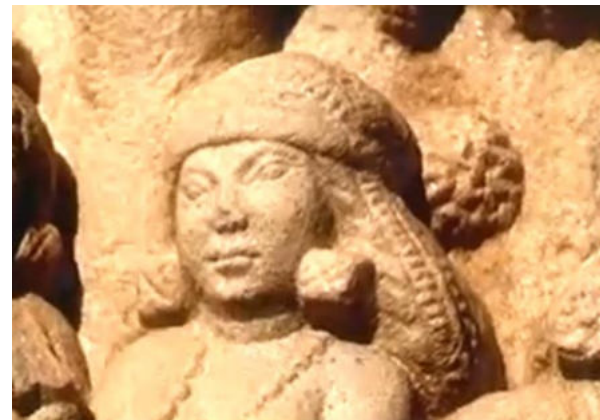
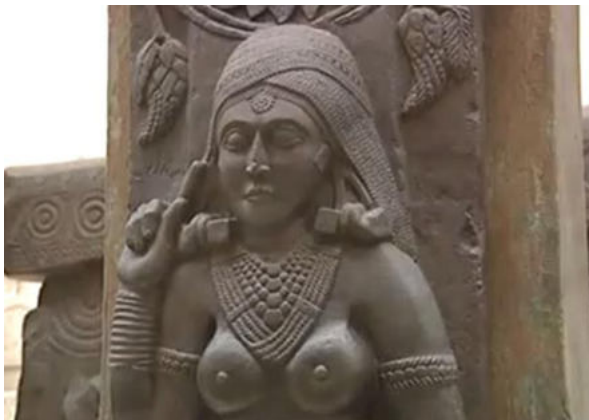
Similarities between Ajanta Painting and Sculptures in Bharut and Sanchi;

-If closely observed one could see, the Paintings in Cave 10 the oldest in 2 B.C where the head dress and ornaments in the paintings are similar to the statues that belong to the same period at Bharut and Sanchi.

AJANTA CAVE 10 PAINTING:



STATUES AT BHARUT AND SANCHI:



CAVE 17:

Among all the other Cave Paintings in Ajanta, Cave -17 is more damaged than Cave -1.

The Paintings in Cave number-1, 2, 16 and 17 were done during the Vakataka period.

The difference in execution and style is noticed in these paintings because of the different authors. Also, decline in the execution of paintings are also seen in some of these paintings which depicted mechanical, rigid and life less figures of Buddha in later in later period paintings.

The excavation of Cave-17 by a feudatory Prince during the Vakataka King Harishena , was evident through the records in Brahmi inscriptions.

Cave-17, consists of 17 cells, on 3 sides, a vestibule and sanctum containing the image of Buddha.

Among all the paintings in the Cave-17, the most preserved one was the paintings in Vakataka age that includes Viswanthara Jathaka(Right side of the door), a gigantic wheel which depicts 'the wheel of life', the flying Apsara which is located on the left side of the door, the Nalagiri which is a wild elephant by Buddha at Rajagriha. Viswanthara Jathaka is very popular in central Asia.

The Jatakas depicted here are Chaddanta, Mahakapi (which is in 2 versions), Hasti, Hamsa, Viswanthara, Maha-Sutasoma,

Sarabha-miga, Machchha, Mati-posaka, Sama, Mahisa, Valahass, Sibi, Ruru and Nigrodhamiga.

In Cave -17 paintings, the exemplary paintings among all the other paintings were the paintings during the Vakatali period. It is noticeable that the variation and execution of these paintings which is mainly because of the different author who followed Contemporary style. The main theme which is depicted here is the various Jathaka stories and incidents depicted from the life of Buddha and the Contemporary events and social life. Another distinct feature; the silhouetting of figures against the light of background sprinkled with rosettes depicted the panel flat and textile like character. The ceiling consisting decorative and geometric patterns of floral designs.

A Story brief on 'Viswanthara Jathaka':

'According to this story, there was a kingdom named Sivi, where the king was called Sanjaya and his son Viswantara who was exiled because of his generosity. Viswantara dint want to disappoint any one, he even gave away his auspicious white elephant which was considered as a national treasure, to the neighboring kingdom when they were suffering from draught. People from his own kingdom demanded banishment of Viswantara because of his excessive generosity. Under the odder of his father Sanjaya, Viswantara-

left to forest with his wife and children. During the course of his journey he first gave away his own horse and his chariot. He even gave away his two children to a Brahmin also his wife too was given away during his course of journey. And the story ended with the King of gods Indra, re united Viswantaras wife and children and was happily accepted by the kingdom. ’

It’s a very interesting fact that these stories has been depicted in various other sculptures and paintings, but this particular scene of Viswantara being exiled is now only in Ajanta cave-17 and in central Asia.

Variety in terms of narrating the same story:

In Sanchi the depiction of Viswantara Jathak is from right to left from the central portion of the outer gateway,

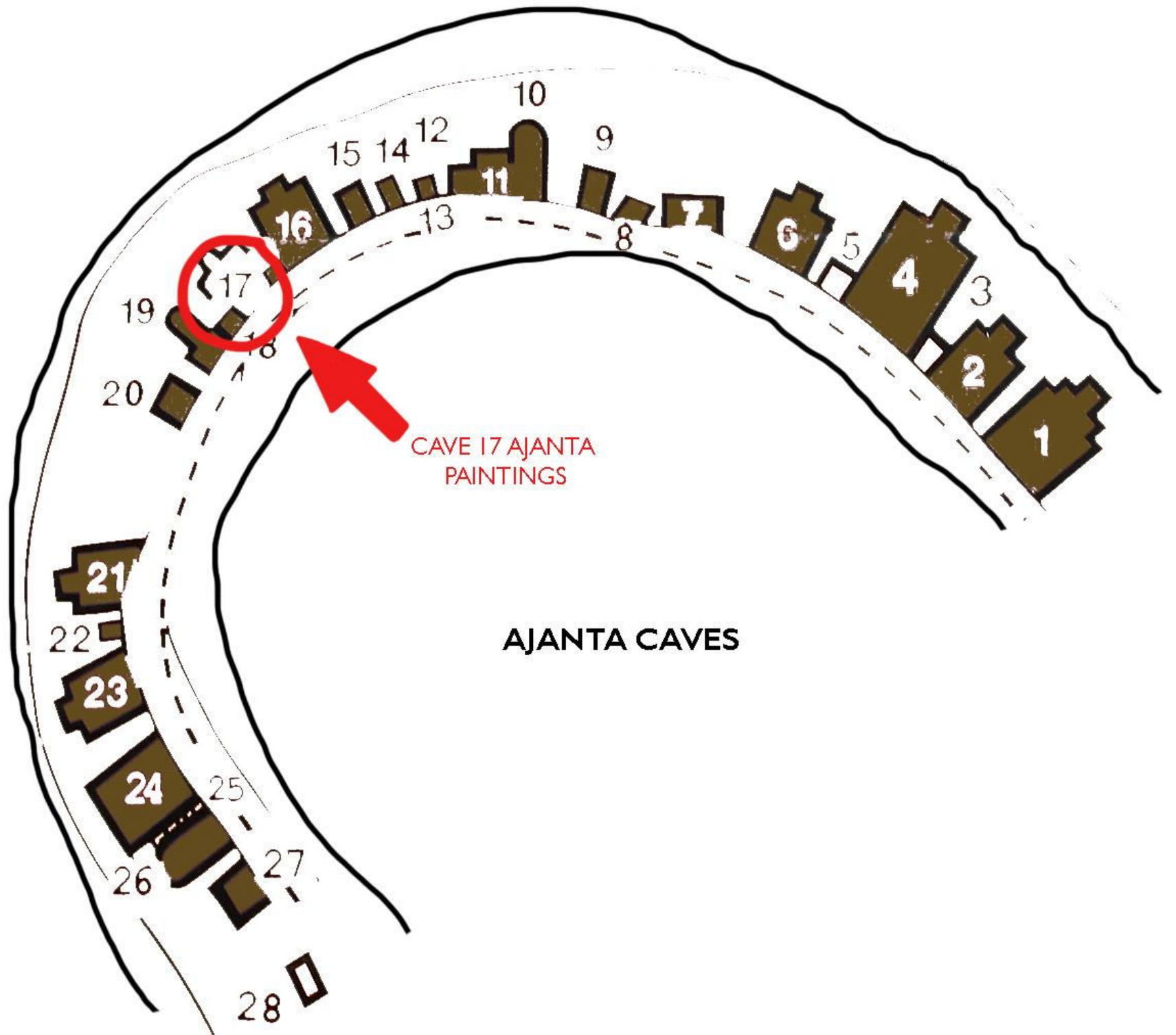
While the story here in Ajanta is represented from left to right.



: Sanchi Stupa is located at Sanchi Town in Raisen District of the state of Madhya Pradesh, India, located 46 km North East of Bhopal. 3rd century BCE.

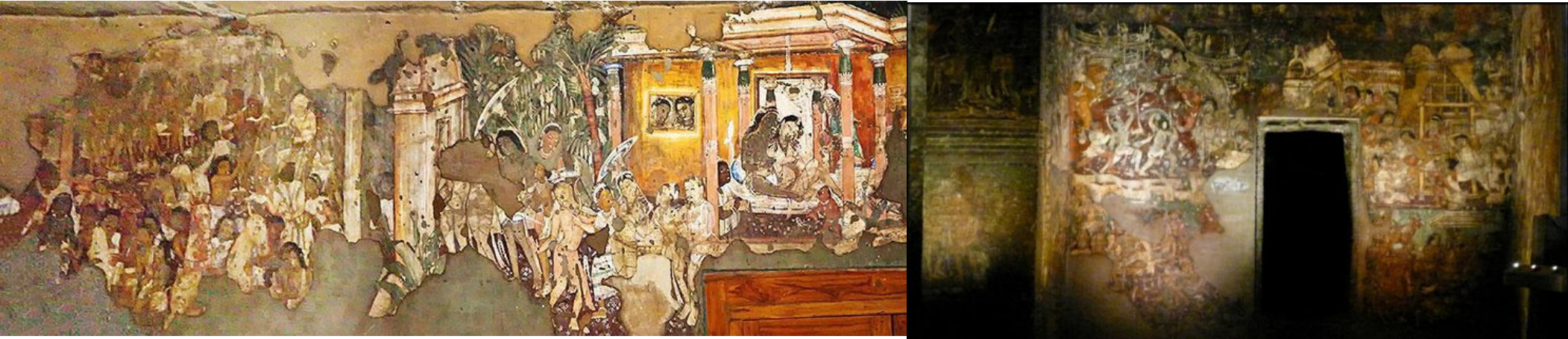


: Cave 17 Painting done during Vakataka period



Similarities between 'Viswanthara Jathaka' from Ajanta Paintings Cave -17 and 'Ramayana':

In Viswanthara Jathaka, there was a famous Kingdom named 'Sivi' and the king named Sanjaya and he had a son named Visvantara (who was a rebirth of lord Buddha), who was exiled due to his excessive generosity. On the order of his father Sanjaya, Viswanthara left to forest with his wife and children. Here the story is driven by the central character 'Buddha'.



Similarly, in Ramayana, there was a famous kingdom named 'Ayodhya' and the king named Dasharatha and he had a son named Rama who was a rebirth of lord Vishnu (According to Hindu mythology) was exiled due to his generosity. On the order of Rama's father Dasharatha, he left to forest with his wife Sita and his brother Lakshmanan. Here the story is driven by the central character 'Rama'.



Also In both the story narration, Buddha and Rama are considered to be lord and is still being worshiped by Hindu Religion around the World, though both the stories originate from different Era.



Similarities between Viswantara Jataka from Ajanta Cave17 and Sigiriya Srilanka.

Here the story narration of Viswantara Jataka in Ajanta Cave 17 and Sigiriya Paintings in Srilanka is more or less the same story but they are depicted in varied style as it reached from North India till the way to Srilanka.

But there are similarities in the structure of figures, if observed, the oval shape of face, the style in depicting facial features (eyes, nose) is very much similar to that of Ajanta paintings.

Similarities between Viswantara Jataka from Ajanta Cave17 and Jataka at Kizil in Xinjiang China:

The narration of Viswantara Jataka is very detail explained in Kizil caves during 7th century; the greediness of the Brahmin beggar to whom the kids were given to.



Similarities between Viswantara Jataka from Ajanta Cave17 and Jataka in Miran located in Southern part of China:

The in depth narration of Viswantara Jataka narration is way beyond compared to that of Gandharan sculptures. It is an interesting fact to note that, a brahmnical inscription written on the thighs of Viswantara's elephant equivalent to Roman Tita, showing that there were Roman artists who moved to china to work on Buddha Art. In Viswantara Jatak in Ajanta cave omitted the scene were Viswanatara taking leave from his father which is an important part of the story, but its depicted in Miran.



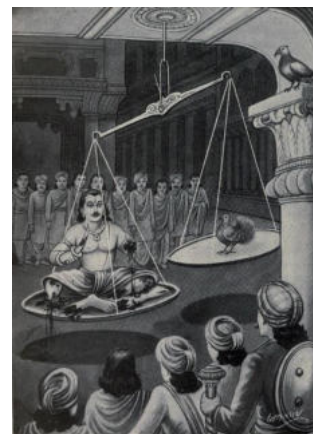
Viswantara Jataka in Thailand:

Viswantara Jataka narration is similar to that in Ajanta Cave- 17 Painting, which is done in around 19th century, Thonburi district, Bangkok, Thailand.



Similarities between ‘Sibi Jataka’ from Ajanta Paintings Cave -17 and ‘Mahabharata’

‘According to the story ‘Sibi Jataka’ there is a king called Sibi. One day, Lord Indra and Agni decided to test the king Sibi’s generosity. Indra and Agni disguised themselves to hawk and a pigeon. Hawk started chasing the pigeon. Pigeon fell down on Sibi’s lap, and pleaded for help from him. King Sibi, have a long argument with hawk and finally hawk decided to make an agreement that, king should compensate the pigeon by giving kings flesh to hawk. Hawk agreed, Sibi started chopping his flesh out from his body. After a moment, he found out the chopped flesh pieces is still not enough to match the pigeons weight. He still continued chopping flesh from different parts of his body, still it didn’t match the pigeon’s weight. Finally, the king Sibi decided to give himself to the hawk. Lord Indra and Agni were amazed to see Sibis generosity. Indra and Agni, came back to their original form and blessed Sibi with many boons...’



: Amar Chitra Katha Publications- ‘Indra and Shibi’

Similarities between ‘Jatakamala’ and ‘Sibi Jataka’ from Ajanta Paintings Cave -17

‘In Jatakamala, the version of story is very similar to that of Sibi Jataka. The story is as follows; One day lord Indra decided to test the king Sibi’s generosity. Indra disguised himself into a blind man and approached to King Sibi and pleaded him to help in getting his vision back. The King Sibi, decided to donate his both the eyes on that moment. Lord Indra transformed to his original appearance and blessed Sibi with many boons.’

Sibi Jataka, is also narrated in many different forms in Mahabharata.

Similarity in story between Valmiki Ramayana and Sutasama Jataka of Ajanta Cave 17:

‘According to this story, there was a king called Indapatta and he had a son named Sutasama who was a reincarnation of Lord Buddha. One of the famous teacher known in that kingdom, taught Sutasama various aspects of deep knowledge and science. In later stage, he succeeded to the throne of his father.

One day Sutasama was coming out of a lotus pond after bath, suddenly cannibal (a robber who eats human) seized him. Sutasama persuaded him. But later Sutasama allowed to let the cannibal person free by offering him flowers and prayers and promising him that he will come back to you next day morning. The cannibal robber was surprised to see Sutasama next day morning in front of him. The cannibal robber who was once a student with Sutasama, preached to the cannibal robber and reformed him to an enlighten person.’

‘In Ramayana, there is a story of a hunter who was reformed by a Valmiki. The story brief is as follows;

Once upon a time, there was a hunter in a deep forest searching for an animal for food. Far away there was a tree, where two small birds playing on a branch. Hunter saw this, he pulled out his bow and arrow aimed and shot to one of the bird. One of the bird got injured and fell down from the branch, soon the other bird started weeping for his playmate. This incident was witnessed by a saint

escaping from the curse. Valmiki preached him to continuously pray 'Rama...Rama...Rama...' Hunter started praying continuously days, nights, months and years in the deep forests... hence later he was reformed to an enlighten person.'

Here, if the content is closely observed, the main character preaches to an uncivilized person and reforms him to an enlighten person.



: Valmiki Ramayana 5th to 4th century BCE



Similarities between Syama/ Samaka Jataka and Matriposaka Jataka, from Cave-17:

Samaka Jataka Story line: 'In Samaka Jataka, Sama carries his blind parents and preaches to the king like a true Bodhisatva.'

Matriposaka Jataka Story line: 'The story is very similar to Samaka Jataka and its about an elephant preaching to his blind parents '

Similarities between Syama Jataka in Ajanta Cave-17 and Samaka Jataka in China:

In China Syama Jataka is known as Samaka Jataka. Here in this narration, a king from Kapilavastu goes to the forest and while hunting he kills a boy (Syama) near the stream. Then the king approaches to his parents and explains what happened. King then, takes Syama's parents to Syama. Syama's agony moved the heaven and the earth. A god from heaven appeared from nowhere and put an elixir into Syama's mouth, then his life was revived and the god also blessed his parents too such that they got their eye sight back.

It is also interesting to note that most of the ‘Jatak’ story plot play around the main character between Buddha and Lord Indra.

Syama Jataka in Ajanta Cave-17 In Bhramanical version; In this version of story, instead of Syama its Saravana Kumar. Saravana Kumar, son of blind parents was killed in an accident by The king Dhasharathan from Ayodhya. Once Saravanas parents came to know about wat happened, the cursed Dhasharathan.

Syama Jataka in Dunhuang Caves:

Syama Jataka is also been depicted in Dunhuang Caves in China in Cave:229 of Mogao, where

there is a long panel of scenes including the king hunting in the forest, Syama near the river,

-In ‘Gandharan sculptures’ the narratives are the same as in the ‘Viswantara Jathak’ in Cave-17 at Ajanta.

Here the ways of looking at the narrative is from top to bottom. The 5 scenes carved on it consists of:

The Birth, the discussion scene, the bhodisatva leaving the sleeping women and

The great departure which is the similar narration in the Viswantara Jataka.

History of Gandharan Art:

In some of the great excavations in Peshawar and found a ring ainciently known as Gandharan.

After 6th century BC Gandharan fromed a part of Achsemenian Empire, which was conquered under

The reign of Cyrus. In Bahistan inscriptions, it was found that the Gandharian people were among the subjective people belonging to Indians (belonging to Indus Valley).



But there is only little Information left about Gandhara, in history Until the Alexander the great over threw the Achemenian's last Empire.

The art school flourished in Gandhara was not the origin from Indian soil. Years before

That the Ancient school of India, represented by the school of Bharut stupa, the gate ways of Sanchi, rock cut temples in Orissa etc.

Analysis in narration style between Gandhara sculptures, Bhutanese Jatak Paintings and A panel from Comic Krishna (current graphic novels):



: Bhutanese painted thanka of the Jataka Tales, 18th-19th Century, Phajoding Gonpa, Thimphu, Bhutan

: Krishna novel by Abhishek Singh



: Chaddanta with other elephants
Chaddanta-Jataka, Bharhut



One could see the similarity in narration style which is in the form of panels in all the three Creative Arts presented here. The similar kind of visualization can also be seen even till this very 21st century comics, where the story telling is depicted visually by blocking the scenes into panels. Hence it is evident that since centuries before, artists followed certain narrative principles in storytelling, which are very discipline and neat in composition and even if its sculptor or painting.

Shadanta Jataka:

Once upon a time, Bodhisatva was born as the son of a chief elephant, who was living in a golden cave in the Himalayas. He was staying in between white lilies and a lake called Shadanta which had white and blue lotus in it which is surrounded by thick vegetation of forests. He had huge silver rope like tusks. He had two queens. One day in a certain circumstance he offended one of his queens. She hoped to send a hunter to the forest to slay the elephant and to get the silver tusks. This queen decided to suicide by fasting and she did as it is. She then took rebirth and became a beautiful princes, she then sent a hunter with a poisoned arrow to the forest to slay an elephant for getting the silver tusks. Hunter went, and tried to get the elephant tusks. Elephant removed the tusks and gave it to him, so that because of his generosity the elephant could get next life as bodhisattva. After the hunter successfully accomplished the queen's task, he handover the elephant task to the queen. She kept it on her lap and suddenly remembered the elephant was her lord in her previous life.

Shyama Jataka from Ajanta Cave-17:

Once upon a time Bodhisatva known as Shyama, was born as the son of a hunter and his wife. Because of their sins which they did in their past life both of them were blind in this life. Shyama used to take care of both of them by carrying where ever he goes. One day, Shyama went to fetch some water near a lake. That moment, a King from Banaras was hunting in the forest. King mistook Shyama as a deer and shot his arrow on him. King later realized it was not deer. Shyama was full of sorrow, he weeped thinking that who will take care of his blind parents if he dies. After a moment Shyama dies. King became really sad. Suddenly, a goddess appeared and blessed Shyama reviving his life and even blessed his parents giving them back their eyesight.'



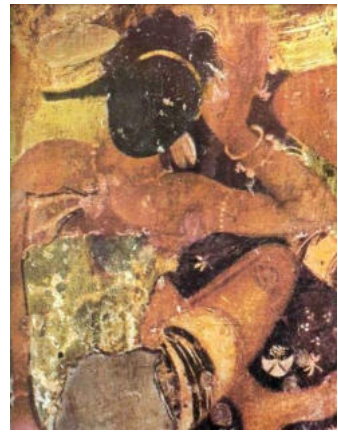
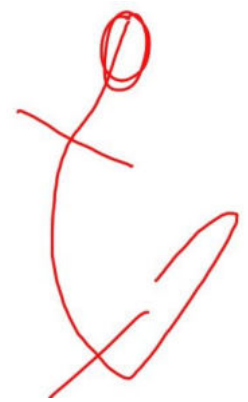
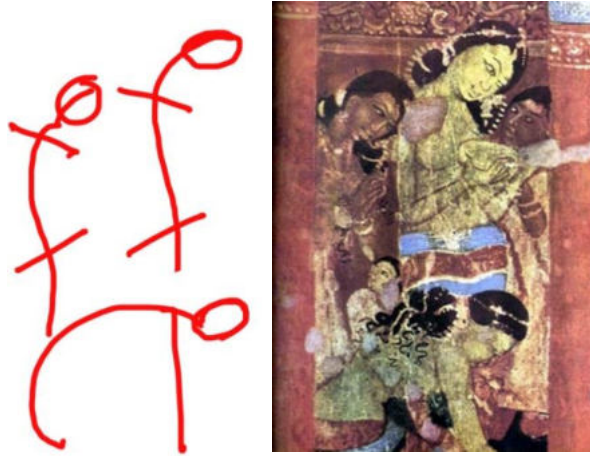
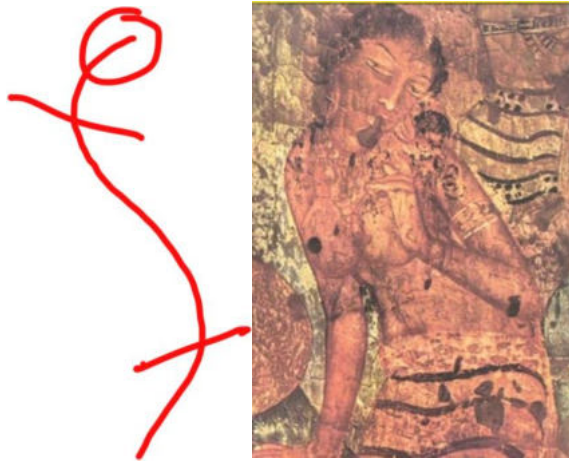
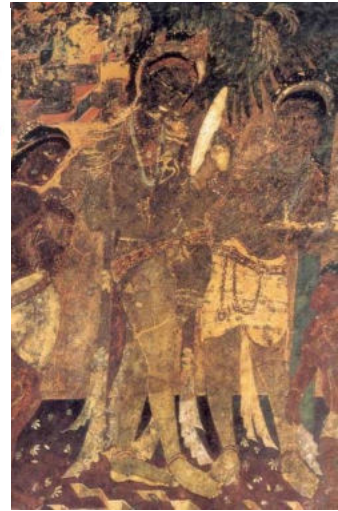
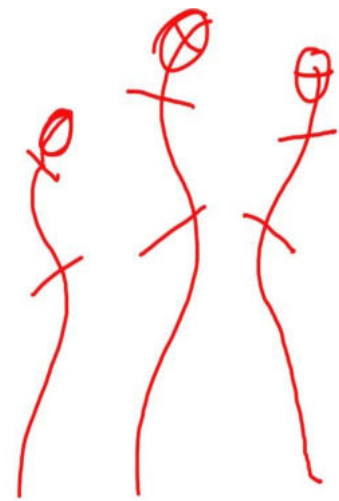
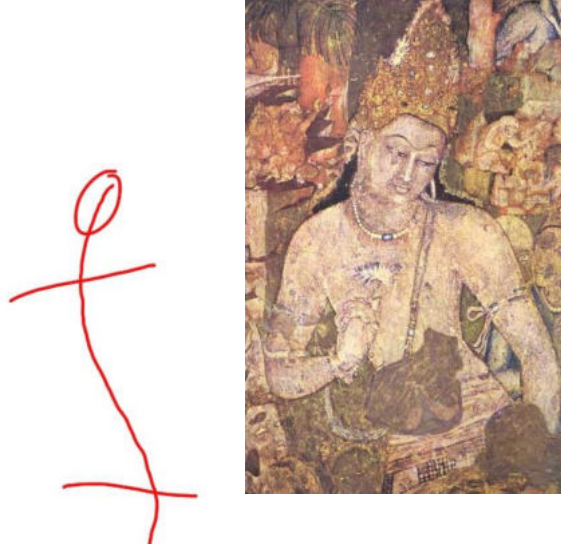
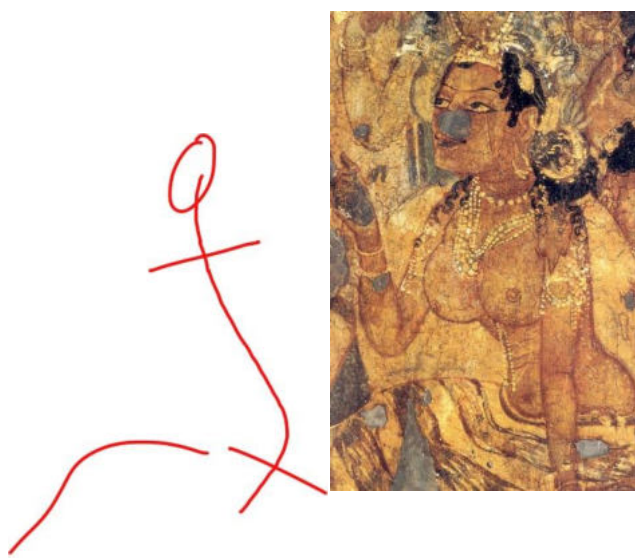
: Sculpture in Gate way at Sanchi Stupa located at Sanchi Town in Raisen District of the state of Madhya Pradesh, India, located 46 km North East of Bhopal. 3rd century BCE.

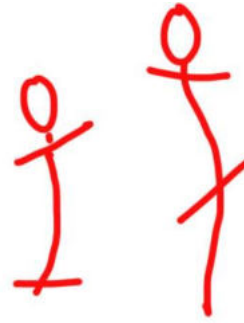
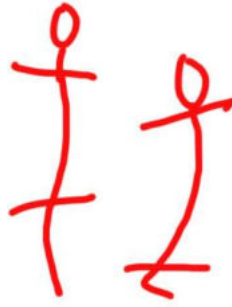
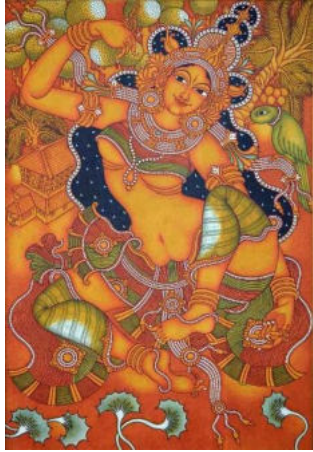
In the entrance of Cave-17, there are 8 Buddha's including the Maitreya, the Buddha which is yet to come. The paintings here are very beautifully and elaborately executed. Here, it's evident that two painters have painted separately because the paint on the left side of the door is oxidized. Painters would have made their own colors separately and painted.

Ajanta paintings might have looked different that day compared to today, because many of the paints used are from the Minerals which oxidizes with time.



Similarities between Ajanta Mural Painting and Kerala Mural Painting:





There are so much resemblance within Ajanta mural Paintings and Kerala mural Paintings;

If closely observed, for example the design in facial features such as Eye brows, eyes, nose, lips, the rendering etc are seen very resemblance in both the painting styles.

Limited application of colors.

Similarity in gesture/ pose and anatomy of the depicted female figures.

Similarities in floral designs and ornaments; As the mural art spread to the south India, there is an intense increase in choice of color scheme and decorative designs.

Similarities in depiction of god/ worship stories.

Ajanta art is seen where the Buddhist Pray or meditate and the place is confined to such importance, Kerala murals are seen only in temples by depicting stories from the Indian ethics (Ramayana/ Mahabharata) with respect to the god belonging to that particular temple.

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