

AJANTA AND POST AJANTA PAINTING

In the previous lesson, we learnt about painting of Indus Valley Civilisation. In this lesson, we will learn about the Ajanta and post Ajanta painting. The Gupta rule in northern India carried forward the tradition of sculpture and painting further. It has produced numerous new movements and a distinct style of paintings and sculptures. Qualities of softness, smoothness of sculpture, and slender body are the same of the remarkable outcomes. Chandra Gupta-I married Kumaradevi, a Princess of the Lichhavi tribe and ascended the throne about 320 A.D. The Gupta power was sustained by his son and successor Samudra Gupta (335-375) and Chandra Gupta-II (375-415), known by the title of Vikramaditya. Most of the Ajanta paintings were done in the Gupta and Vakataka period.



OBJECTIVES

After studying the lesson, the learner will be able to:

- identify the main historical founder of this era;
- describe the site of Ajanta Caves;
- describe how, when and who discovered the Ajanta Caves;
- explain the method of making the surface for painting;
- explain, the colours used in Ajanta Paintings;
- state the subject and names of Jataka Kathas; and
- write about the method of composition used in Ajanta caves painting.

The Ajanta paintings completely cover the walls, pillars and ceiling of the caves. They constitute a great gallery of Buddhist art illustrating scenes from the life of

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Lord Buddha and his previous lives comprise the Jatakas, floral and animal motifs, and stories. The Jatakas represented here are the Chhaddanata Jataka, Hasti Jataka, Vessantara Jataka, Mahakapi Jataka II, Matiposaka Jataka and Sama Jataka etc.

Similarly, another print out works and made belonging to the Buddhist art and architecture in India at Bagh Caves of Madhya Pradesh located 50 km west of Mandu, on a perpendicular rockface of a hill.

The most famous paintings are found in the Ajanta caves. Ajanta caves are situated over the winding bed of the Waghora River, a small tributary of the Tapti river, sixty miles northeast of Aurangabad district in Maharashtra state. The caves are named after the nearby village Ajintha. Ajanta Caves extends a rocky hill some 260 feet high and cut out of its sides along a stretch of 540 yards. There are thirty caves, including an unfinished one. Caves 9, 10, 19, 26 and 29 are Chaitya halls (worshipping places). Others were used as Viharas (Monasteries) where the monks lived. Ajanta caves were discovered in 1819 by some of the officers of the Madras regiment. One of them is Major John Smith. The first report on the Ajanta caves was sent to the Royal Asiatic Society by Lt. JeE. Alexandra in 1824.

3.1 BODHISATTVA AVALOKITESVARA

First, we need to know about the popular painting Padmapani Bodhisattva.

Basic Information

This is one of the most famous and popular paintings from Ajanta. The painting portrays Bodhisattva, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva is a Bodhisattva of compassion who refuge to Nibbana till the enemy gets emancipated into the Dhamma. The Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is considered as Triratna. Hence, the chanty is made as follows:

*Buddham Sharanam Gachchami
Dharmam Sharanam Gachchami
Sangham Sharanam Gachchami*

3.1.1 Padmapani Bodhisattva

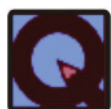
Title	:	Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara [Padmapani Bodhisattva]
Medium	:	Fresco on wall, Tempera
Period	:	Late 5th century A.D.
Cave No.	:	One



Fig. 3.1: “Padmapani Bodhisattva”

General Description

Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara painting, is painted on the back wall of the hall in cave no 1. He is wearing a beautiful crown with beads on his head, and his long black hair falls gracefully. Upper part of his body appears nude. In his ear, he is wearing a golden Kundala and two armllets are shown in his arm. His eyes are half open. The eyebrows, depending upon the facial expression are drawn by simple lines. The figure is closely related with the styles of Vidarsha sculptures. The paintings of Ajanta are not full fledged frescos. In fresco painting, painting is done while the surface layer of plaster is still wet. But the mode of paintings at Ajanta is the tempera, “dry fresco” and the colour and material used are very basic. The five colours usually described in the Shilpa Sutra text are found here: Red Ochre (geru), Yellow Ochre (Pilimitti), black (Kajal), Lapis lazuli (Blue) and White (Lime or Khadia).



INTEXT QUESTIONS 3.1

Choose the most appropriate option:

- Padmani Bodhisattva belong to.
 - Cave No. 1
 - Cave No. 2
 - Cave No. 12
 - Cave No. 13
- What is the title or subject of the painting?
 - Lord Bodhisattva
 - Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara
 - God Bodhisattva
 - None of these

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3.2 APSARA

Dear learner, now you will learn about the beautiful Ajanta cave painting of female figure found in Ajanta cave.

Basic Information

The Ajanta painters, have created many forms of female beauty. These include women from a royal family, courtesans, dancers, common women and Apsaras or nymphs.



Fig. 3.2: "APSARA"

3.2.1

Title	:	Apsara
Medium	:	Fresco on wall, Tempera
Period	:	Late 5th century A.D.
Cave No.	:	Seventeen



Notes

General Description

The Ajanta paintings are of a different variety, and the text, like Chitrakavya of Vishnudharmitta Purana, helps understand some of the technicalities. Sadanga is one of the later texts that describe qualities of paintings and is equally seen these qualities in Ajanta Paintings. Sadanga or the six limbs of art, composed of Rupabheda (Variety of form), Pramana (proper proportion), Bhava (depiction of emotion), Lavanyayojana (Infusion of grace), Sadrisya (likeness), and Varnikabhanga (mixing of colours). The painters here mastered the vast complex of human figures, animal and plant forms in addition to giving free scope to their imagination. The masters of Ajanta have control over the proportion of individual figures and can group them in an excellent composition.

Flying Apsara is a masterpiece of the Ajanta artist. Her body colour is dark brown. Apsara is wearing a decorated turban on her head, pearl necklaces on her neck and Kundal-type earrings on her ears. She is holding a musical instrument cymbal in her hand. She is wearing exquisite bangles. Her dreamy eyes are half open.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 3.2

Match the following:

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Medium | (i) Dark brown |
| 2. The skin colour of Apsara | (ii) Tempera |
| 3. Apsara holding | (iii) Khartal |

3.3 DECORATION ON THE CEILING

Dear learner, let us learn the ceiling decoration found in Ajanta cave.

Basic Information

The caves of Ajanta are beautifully decorated with both paintings and sculpture. The artist gave the same importance to the ceiling of these caves as he has given to the walls. The ceilings are decorated with different motifs of human figures, animal, bird forms and floral forms. This ceiling is covered with images of the Buddha.

3.3.1

Title	: Decoration on the Ceiling
Medium	: Fresco on wall, Tempera
Period	: Late fifth century A.D
Cave No.	: Two

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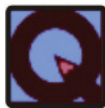
Notes



Fig. 3.3: "Decoration on the Ceiling"

General Description

Before they began painting, the artists prepared the cave wall. The first coating on the wall was of clay mixed with rice husk cattle dung and gum. The outline drawing was in dark brown or black and subsequently, colours and tones were added. This is a beautiful example of a ceiling decoration from cave no 2. The long panels and borders from the ceiling of caves are painted with swans, birds, Vidyadhara couples, auspicious conches, lotuses and buds, as well as sinuous rhizomes and stalks, with lotuses in bud form and bloom form and leaves covering large areas reveal the capacity of the artist to create diverse patterns of great artistic value. This is a beautiful design with the repetition of Buddha images. The panels are divided into several square segments.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 3.3

Fill in the blanks with appropriate words:

1. medium is used in this painting?
2. The long panels and borders from the ceiling of caves are painted with,, etc. to create diverse patterns of great artistic value.

3.4 BAGH CAVE

In this part we will learn about the painting of Bagh cave.

Basic Information

The painters of Ajanta, have rendered the details of festivals and ceremonies of public life. The general view of these in the paintings conveys the power of keen observation of the artist. There are many such compositions at Ajanta, which display the secular life.



Notes



Fig. 3.4: Dancing Panel

3.4.1 Dancing Panel

Title	: Dancing Panel
Medium	: Tempera on wall
Period	: 5th Cent. CE
Place	: Cave No. 4 Bagh, Madhya Pradesh

General Description

The Bagh caves are situated 7 km north away from Bagh village in the Kushi Tehsil of the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh. There are Viharas and Chaityas caves belonging to the Buddhist faith settlement. The cave no. 4 is decorated with paintings on the wall. The painting of a dance panel in cave no. 4 shows the same style of Ajanta paintings, though the Bagh paintings are more mature with perfectly modelled human figures. The painting depicts the performance of court dancers.

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The beautiful young dancers are scantily dressed out and decked with heavy jewellery. The dancers are moving in a circle and using their rhythmic footsteps to match the percussion beat of the drums and cymbals. The colourful costumes of the flower motifs enhance the beauty of these dancers. The painters of Bagh take a lot of interest in hair styling. It can be compared with the dancers of Mahajanaka Satulla in cave no. 1 of Ajanta. There are seven dancers in the left side of the composition. The lady in the centre of the group is dressed in a special gorgeous attire. One of the ladies is playing a drum which is dangling from her neck covering her naked body. The artist has captured the moment of her fingers on the drum with immense skill. There are few figures that have costumes showing their different regions. It would not be wrong to apprehend that royal courts were graced by all kinds of dancers from various regions.

Bagh paintings are just a feeble glimpse of the rich tradition of Indian mural paintings. Unfortunately, only five of the nine caves do not survive with these classical paintings.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 3.4

1. Which is the technique used in the painting?
2. In which state are the Bagh caves situated?
3. Give the total number of caves at Bagh.



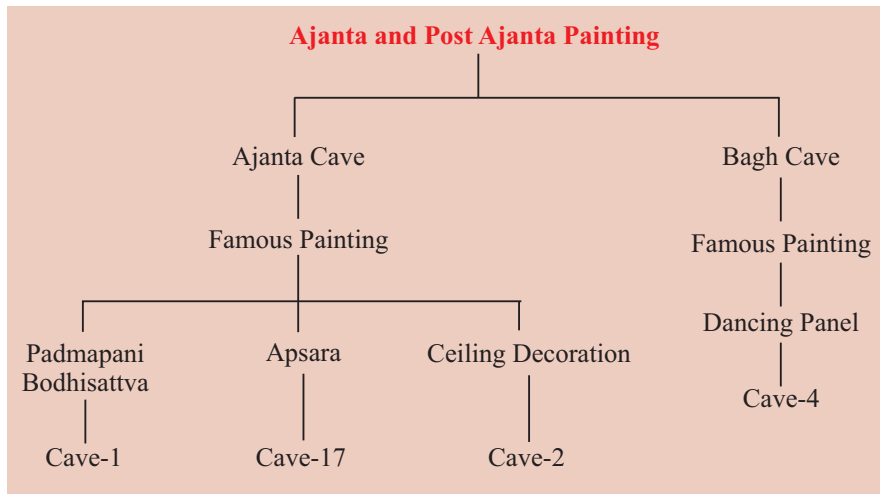
ACTIVITY

Write the number of the caves (any five) and the painting found. Also write the subject of the painting in one line.

Cave No.	Painting	Subject



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT



Notes

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The learner

- use a variety of styles and floor forms to create any kind of wall and decoration.
- describe the background of Ajanta and Post Ajanta Art with historical perspective.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Why is Gupta period considered as an important period in the history of art?
2. In which period were Ajanta paintings done?
3. Who was known by the title Vikramaditya and why?
4. What were the phases witnessed by the Gupta period?
5. Where are Ajanta caves situated? When and by whom were Ajanta caves discovered?
6. What does Ajanta constitute, and what does Jatakas represent?
7. Which colours are used in Shilpa Sutra's text?
8. How was the wall of Ajanta prepared?
9. What is the skin colour of Apsara?
10. What is the Apsara holding in her hands?

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ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

3.1

1. (i) Cave no 1
2. (ii) Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara

3.2

1. Tempera
2. dark brown.
3. Khartal

3.3

1. Tempera.
2. swan, birds, lotus

3.4

1. Tempera
2. Madhya Pradesh
3. Nine

GLOSSARY

Transformation	a complete change
Pulsation	expands and contracts with strong regular movements
Aptly	appropriate, suitable for occasion
Ascended	rising in power or status
Vakataka	a dynasty that ruled almost same time of the Guptas
Winding	a lot of bends and turns
Tributary	some paying
Chaitya	place where Buddhist monks pray
Vihara	place where monks live
Truimph	great success
Symbols	patterns, motifs
Gallery	a space to display artwork
Jatakas	stories of Buddha's previous birth in different forms like animal, birds and plants etc.

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Specimens	sample of something
Companion	a person who is with another person
Tempera	painting with pigment mixed with egg or other binders
Kundal	a big bangle type Baring
Expression	the look on your face that shows how you feel
Subsequently	coming after something
Apsara	celestial dancing girl
Instruments	a thing that you use for playing music
Auspicious	Sacred
Conches	Shell of a fish used in rituals
Rhizomes	horizontal underground plant stem producing both roots and shoots
Stalks	the stem of a plant or support of a leaf, flower or fruit
Reveal	show some thing that was hidden
Enshrining	Tradition, idea in a form that ensures it will be respected
Vestige	last remaining trace of something
Mudra	Symbolic hand gesture
Mahayana	A sect of Buddhism in which image is made and worshipped
Hinayana	A sect of Buddhism considered to be the path of elders in which image worship is a tabu

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