CHAPTER – V
MATERIAL CULTURE

5.1 Cultural Communication through Paintings and Sculpture
5.2 Aspects of Material Culture
5.3 Exchange of Symbols and Motives at Ajanta
5.4 Analysis of Sculpture and Painting as per Panels
5.5 Evolution, Nature and Features of Ajanta Paintings as per Jataka Stories
5.6 Ajanta Murals
5.7 Co-relation between Sculpture and Painting
5.8 Interpretation and interaction aspects of analysis through art
and architecture of Ajanta Caves
5.9 Summary

References
CHAPTER - V
MATERIAL CULTURE

5.1. Cultural communication through paintings and sculptures:

Cave temples depicted not only daily life but also they revealed material life of the people in the bygone ages. New outlook is required to understand their material life in new angle. B. Subbarao has rightly observed that, "the pattern of development of material culture in India...is fundamentally based on the geographical features of the country, depending on factors like attraction, aridity, relative isolation and isolation." The location of Ajanta in a specific geographic condition provided an opportunity to depict cultural life in the surrounding areas. The place was far away from urban settlement and it was a centre of learning.

Every country has its own material culture. To know such culture art plays a key role. Dr. Dhavlikar has rightly opined that, "the material culture that is depicted in the paintings is extremely helpful in building up a picture of life in ancient India in general and in the Deccan in particular." In this respect there are quite a few monuments like the cave temples of Ajanta which offer such an amazing range of scenes from daily life. In these paintings, there we witness the colourful panorama of ancient life in its kaleidoscopic variety. This kaleidoscopic variety has been studied from the communication angle.

The understanding of Buddhist cave temples must have proper co-relation of material life with solid base of knowledge sharing. First knowledge was created then philosophy and cultural values were inculcated. T. V. Pathy has observed that, "when learning and scholarship became the main aspect of the monastic life, Buddhist centres continued to attract the public even though the faith was gradually its way out.
Many a ruler considered patronage to Buddhist monasteries as service for the spread of learning and culture rather than the cause of Buddhism." 3 Ajanta served the same purpose like that of Nalanda in Western India.

About relation between knowledge and culture Parimoo has observed that, "the study would involve extensive and comprehensive enquiries afresh into the art forms, religious setting, political and social history, study of inscriptional and numismatic evidences, textual sources along with the study of temporarily and spatially related monuments." 4 Ajanta art and architecture do reveal religious and socio-political history of contemporary period in a detailed manner.

5.2 Aspects of material culture:

Art and material culture are an inter-mingled. In this aspect Bharata Iyer opined that, "art in India was seen as a way of life and was largely utilitarian in purpose; that is to say the theory of art for arts sake' scarcely influenced our determined Indian art." 5 Mr. Iyer further observed that "A purely personal art had no place in the Indian tradition. The artist and the onlooker shared a common inspiration, suffice it to say that Italian art remained truly national in the widest and deepest sense of the term because its ideals were the ideals of the nation and its canons were well understood by the people." 6 Because it is an art of national in the widest and deepest sense of term and its ideals were well understood by all. The artists gave shape to the visions, ideas and experience of the race. The anonymity of artists and its coverage from North to South emphasizes the national character of the art, unity of life, whether animal or vegetable, human or superhuman is seen. Though there is a trace of foreign influence it cannot be noticed because its not absorption, rather amalgamation. It has been truly revealed in Ajanta sculpture and paintings.
Buddhism incorporated divergent beliefs, traditions, emotions and practices of people because of its non sectarian nature of faith in order to be popular among common-man.

S. K. Datta has stated that, “Buddhism made its headway as the religion of the people and not as the cult of a sect.” 7 This cult developed its own culture and also influenced Indian way of life.

Art and architecture has remained continuously the medium of cultural life. About architecture as mass communication Dr. D. N. Verma rightly observed that, “…more and more monks gave their tacit concurrence to the popular demands of the visual representation of the major events of the Master’s life and of the Jataka stories in the precincts of the Chaitya. It was under these circumstances that the mass communicator found his way in the Chaityas and Stupas of Bharhut and Sanchi.” 8

Drapery:

Drapery reveals richness of cultural life of Ajanta. About draperies it has been observed that, “the draperies express most thoroughly the peculiarities of the oriental treatment of un-sewn cloth, which without a single stitch, pin, clasp, button or other fastening furnishes the most graceful, convenient and comfortable garments known to mankind.” 9 This sophistication was an essential part of golden period of Gupta.

In this connection Dhavlikar has observed that, “the full sleeved tight fitting coat worn by the Ajanta Kings is very similar to that of the Gupta Kings. It may probably be the Varabana, which was introduced in India by the Tasmanians. A similar coat is noticed in a terracotta figurine from Ahichhatra.” 10 Such coats were worn by kings while they went on hunting or war expeditions.
Dress:

The best example of dress can be noted in cave n° XVII. About dress code of military Dhavlikar has observed that, “the costume of the armed personnel as depicted in the murals shows that there was definitely some kind of uniform for the army. However, we cannot precisely know the particular rank of a soldier from the painted illustrations as testified by Strabo. It, therefore, seems that uniforms for the army existed even at a very early period of India.” 11 The dress of army shows about the feeling of security and discipline of the period.

Various types of dress of woman were exhibited in different paintings of Ajanta. In this aspect Sabtore has observed that, “the women are at times shown at Ajanta (Caves XVI – XVII) only with a loose cloth which is little longer than that worn by men, and many a time either with half armed or full armed jackets. Such a short loose cloth worn below the waist was not necessarily plain for it had stripes and in some cases colours too. The loose ends were let down gracefully in folds on the back.” 12

The garments of women shown in Ajanta paintings depict designs as well as colours. In these modern days fashions change rapidly but it is highly appreciable that Ajanta designs are still in vogue. (ref. plate I)

Costume and coiffure:

The richness of Ajanta life is reflected on costumes and coiffures. About dress style Albert Grunwedel has observed that, “in the treatment of dress, the earliest Buddhist art is very successful: though the unusual articles of clothing, such as the monk’s cowl present difficulties. The dress of the men consists in the main of the same articles as are generally worn at the present day – a lion cloth worn so as to resemble trousers (Hindi- Dhoti, Tamil- Mundu) forms the garment base. The modern
jacket, for example, Hindi angiya, Tamil Sokkag, or other forms of this article of this attire, no where appear”. 13 The continuity of dress style of these days is a good example of roots of culture linked up with ancient times.

About female hair-style, Ajanta is a landmark example. Dhavlikar has observed that, “in no country except probably in Japan has so much imagination, thought and artistic genius gone into devising hair styles as in India. This is evident from the rich variety of coiffure and head dresses represented in the whole range of Indian art and Ajanta can be said to be the richest source for the study of coiffures and hair dresses for which it has won the admiration of one and all.” 14

Best hair styles in Ajanta can be witnessed in cave Nos XVI and XVII while narrating Vidura Pandita Jataka, Champiya Jataka and Mahajanka Jataka, etc.

Ornaments site the example of cultural glory. Yazadani has observed that, “Sir John Marshall in his writings has laid great stress on the influence of the Jewellers art on the sculptures and architecture of India. But this art had its beginning in South India as the presence of its early gold workings indicates. Further skill in making beads and polishing stones for rings and other ornaments was also developed there much earlier than in North India, as has been proved by our excavations in the Raichur district.” 15 In Ajanta the best type of ornaments can be seen on the female figures in cave No X, in the narration of Chadanta Jataka.

Pottery and Utensils:

Potteries are the alphabet of culture. In this regard Dhavlikar has observed, “the invention of pottery marks a major step in the history of mankind. The clay vessels of early period were copied later in metal and we find a variety of shapes fashioned to suit the taste of users… here at Ajanta we can define the shapes of vessels of Satavahana and the Vakataka-Gupta periods separately.” 16 Literary evidences are
many for description of vessels used in by gone years, but Ajanta illustrations are very beautiful to look at

Weights and measures:

Different sizes and types of weighing measures were depicted in the cave paintings of Ajanta. Dhavlikar has observed that, “one is a small balance in a shop...the other is huge and brought for weighing the king.... two posts with a horizontal bar above have been provided for the suspension of balance. Another interesting but curious measure....looks like the right angle used by carpenters and masons.” 17 Such type of measures was described by Kautilya in his Arthashastra. These measures were shown used by traders and the king in Jataka tales of Viswantara and Sibi respectively in cave n° XVII of Ajanta.

Furniture:

Due to its perishable nature, being made by wood, ancient furniture is not available, but the plastic representation is abundant and reflects the different designs and varieties of furniture of ancient India. Griffiths has rightly observed that, “footstools were of various patterns and much used. In cane or wicker work a circular stool of hung glass form was made which is still one of the most familiar objects of the interior. Curtains of patterned cloth were hung on cords in graceful folds and serve as backgrounds in some of the pictures.” 18

The illustration of thrones and seats is common in Ajanta paintings. Footstool was an adjunct of the throne. Its royal insigma and tributary chiefs were worshiping the stool adjacent to the throne of the king, commonly known as Padapitha. Tables, beds different types of cushions, are also seen in cave n° XVII, XVI in Hamsa Jataka and Parinirvana scenes. Curtains are seen in the narrations of Hamsa Jataka and Visvantara Jataka in cave n° XVII.
Security is a major concern of all living beings at all times. Thus arms of defensive and later offensive weapons were invented. So we find that human invented abundant varieties of arms and weapons. Davlikar has rightly observed that, “literary evidence gives us a fairly good idea of the arms and weapons used in ancient India. Some of the works such as Arthashastra, the epics and some of the Puranas contain exhaustive treatment of the subject. However, in the absence of actual specimen, we have to depend solely on their graphic representations such as those of Ajanta.” 19 Weapons shown in Ajanta paintings are of primitive forms. They resemble wooden forms. Bamboo, wood and animal horns were used to prepare these weapons. In cave no XVII of Ajanta in the narrations of Mahakapi Jataka, Sutasoma Jataka, Champeya Jataka, Visventara Jataka, Mahajanka Jataka and Hasti Jataka in cave no XVI. Innumerable varieties of both defensive and offensive arms and weapons are illustrated.

Music and dance play an important role in forming of art tradition of ancient Indian culture being its origin from chanting of the Rigveda and the Sāmveda. The musical instruments depicted in the caves of Ajanta are as observed by Dhavlikar “the theoretical knowledge of music is still preserved in manuscripts and has also been handed down from generation to generation in pupilary succession. But our knowledge regarding our ancient musical instruments is far from satisfactory and hence the importance of their plastic representations.” 20

Though the knowledge of ancient musical instruments through scriptures is in tact, the preservation of such instruments could be possible through sculptures and painting, which is more abundant. Ajanta paintings are foremost runners to depict different categories and groups of such instruments as mentioned in literature. Best
examples of these musical instruments seen hung on the wall in the ‘Conception’ scene in cave no XVI.

Indian musical instruments on the wall paintings at Quizil, Yotkali, Tuanhuang and other important places of central Asia are of Indian origin. In a civilized society like India communications and transportation played an important role. Ancient Indian texts mentioned the existence of trade and commerce between India and Asiatic countries, as per ancient texts classification the modes of transport in olden days. In this aspect John Griffiths has observed that, “vivid testimony to the ancient foreign trade of India’s borne by the representations of ships and boats painting shows a sea going vessel with high stern and three masts each surmounted by a truck, and carrying a lug rail. A bowsprit, projecting from a kind of gallows on deck, is indicated with an out flying jib square is form like that borne till recent times by European vessels. The ship appears to be decked and has ports.” 21 Ajanta paintings illustrated conveyance without wheels, were used by Royal families. Men were carrying carts and chariots, with, which were drawn by animals. Boats and ships are water bound transport. Simhala Avadana and Susatoma Jataka tales illustrate these transports in cave no XVI.

Flora and Fauna:

Flora and Fauna was given equal importance by the artist along with human figure in the sculptures and paintings. Meshram has rightly observed that, “the Saltree is also painted in the lake scene of Shad-danta Jataka (Ajanta X), which is in full blossom. The Bodhisattva is shown standing under a large tree and is accompanied by a calf elephant. According to Buddhist texts, Mayadevi gave birth to Siddhartha, while standing under a Saltree.” 22 All the three incidents of Historical Buddha took place under a tree. Gautama was born under a Saltree. He took enlightenment under a
Bodhi tree, took Parinirvana under a Saltree. In cave n° X these illustrations are seen. Human life is associated with flora and fauna surrounding him. Animals play a vital role in daily chorus as well as religious importance. Dieter observed that, "among India’s four animals, the lion, the elephant, the horse, and the bull, elephants and bulls occupy a predominant position in Ajanta paintings. They serve both to add splendour to royal processions and military expeditions and to indicate the stables when royal palaces are depicted." 23 In cave n° X and n° XVII illustrations are there depicting animals. Gautama left the palace riding Kanaka, in Shadanta Jataka. Bodhisattva was born as an elephant, bull is a symbol of power and Siddhartha was symbolized as Sakya lion. Hence importance is given to animal life too.

**Mythical animals:**

Mythical animals or Vyalas are represented in sculptures and paintings. Regarding types of such animals Meshram has observed that, "they can be divided into two types namely (1) terrestrial (bhucarin) (2) aerial (Vyomacarin,) Five headed Nagas, beaked animals, house headed Yakshas and Sphinx are closed as terrestrial type and winged animals as the racial type." 24

Dhavlikar has also stated that, "mention may also be made of some mythical beings which include a mermaid (ceiling II, Purna Avadana II) a boar headed man (ceiling II) and a tiger with the head and horns of an antelope (Cave n° IX). Dragons appear in the ceiling of the chapel to the left of the ante chamber of cave II. Many of these are used as decorative motifs." 25 These Vyalas seem to have been known in ancient times. Even now winged animals made of bronze can be seen in Hindu temples.

Gautama before attaining enlightenment and becoming the Buddha took several births as Bodhsattvas in the guise of birds and animals. In this context of
decorative motifs, Mulkraj has observed that, "the birds also symbolize the Buddha. The golden geese, which have been mentioned in the Jatakas, as the enlightened ones, in the evolutionary state are painted decoratively. The golden geese from cave n° I represent the decorative mannerism of 6th and 7th centuries. Mere prettiness has become an accepted norm." 26

During Hinayana, Buddhists worshipped the symbols to feel the presence of the Lord. Later Jataka tales were incorporated to popularize the Buddhist philosophy among commoners. The followers of the Mahayan cult started image worship, hence the symbolic representation in earliest sculptures and paintings became decorative designs. In cave n° I being the latest, plenty of such flower and bird decorations are seen on the ceiling.

5.3. Exchange of symbols and motives at Ajanta

Communication in India is interaction of symbols and motifs. In order to understand these aspects of communication study of Ajanta caves can be conducted systematically. Convention become tradition and such traditions leave some impact on, art of the days forming symbols. Coomarswamy has rightly opined that, "Indian art is always a language employing symbols, valid only by tradition and convention. The symbol may be little more than a geometrical design, as in the case of the lotus, rosette, and denting, miraculous birth or anthropomorphic as in the later nativities where Mayadevi is represented as a woman either with or without the infant Buddhisattva." 27 In Ajanta these symbols were reflected meaningfully. While discussing the language of Indian art Motichanda has opined that, "symbols in Indian art are not the exclusive property of a particular religion." 28 Like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism also used symbols in a befitting manner.
Motichanda further observed that, “from the common treasure house of Indian symbols, the Hindus, Jains and Buddhists, all borrowed and though interpreted the time honoured symbols according to their own belief, there is no doubt that as evinced by Vedic literature, their original meaning was the same.” 29 Symbols have no specific religion. Irrespective of their adaptations by any religion basic meaning does not change.

The interchange of ornamental motifs is as old as the origin of such decorative designs. Andrews has rightly observed that, “the interchange of decorative forms between India and her neighbour has been as active as the same process in other parts of the world and whatever of decoration India has adopted, evolved or developed, she has endowed with some thing of her own essence before passing it on.” 30 Such evolution and changes of decorative motifs is also seen in Ajanta draperies, hairstyles and images of the Buddha. Ajanta left a model before the world, which has been followed by later ages.

In the beginning of Buddhist philosophy the followers of Buddha in order to pay veneration wanted to have something to feel the presence of the Lord. Hence early Buddhism and its art cantered round the life of Buddha and events like his birth, renunciation, enlightenment, turning the wheel of life and Nirvana and good deeds of his former lives.

Mathur has rightly pointed that, “here Buddha is not portrayed in human form and his presence is indicated by symbols. His actual likeness was regarded as too sacred to admit of representation.” 31 In Ajanta art also many such symbols are present.

In early Buddhist art, the Buddha is constantly represented in symbols like throne, wisdom tree, wheel etc, A. K. C. Swamy has rightly observed that,
“anthomorphic elements have now been combined with the earlier and more abstract symbolism that was an inevitable result of the emergence of Buddhism as a popular religion, its extension as an emotional (Bhaktivada) persuasion.” 32 Earlier, symbols, imaginary skills of the artists, rise of Bhakti cult and Mahayana philosophy paved way for the Buddha’s image making.

**Chaitya and Stupa:**

After Maha Parinirvana of Buddha Chaitya and Stupa were erected on the funeral remains of Lord Buddha. Now Chaitya is a symbol used for enlightenment. Chaitya and Stup ta are synonymous. The difference is only interpretation in terms of religion and architecture. Gangoly has opined that, “according to its root meaning, Chaitya from Chita, a funeral pile denotes any thing connected with a funeral pile, e.g., the tumulus raised over the ashes or relics of a dead person. Hence technically, a Chaitya has been understood to mean any relic, shrine, or altar and generally a place of worship or a temple...Chaitya is a religious term, while Stupa is an architectural equivalent for a rich mound.” 33 Buddhists followed Hindu tradition by erecting memorials on the relics of holy men.

**Ashokan Pillar:**

On Ashokan pillar Chakra and lion have become symbols of Indian identity.

Symbols in art leave some impact on the viewers. Regarding more clear communication and impact, D. N. Verma has opined that, “the effective use of symbolic motifs on the Ashokan columns appears to have left deeper impressions on the consciousness of the communicator. The animals on the columns, the lion, the elephant, the bull and the horse had been associated with the Buddha and the people understood the symbolism.” 34
Such visual representations were clearly understood by viewers. Regarding the development of iconography Mathur has observed that, "in India, art has been so closely related to religion that for its proper understanding, it is necessary to have some knowledge of various forms and symbols representing the supernatural powers in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism."  

In order to understand the art of a land one has to acquire knowledge of religion of India.

**Kalash:**

Amritakalasha played an important role in Indian architecture. This Kumbha is considered as an auspicious symbol. K. C. Aryan has described that, "in the earliest rock cut cave temples, one finds the Kalasha motif at the base of the lithic pillars. In subsequent periods it came to be used on top of the pillars along with foliage. This is known as Ghatapallava (pot and foliage). Mangalaghata, Purnaghata, etc., in architectural terminology and symbolizes abundance, prosperity and plenty."  

In the earlier architecture Kalasha was on the base, the reason behind it was, wooden pillars were kept in pot with sand for support. This utilitarian motif became decorative and climbed to the top of pillar in stone architectures.

**Tree as a symbol:**

Like animal forms plant life is also given importance in Buddhist philosophy. M. C. Arthur observed that, "all the four events of Buddha’s life occurred under a tree, so trees played an important role in Buddhism. Mayadevi, Gautama’s mother gave birth to Buddha in a glove of trees in Lumbini, Siddhartha attained enlightenment under a Pipal tree at Bodh Gaya...Buddha attained Parinirvana under a Sals tree."  

In Buddhist sculptures and painting scenes of the above are commonly depicted.
Three Ratnas:

Precious jewels represent spiritual wealth. In Buddhism the three Ratnas are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha means monastic order. Regarding Tri-ratnas and other symbols Dr. Mathur has observed that “His presence was shown by a tree (the Bodhi tree), a wheel (the wheel of law set turning at Sarnath), Stupa (his burial mound) or else by the foot prints, or an empty saddle or throne of even by his Umbrella, for the umbrella had long been a symbol of royalty. The whole of Buddhism was composed of; Trinity made up of the Buddha, Dhamma (the law) and the Sangha (the monastic order). This was embodied in the Tri-ratna (three jewels) symbol.” 38 The philosophy of Buddhism revolves round three Ratnas and Buddhist art to depict them. Ajanta is no exception to it.

Wheel:

Buddhist art of all times shows the wheel as a motif in sculptures, paintings, architecture and the decorative arts. Mc Arthur has observed that, “it represents the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth known as Samsara. It also symbolizes the Dharma, or teaching of the Buddha which is constant motion and provides a path towards spiritual enlightenment and eventual release from this cycle.” 39

Buddha’s sermon is called as turning of a wheel, so the symbol of wheel stands for reverence towards the Lords in all the sections of Buddhist philosophy.

Lotus:

In Buddhist art the lotus has immense importance. Regarding the concept of lotus symbolism, McArthur has opined that, “the lotus, one of the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism, represents spiritual purity. Buddhists believe that just as the lotus flower rises up from the depths of muddy ponds and lakes and then blossoms immaculately above the water’s surface, the human heart or mind can develop the
virtues of the Buddha and transcend desires and attachments, to reveal, its essentially pure nature.”  

In Ajanta paintings in the early caves of Hinayana phase, lotus was shown as a symbol indicating the Buddha whereas in the Mahayana phase as a conceptual motif. For example in cave n° 1 Padmapani has a blue lotus in his hand, the black princess holds a lotus, a maid holds a lotus in the dying princess panel.

Thirty-two auspicious marks:

Ancient Indian text Lakshana Sutra detailed the auspicious thirty-two marks. Regarding the thirty-two marks of a great man McArthur has described that, “according to pres-Buddhist Indian tradition, there are thirty two physical markings or Lakshanas that characterize a great man. These markings appear because of meritorious acts in his previous lives. In the legend of the Historical Buddha, the great sage Ashita visited Siddhartha soon after he was born and identified the thirty two signs on the boy’s body.”

A few Lakshanas’s are mentioned here. So McArthur observed that, “the eight Auspicious symbols (Sanskrit: Ashtamangala) appear on many Buddhist objects, textiles and paintings. When they appear as a group, their powers are multiplied. In certain texts, aspects of the Buddha were compared to these symbols. For example, the Buddha’s tongue to an open lotus petal and his head to a protecting parasol.” These marks can be seen in figures of the Buddha in Ajanta sculptures and paintings.

5.4 Analysis of sculpture and paintings as per panels

There are innumerable paintings depicted in Ajanta caves. Ten murals and five sculptures are selected for panel analysis of sculpture and paintings. The names of panels are as follows:
**Paintings:** The mother and child, Padmapani, Vajrapani, Black Princess, Dying Princess, Toilet Scene, Apsaras, Nymph, Maha Hamsa Jataka and Nalagiri Jataka.

**Sculptures:** Seated statue of the Buddha, Hariti, wild bull, Mara’s Attempt and Maha Parinirvana.

The analysis of sculpture and painting is done on two aspects, first, its theme or content and second, the murals. Krishnamurty has rightly observed that, “each Jataka tale conveys a message or moral to humanity at large in multifarious ways. The message conveyed by Buddha in these tales has universal application. Buddha while narrating these Jataka stories brought out the realities and values of human life.” 43 Human values and realities of life were imbibed in Buddhist philosophy. Buddha conveyed these values through his preaching. Ajanta caves amplify message-cantered theory of communication.

**Mother and child:** (ref. plate II)

Siddhartha after attaining enlightenment and turning the wheel of law at Sarnath returns to Kapilavastu with a begging bowl in his hand. Bhattacharya has highly appreciated the panel and he stated that, “in an emotionally charged panel, the great Being stands at the palace gate before his wife Yasodhara and son Rahula. But the separation caused by his desertion of material world and attainment of spiritual sublimity, reflected in his halo and colossal size, appears to have created, a psychophysical gap between him and his nearest ones. Hence, Yasodhara in her diffidence puts forward Rahula, the common bondage, that un-passable separation.”44

Buddha in his mendicants, robes, moved with compassion at the sigh of his son and wife, offers his begging bowl to Rahula and accepts him as his disciple. Mulk Raj Anand has observed that, “mother and child; before the Buddha, classical realism
reaches its zenith in the composition, with firm statuesque drawing of the enlightened one detached almost like a God from the mother and child with the small human frame of the house at the back. The flying angel and the halo symbolize the Buddha’s spiritual greatness.” 45 The towering height of the Buddha, flying angles, sprinkling flowers, and halo behind the Buddha added symbolism to the spiritual greatness of the Buddha.

**Padmapani:** (ref. plate III)

Regarding the subject matter and canonical rules followed by the artists, Guha has observed that, “we see here how carefully the artist had worked in accordance with the principles set forth in the six limbs of painting. The subject matter of the painting is the portrait of the Bodhisattva, the Buddhist God of Compassion and tenderness, whose mission is to assuage human suffering by taking upon himself the sorrow of all earthly beings.” 46 The Ajanta artists attained mastery in displaying compassion and tenderness and also followed the cannons of Chitra Sutra.

**Avalokitesvara Padmapani:**

The Mahayana cult represented the symbol of human perfection while depicting Padmapani. The Buddhist metaphysical myth of unity and solidarity of all life is shown in the painting. J. P. Guha truly observed, “But the roof and crown of all is the Avalokitesvara Padmapani (Bodhisattva) in Cave no I. It is a very ‘MonaLisa’ of Indian painting. It is an expression of a spiritual beauty carried to its highest degree of intensity.” 47

The writer placed this painting on the top of list of the art of painting. The very concept of spiritual intensity and careful linings is superb in quality.
**Vajrapani:** (ref. plate IV)

All the five Dhyani Buddhas represent different virtues. Vajrapani Bodhisattva represents power. McArthur has opined that, “Vajrapani the holder of the Vajra is the Bodhisattva who represents the power of all Buddhas.... To many Buddhists, Vajrapani represents removal of obstacles and the conquest of negativity through fierce determination, symbolized by the Vajra, that he holds. As one of the five Dhyani Bodhisattvas of esoteric Buddhism he is closely associated with the Buddha Akhobhya.”

Being the most powerful of all Budhisattvas, Vajrapani is supposed to protect humanity.

**Black Princess:** (ref. plate V)

Besides Padmapani, a princess with plenty of ornaments is depicted and her gesture is exceptionally expressive. Manohar Kaul has observed that, “the highly refined character and graceful charm of a cultured noble are discernible in the features of the prince, who is the chief figure in the mural. The lady close to him presumably his wife Yasodhara is of sober colour. The juxtaposition of diverse and contrast colour complexion is suggestive of the Buddha to ignore all colour distinctions as simple, external trappings only true to nature and not to inner harmony of the spirit which in all is alike.”

The inner spirit least bothers colour, or ornaments. The artists achieved the goal of depicting the very concept of inner soul.

In modelling and design of plastic arts Ajanta artists are comparable to the Western artists of modern times. Manohar Kaul has observed that, “this fresco has evoked appreciation from Western art historians. Among others Larenzo Cecconi writes, “This painting in its grand out lines recalls to memory the figures of Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel. While the clearness of the colour of the flesh, so
true to nature, and the transparency of the shadows, are the like those of Carroggio. The design and expression of the face are exceptionally surprising. In the breadth of the technique, the interpretation of the shape of the hand, made to realistic perfection, permits of a comparison with the two great artists of the Italian Renaissance.”

The pearl, grey complexion and highlights on nose, lips, and eyebrows express her serenity and modesty. The modern scholars unanimously treat Ajanta paintings as murals not frescoes.

**The Dying Princess:** (ref. plate VI)

Buddha’s cousin Nanda renounced the world as per Buddha’s wish. His wife Sundari collapsed at the site of the crown brought by an attendant conveying the news Nanda’s renunciation. The tense situation is depicted in this painting. Manohar Kaul has observed that, “the fresco in cave no XVI showing the tense and depressing scene round the bed of a dying princess is a significant specimen of creative art. The drooping head and emaciated limbs of the princess show her in her last gasps. The grief stricken face of a female attendant, looking helplessly and of another feeling the pulse of the dying princess, heighten the tragic atmosphere.”

The bending posture of the princess, her hair without crown, hanging hands worried attendants a nurse carrying medicines in a tray narrate the story. Yazdani has observed that “the figures in the middle is of the princess, who is sitting on a low throne, her back resting on a ground embroidered pillow, and the maid standing behind the throne is holding the princess with her two hands so as to prevent her from falling down from the throne through weakness. The head of the princess is inclined on one side and her half closed eyes indicate both feebleness and despair.” Expressions on the faces are truly depicted. The narration is like a drama in front of the viewers. More than that the expressions shown on the faces of attendants and
expressive gestures, i.e., a lady hiding her face, a peacock on the top of a hill, a bent banana leaf, added more effect to the tense scene. The artist understood thoroughly the principles of light and shade. All these aspects placed the painting among the best work of art.

The toilet scene: (ref. plate VII)

The physical beauty of the female figure, the movements, grace and charm were easily illustrated in these paintings. In this regard along with the appreciations of Western writers, Manohar Kaul has observed that, “whether it was a princess or a maidservant in various charming poses, sprightly movements and vivacious moods, the moral dignity of womanhood was maintained invariably. One cannot think of a parallel to this frank and chivalrous women worship of Ajanta, remarks Gladstone Solomon adding, nowhere else perhaps has woman received such perfect understanding and homage. In spite of her obvious reality, one feels at Ajanta that woman is treated not as an individual but as a principle.”

While describing the beauty of the princess Kaul, has further observed that, “she is there not female merely but the incarnation of all the beauty of the world. Hence with all gaiety, her charm, insouciance, she never loses her dignity and nowhere is she belittled or besmirched.”

It seems the artists while picturising the female figure has followed no convention. They have copied the poses of women instead of getting women to pose for their art. For the artists, women were too precious to be diminished by laws. Through the gestures of women the artists could learn their nature and reproduce it carefully.

Apsara: (ref. plate VIII)

Colour combination and colour presentation have a distinct purpose. Dark background against tone is distinct. Manohar Kaul has observed that, “the art of
Ajanta is conspicuously the art of line. The artist would give effective expression to his subject by simply modulating the line in various ways. The modelling relief, vigour and other features of the pictorial art that are essential to give the painting its special character, are achieved first by simple outline and then by certain variation of line." 55 It seems the artists are alert in applying colour to their works.

Nymph:

Flying movements in air can be distinctly noticed by the displacement of ornaments on the body of a nymph. Bhattacharya has observed that, “in another scene a nymph has been represented along with other celestials as coming down to worship the Master with an effortless ease through the air, the strong wind causing a swing of her ornaments and tussels. In the delineation of the nymph, which no doubt represents one of the finest female beauties painted at Ajanta, remarkable is the quality of modelling attained by the mastery of shading and touches of highlights.” 56 Dramatic affect, modulations, simplicity and force of line, were presented in a skilful manner, by the artists of Ajanta.

Maha Hamsa Jataka Cave no XVII: (ref. plate IX)

Once the Bodhisattva was born as goose. The queen of Benaras dreamt of it. Though the golden goose was trapped, it was received with royal dignity and the Royal couple learnt the sacred law with utmost interest. In this context Percy Brown has observed that, “this birth tale relates that queen Khema has a dream about a golden goose and entreats Samyana the King to find one for her. By means of a decoy the royal fowler entrusted with this task captures the goose king, who is deserted by all his subjects, except one, Sumukha, his chief captain. The two prisoners were brought before King Samyana, who treats them with great honour, and after the goose
KING HAS PREACHED THE LAW TO HIM PERMITS THEM BOTH TO RETURN TO
THEIR HOMES ON THE SLOPES OF CHITTRAKUTA, THE BRIGHT PEAK. 57
Maha Hansa Jataka:

The meal in the hall offered to the golden goose is pictured in a fine manner.
Percy Brown has observed that, "the interest of the entire group is concentrated with
the most vivid intensity on the two goose enthroned in the middle. It seems quite
likely that the hanging canopy above has been specially erected by the king as one of
the signs of his respect for the royal bird beneath. A richly decorated screen or Kanat,
acts as a background to the whole, as well as signifying the private character of the
proceedings." 58

The colour scheme is superb and befitting with delicate pinks and greys.

Subjugation of Nalagiri: (ref. plate X)

Devadatta, the wicked and jealous cousin of Siddhartha tried many times to
take the life of the great being but could not succeed. Once a wild elephant was freed
to attack the Buddha. While detailing the Nalagiri Jataka, Bhattacharya has observed
that, "the entire panorama of Nalagiri’s subjugation by the Master is an instance of it.
In simple composition showing vertical and horizontal forms the painter narrates this
significant miracle of the master’s life in a language, which appears to be visually
perfect. The tension of the story accentuates along the repeated representations of the
infuriated elephant that surges forward in the streets of Rajgriva causing a great havoc
among the citizens." 59 The tempo of tense situation is systematically maintained in
this narration.

Nalagiri Subjugation:

Bhattacharya has further opined that, "but the mountain like elephant let loose
by the conspiring Devadatta to take the life of the Buddha, kneels before the latter, as
he touches the head of the animal. The eyes of a spectator move laterally along with
two representations of Nalagiri and then suddenly become arrested before the
unperturbed standing figure of Buddha. In the background the citizens of the street are shown as witnessing the miracle with awe and adoration, while in a palace window, overlooking the street, it seems that the conspirators Devdatta and Ajatashatru are engaged in a bewilderèd conversation.” The super natural power of the Buddha obviously surpassed the mighty and wild elephant depicting the victory of good over evil. The study of these painted panels vividly shows duty and ethos of the classical age. The treatment given to the paintings is superb. It not only reveals economic prosperity but also cultural richness of the period.

**Analysis of sculpture:**

Sculpture is no less than paintings at Ajanta. Whether it is sculpture or painting the artists tried to pass on a message with moral through visual narrations. Regarding the theme of the sculptures Krishnamurty has rightly observed that, “artists of ancient India mainly emphasized on two aspects viz., depiction of great events from the life history of Buddha and his former births, generally known as the Jataka stories through visual narratives in stone media, with a view to educate the public about the ethics and morals embedded in them.”

Siddhartha renounced the world and after enlightenment preached the sacred law to fellowmen. Irrespective of whether the Bodhisattva took the guise of a bird or animal, the Bodhisattva preached the sacred law through good deeds and served mankind. Later events of those good deeds became Jataka tales and occupied a great importance in Buddhist art. These were the essence of the cultural communication in those days.

**Seated Buddha:** (ref. plate 1)

In Cave n° 1, a huge seated figure of the Buddha is seen with a smile on his face. Three-dimensional effect is brought about, even in solid rock, at Ajanta. In this
aspect, Radhakrishna has observed that, "when a solid object is situated in a space, it occupies or displaces a definite amount of space. It becomes an object for us, being differentiated from other objects and by being delineated from the space surrounding it. The other aspect of space is the quantity of matter the object contains, i.e., the mass." 62 Because of the mass nature of stone, bulk is felt, which is the amount of space occupied by the object in these sculptures.

**Hariti:** (ref. plate 2)

In Buddhist art Hariti is a very popular Goddess and readily recognized with children around her. Bhagwat Sahai aptly describes the character of Hariti as follows: "sometimes she is shown seated with a child resting in her lap, childishly playing with her necklace or sometimes simultaneously sucking her breast. Then again, she is found standing but her favourite child still is clinging to her bosom, placed astride on her hip in the manner women usually carry their children." 63 She is recognized as a protector of children. Originally she was herdsman’s wife in Rajgriha who was forced to dance in a festival while she was pregnant, resulting in her miscarriage. Because of the said incident she turned violent and vowed to devour children. Previously she was known as a demoness of smallpox. Lord Buddha transformed the cruel women as a deity of fertility and childbirth. Then, she gained a special place in Buddhist art.

**Wild Bull:**

Many sculptures ornamented the rock cut shrines and monasteries of the Deccan during the Gupta period. Regarding the sculptures of Ajanta V. A. Smith has described that, "in cave n° I, supposed to be the latest of the completed excavations a great quantity of rich sculpture exists, dealing chiefly with incidents in the lives of Buddha. A scene depicting the chase of the wild bull is praised as being spiritedly
carved.” In Ajanta caves though the sculptures are less in number when compared to paintings but each of them has its own identity and speciality.

**Mara’s attempt:** (ref. plate XI, plate 3)

Marvellous paintings at Ajanta eclipsed beautiful sculptures. V. A. Smith has observed that, “the most notable sculpture on the walls (Cave n° XXVI) is the large and crowded composition representing the temptation of Buddha, which Dr. Burgess describes as ‘beautiful’ adding that several of the faces are beautifully cut....The fantastically dressed hair, characteristic of the period, worn by several of the figures in the Ajanta sculpture should be noted.”

In this scene beautifully dressed women, i.e., Mara’s daughters try to divert Gautama from his meditation towards worldly life. Gautama fought with them and attained enlightenment

**Mahaparinirvana:**

In Cave n° XXVI Buddha’s Mahaparinirvana is depicted in sculpture. R. S. Gupte has described that, “the figure of the Buddha in Mahaparinirvana is of huge dimensions. His face shows that calmness and serenity which can come only when a person has reached that stage of eternal bliss where there is no pain and no sorrow and from where there is no return to this world of unhappiness. The artists of Ajanta have succeeded in capturing this mood and in this they are true to the great art traditions of the period.” The Buddha slept in a side angle with a hand under his head as if alive. Some people were shown with pleasant mood whereas some mourning for the Lord’s death. One, who realized the sufferings of life and could understand Nirvana expressed happiness, whereas ordinary followers grieved for the departure of the teacher.
The Buddha sculpture in the Shrine:

In the shrine is a sculptured figure of the Buddha. Bodhisattva’s attendants attend him. There is something peculiar about the figure of the Buddha. According to R. C. Mujumdar, “the sculpture is executed with great skill. It shows three different expressions when seen from three different angles. When an electric light is held on the right side of the figure, a smile spreads over the Buddha’s face and when it is held on the left of the figure, the face shows deflection. If the light is thrown in the middle, the expression is that of meditation.”

Sculpture:

Sculpture is no less than paintings at Ajanta. Three-dimensional effect is brought in solid rock also at Ajanta. Dr. Radhakrishna has observed that, “carved sculpture is that in which the conceived form is approached from without, inwards, by the process of attrition or cutting away. The beginning of a statue in wood or stone is not a skeleton but a roughly rectangular three dimensional block of solid substance with the bounds of which lies the figure or form conceived by the sculptor.” Because of the mass nature of stone, bulk is felt in these sculptures.

Dr. Radhakrishna has truly pointed that, “the pivot of the Buddhist sculpture is Jataka stories, i.e., the previous births of Buddha and enlightenment of Bodhisattvas... The object of the sculptor is to give expression to a spiritual message that the forms of Bodhisattva were intended to impart.”

It is irrespective whether Bodhisattva took guise of a bird on animal, but preached the sacred law through good deeds and served mankind. Later those good deeds became Jataka tales and occupied a great importance in Buddhist art.

Many sculptures ornamented the rock cut shrines and monasteries of the Deccan during Gupta period. Regarding the sculptures of Ajanta, V. A. Smith has
described that, “in cave n° I, supposed to be latest of the completed excavation, a great quantity of rich sculpture exist, dealing chiefly with incidents in the lives of Buddha. A scene depicting the chase of the wild bull is praised as being spiritedly carved.”

In Ajanta though sculptures are less in number, when compared to paintings, but each of them have its own identity and speciality Yazadami has observed that ‘the sculpture has apparently been guided by tradition in giving them bellies and hippopotamus like limbs, for their cult was associated with abundance of food, wealth and progeny. Hariti holds a purse in her right hand and a child seated on her left knee, the purse being symbolical of wealth and the child of fecundity.”

According to Buddhist stories Hariti was a demoness, and devouring children. Buddha converted her into a deity of fertility. Marvellous paintings at Ajanta eclipsed beautiful sculptures at Ajanta. R. S. Gupte has observed that “The temptation scene of the Buddha is executed in a masterly fashion. The Buddha is seen seated in the middle, under the Budhi tree in the Bhoomi sparsha mudra. Below are seen the daughters of Mara in various seductive attitudes.... They are scantily dressed and expose their full bodily charms in order to tempt the Buddha.” In this scene beautifully dressed women i.e. Mara’s daughters try to divert Gautama from his meditation towards worldly life. Gautama fought with them and attained enlightenment.

In cave n° XXVI Buddha Mahaparinirvana is depicted in sculpture. The cushion on which Buddha’s head reclined gives the impression of being pressed by the weight of the head. R. S. Gupte has described, that “on the wall of the left aisle is the sculpture of the Buddha’s Mahaparinirvana in full relief. He is lying on his right side with his right hand under his head, his head reclines on a cushion which gives the impression of being pressed by the weight of his head. The folds can be clearly seen.
A number of mourners are seen seated below in profound grief. Near the cot of the Buddha, a stand, an oil can, and flowers may be noticed. Above the figure of the Buddha Gods and Goddesses can be seen. The Mahaparinirvana panel is highly appreciated sculptured panel of Ajanta.

5.5 Evolution, nature and features of Ajanta as per Jataka stories

Regarding the composition of Jatakas, Dr. Subramaniyam has opined that, "according to a tradition there were 550 Jataka stories originally composed in Pali, which were taken to Ceylon by Mahendra, the son of Ashoka the Great, about 250 B.C., and the commentary was retranslated into Pali by Buddhaghosa in 5th Century A.D. Through this commentary, the texts of Jatakas have come down to us. Some scholars say that Somadeva, a writer in the early centuries of Christian era composed Katha Saritasagara based on the Brihatkatha of Ganadhya in which many Jatakas were incorporated." 74

Basically the Jataka stories were composed in Pali, so that common people can know and understand them. Due to Asoka's jealous religious feeling and intention to spread Buddhism, the Pali Jataka stories were taken to Srilanka and, along with commentary brought back to Delhi.

Regarding formation of text of Jataka stories, Dr. Subramanyam further opined that, "some of the Jataka stories, were carried to the distant lands as composed in the Panchatantra. Whatever case may be, the text of the commentary was first edited by Dr. Fansboll, who categorized the text into three major component elements viz. the tale, the frame and the verbal interpretation, considering it as the oldest, most complete and important collection of folklore and ... first volume of their translation appeared in 1895 under the editorship of E. B. Cowell." 75 Scholars started to correlate these stories with illustration at Ajanta caves.
Some scholars identified Jataka stories with the illustration at Ajanta paintings and sculptures. Krishna Chaitanya has rightly observed that, "Ajanta paintings narrate the Jataka stories, which record the previous incarnation of the Buddha and episodes from his last incarnation as Siddhartha. For the classification of the themes, represented we should be grateful to scholars like H. Ludersand A. Foucher who drew attention to Aryasura's Jatakamala and Mareshwar Dikshit who identified the Maha Ummaga Jataka in cave no XVI." 76 The art of Ajanta is illustration of Jatakas. Until and unless the Jatakas are identified and well defined, the viewers cannot understand the message incorporated in it.

Soundara Rajan has observed that "In the Jataka tales, the narrative element part as the intention was to emphasize the importance of living, rather than the doctrine aspect of Buddhism." 77 These virtues are seen in the characters of Sibi, Vesentara and, Chhadanta elephant.

Unless the story is not given emphasis, it is not possible to know its moral. A few to mention, in Sibi Jataka Sakra and Agni approach Raja Sibi in the disguise of eagle and pigeon, when Raja Sibi tired to save the life of a pigeon. The eagle demands equal amount of flesh from Sibi's person. Later they appear in their own character and relieve the king from the pains of donating flesh. So the spectator should have glimpses in an order of sequence. The symbols encoded in this story can be decoded properly and cultural message can be presented well. T. N. Mishra has opined that, "the Indian art was still essentially descriptive and narrative in form and content, that was the time when artists told stories, through reliefs, of the Master in a simple manner." 78 So Buddhist art gave birth to narrative form while illustrating an event with content. This carries a significant landmark in cultural communication.
properly and cultural message can be presented well. T. N. Mishra has opined that, “the Indian art was still essentially descriptive and narrative in form and content, that was the time when artists told stories, through reliefs, of the Master in a simple manner.” 78 So Buddhist art gave birth to narrative form while illustrating an event with content. This carries a significant landmark in cultural communication.

Bodhisattvas showed different types of moral and did good deeds in various births. So the stories belonging to these Bodhisattvas were classified as per convenience. Dr. Subramanyam has opined that, “based on contents, the Jataka tales can be divided into four categories, viz., those which denounce women, those which stress on the need for modification, after renouncing the world, those which denounce the Brahmanical elite and those which teach the political conduct of the monarch as well as nobility. Whatever were propounded or expressed in these tales, they were well said, well propounded and convincing.” 79 These stories provided compendium of information on the contemporary society and these visual commentaries are still relevant to the present world.

Generosity, morality and forbearance were the main characters on whose radius almost all Jataka stores revolve. Dr. Subramanyam has observed that, “the object of writing these stories in verse is to teach the doctrine of universal salvation in a classical and pleasant style, acceptance to the general readers. The author emphasized in the work on three perfections, ‘Sana’ (generosity), ‘Sila’ (morality) and ‘Kaauti’ (forbearance) mainly applicable to monarchs and also on the Bodhisattvas’s ideal of self sacrifice or the well being of others. The book formed a source for the Mulasarvastivadi Vinaya and the painters of Ajanta.” 80 Such virtues are well defined in the Jataka stories of Ajanta art. These can be described as a significant part of cultural communication in those days.
Dr. Subramanyam gave a detailed list of ways of narration in art. “It appears that at the time of depicting the Jatakas, the artists first selected important incidents available in the text and afterwards paid attention to ordering the events in a sequential manner to some extent. For portrayal of the Jatakas, the artists followed seven types of narrative modes, viz., monoscenic, narrative static, monoscenic, conflated monoscenic, narrative synoptic narrative, sequential narrative network and continuous narrative.”

So whether it is stone or brush medium, the system is the same, i.e., narrative in seven ways. Shadanta Jataka is the best example for continuous narrative. The story was divided in three panels. Firstly Chullasubha’s present birth as queen of Benaras, her previous life as wife of the golden elephant and next her wish to take revenge for her insult met in her previous birth. Hamsa Jataka is an example for conflated monoscopic narration.

**Visventara Jataka:** (ref. plate XII)

Sibi’s son Sanjay and his daughter-in-law Madri had a son Visventara who was a Bodhisattva. He was devoted to alms giving. Once he gave away to famine stricken Brahmins, which has supernatural power to bring rains. People were unhappy with him, so the King Banished Visventara and Madri along with children. Sanjay even surrendered his children to wicked Jijuka. While appreciating this illustration, Dr. Subramanyam observed that, “the artist appears to have conceived the story in terms of thematic clusters, which he placed at an easily readable eye level.”

The events were composed in a systematic manner.

**Shadanta Jataka:**

The narration of this Jataka begins with wild life and the Bodhisattva as a golden elephant with six tusks roaming in the forest along with his two wives. When he
shakes a sal-tree, flowers and pollen were poured on the head of Maha Subhadha and dry leaves and red ants on the head of Cullusubhada, jealous Cullasubhadha took a vow to take revenge. Later she was born as the queen of Benaras. She orders the King to collect tusks when the King’s hunters bring them the queen faints. Herman Goetz has observed that, “in the third episode we see the hunters bringing the tusks of the Chhadanta elephant, and the Rani being seized with a fainting fit at the site of them. One attendant is fanning her, another is bringing water to sprinkle over her face. The expression on the faces of the ladies show grief and sorrow and the artist has succeeded in producing a dramatic effect.”

Hinayanas believe in self-salvation, whereas Mahayana introduced the Bodhisattva cult. Bodhisattvas refused nirvana until each individual gets free from evil deeds. So he took birth in the form of a bird or animal till he was born as Siddhartha, who attained Buddhahood. Philip Rawson has observed that, “the pattern of successive rebirths, until the culminating human incarnation as Gautama when he finally reached at Bodhgaya, the goal of all Indian spiritual life, final release from the ‘wheel’ of existence. The Buddha continued to live in human guise but he was in Indian terminology ‘Jivanmukta’ released while living.” Bodhisattva’s final birth was Siddhartha who turned the wheel of life after attaining enlightenment.

5.6 Ajanta Murals

The history of Indian painting starts with mural painting because of their existence. Ajanta paintings are termed as frescoes and murals. Fresco is an Italian term of painting, i.e., painting on fresh. In fresco colours are applied while the lime plaster is wet. Though the surface is wet, the colours applied on the surface do not sink into the plaster but hold to the surface through a sort of chemical action. Certain paintings in Ajanta were done when the plaster became dry. According to some
experts paintings at ceilings are murals whereas the wall paintings are frescos. The preliminary aspects of these paintings are selection of spot and preparation of materials. These are (a) the carrier, which supports the ground or plaster (b) the ground on which the paintings are extended (c) the preparation of pigments and colours and (d) the preparation of binding media by which pigments are attached to the ground. The pigments were mixed with rock detritus excavated from the hills, adding plant juice or gum as a glue. Buddhist culture and philosophy provided subject matter to creative artists.

According to historical evidence there is mention of mural paintings in Vatsayana’s Kama Sutra. J. C. Nagpal has observed that mural painting is one of the ancient art forms of India. Beginning from the pre-historic and proto-historic times the art is practiced even today in several parts of the country. The art has undergone many changes in form, style, and content but has also witnessed over the centuries an evolution in its technical execution. “The change in technique and style is seen in Ajanta earlier and later caves.

Indian murals are executed in cave temples some times in palaces. So in most of the case rough rock or stone surfaces serve as the carrier or base for the painting. Jayanta Chakrabarti has observed that, “the stone surfaces, which serve as the carrier are more common, and they are rough or uneven with chisel marks. This unevenness is itself an advantage, as it provides tooth to hold the plaster laid on the surface. This carrier is stable and relatively free from moistures, which otherwise gradually penetrates through the plaster and makes the adhesive capacity of the binding medium weak, causing flaking off of the colour film from the ground, particularly of tempera painting in which gum, glue etc., are used as binding media. “The gum or glue used
penetrates through the plaster and helps to loosen the adhesiveness of the binding medium. It causes flanking of colour film from the ground.

The subjects of Ajanta murals are innumerable and of different types. R. C. Mujumdar has observed that, “the subjects of Ajanta paintings are three fold relating to decoration portraiture and narration. The decorative designs include patterns and scrolls (pahavali) figures of animals, flowers and trees (their variety, according to Griffiths is infinite, carried into smallest details so that repetition is very rare.) …Graceful figures of fabulous creatures and mythological beings such as supurnas (with a human bust joined to the body of a bird (Garudas, Yakshas, Gandharvas, Apsaras, have been used to fill spaces.” 87 The artists of Ajanta left nothing to portray. Birds, animals, human and moreover, mythical figures are also portrayed.

Karl Khandalava has dealt at length regarding the style and its development in colour combination, features, and gestures of Ajanta characters. He has observed that, “long sweeping brush strokes were employed in combination with varying shades of one and the same colour to achieve the moulding of faces and bodies. There is no obvious modelling as such.” 88

Further Khandalava described, “There is no deliberate shading as we understand the term in an art school. Shades of colour lighten and darken almost imperceptibly, creating roundness of surfaces and undulations of the body. The highlighting of the nose, the eye lids, lips and chin is so skillfully done that one never stops to think if it is anatomically carried or not.” 89 All these characteristics of Ajanta paved for new dimensions, which can be termed as Ajanta style.

Dr. Sivaramamurty has minutely detailed the procedure of paintings at Ajanta step by step. The mode of painting of Ajanta is the tempera and the materials used are very simple. The five colours usually described in all the Silpa texts are found here,
red ochre, yellow ochre, lamp black, lapis lazuli and white. The first coating on the surface of the rock was a clay mixed with rice husk and gum."

Further, he has described, “a coat of lime was applied over this, carefully smoothened and polished. On this ground, the paintings were created. The outline drawing was in dark brown or black and subsequently colours were added.” The masters of Ajanta achieved supremacy in the art of painting.

Ajanta artists used natural colours. In this aspect, Asit Kumar Haldar has observed that, “colours produced from stone, mineral substance and earths were, however, constantly used for that purpose. In the Indian fresco paintings at Bagh and Ajanta etc.,... Yellow ochre, chalk, various kinds of red ochre, terracotta or green earth, black earth of grey and many other colour and sapphires (lapis lazuli) are found to have been used.” Red ochre is distinctly seen because dark shade of red ochre is used to picturise women in Ajanta paintings.

In Ajanta, innumerable numbers of narratives are there. Mukul Dey has observed that, “at Ajanta the artist depicted a narrative tale not only by a series of continuous paintings, but also by means of a single master piece. On the left of the ante-chamber in Cave No I, in a very dark place, is an example of this ‘the temptation of the Buddha by Mara’: A painting over twelve feet by ten feet. It can be ranked as ‘one of the world’s master pieces.’” Narration means one expects a number of scenes, but Ajanta artists could describe an incident or event in a single painting also.

Upamitibhava Praparche Katha, an ancient text describes the salient features of a good picture. C. Sivaram Murty has aptly quoted from it “here is a fine drawing delicately drawn in an unobtrusive line, coloured gay in bright colours with relief suggested by modelling, with the element of ornamentation appropriately introduced, symmetrical portrayal of body, emotion, and joy executed in a really admirable
manner. But above all, beyond the beautiful prepared ground, the sureline, the charm of the colour and the shade suggesting depth. There is something more important that makes the picture a masterpiece and arrests attention, and that is the master artist’s stroke, Chitrasyera Manohari Kartuh Kim kim api Kausalam (Vatrok Tijivita III 34). Symmetry, foreshortening strength in drawing, beauty in colour and other merits enhance the charm of a picture….” 94 This single paragraph describes all the virtues of an Ajanta artist. Such master-strokes are abundant in Ajanta.

Emotions expressed while illustrating an event or a Jataka story at Ajanta demands lots of appreciation. Sivaramamurty has observed that, “emotions portrayed in pictures are best illustrated in such master pieces as the mother and child, before Buddha or the subjugation of Valagiri from Ajanta. The form effectively presents ‘Karuna rasa’, while the later shows first ‘Bhayanaka rasa’ in the stampede of the elephant Nalagiri ‘Santa rasa’ where the furious animal lies humble at the feet of the master.” 95

The commingling of emotion is exceptional in Ajanta art. It is correctly mentioned in the comments of Fergusson that, “the style of the paintings cannot of course, bear comparison with the European paintings of the present day, but they are certainly superior to the style of Europe during the age in which they were executed. This is more than a complement. Grouping and details and the story telling is better to any painting anterior to Orcagna and Fiesole.” 96 Ajanta art resembles Chinese art in flatness and want of shadow. But Ajanta art is perfect than that of Chinese art.

All these comments on Ajanta paintings reveal that it has classical reflection of excellent nature. These paintings, not only demonstrate the way of life, but also reveal prosperity in cultural life. It would be interesting to study themes seen in paintings and how they are related with the content in sculpture.
5.7 Co-relation between Sculpture and Painting

The religious sentiment of the painters, sculptors, and patrons played a vital role in the development of art in India. E. B. Havell has rightly observed that, “the combination of sculpture and painting often practiced as a single craft, was the highest form of religious art, being more difficult and costly than simple painting and therefore conferring more merit both on the artist devotees and their patrons.” 97

The painters tried to give solidity and reality of sculpture, so they achieved plastic effect and subtle modelling of surfaces in their illustrations.

Basic theme of sculpture and paintings of Buddhist art is Jataka stories, i.e., early life of the Buddha in various successive existences. Similarities shown in Sanchi sculpture and Ajanta paintings are a clue to determine the dates of the cave art and architecture. Yazdani has opined that, “the frescoes of cave no X at Ajanta and the sculpture of the southern gate at Sanchi, both being similar in portrayal of the principal figures and both being dated in the second century B. C., form important landmarks in the history of the Buddhist art of India, showing, as they do, the remarkable skill of the Andhras in the sister arts of painting and sculpture.” 98

Whether it is sculpture or painting the artists of 2nd century were skilful

Pictorial characters termed in later period were already in a formative stage at Ajanta. This is evident from the paintings of cave no X and IX of Ajanta. Bhattacharya has truly observed that, “in the early phase of Buddhist narrative art the common practice of the painter, and the sculptor was to arrange the figures in simple lateral compositions, and both of them equally aspired to achieve a linear rhythm within the set up of this arrangement. Another notable common aim seems to be the rounded modelling of forms and in this respect the painters of caves no X and IX at
Ajanta were, no doubt, somewhat ahead of their contemporary stone carvers of Bharhut and Sanchi." 99

Linear rhythm in arranging figures and rounded modelling forms were the common factor of interest for the sculptors and painters. R. K. Mookerjee has observed the dependency of allied arts and stated that, "on the one hand, the massiveness and monumentality of the individual figures that reveal the supreme moral and spiritual glory of man in his self absorption and self transcendence cement the alliance between sculpture and architectures. On the other hand, a profound sense of the universality and transcendence of energy and of the compositeness and interdependence of life abolishes the distinction between painting and sculpture." 100

Religious zeal of people strengthened the relation between sculpture and architecture. Whether it is cave architecture or of temple images and ornamental motifs are seen. Cosmic energy and metaphysics lessened the length between painting and sculpture. Mookerjee has further observed that, "the sculpture, architecture in its structure and monumental in its execution, is yet a kind of colossal painting unfolding the cosmic event of the upheaval of the earth from the primordial deluge." 101 When sculpture gets the shape of a monument it becomes a colossal painting.

Buddhist religion gave birth to Buddhist art. Buddhism got extinguished from the land of its birth. Yazdani has observed that, "with the extinction of the Buddhist religion in the seventh century, the noble traditions of art seems to have been destroyed but although painting in pristine beauty and vigour never revived the sister art of sculpture, a few centuries later, was turned into new life." 102

The reminiscent of Buddhism are seen in paintings and sculpture. In later centuries, painting inspired sculpture, which flourished more in caves and temples.
The content of sculpture and painting are same at Ajanta. Krishna Chaitanya has observed that, “the Ajanta artist also shows interesting integrations of painting and sculpture as a unified presentation as in the painted figure of a monk shown as kneeling before a colossal figure of the standing Buddha the later form being a sculpture in cave n° IV.” 103

At Ajanta some illustrations are seen both in sculpture and painting. A few to mention are, Mara’s assault is depicted in Cave n° I, in painting, whereas the same content is seen in sculpture in Cave n° XXVI. Mother and child painting of Cave n° I can be seen on sculpture outside of cave n° XIX.

There existed a close relation between sculpture and painting since guild rules were governing all artistic productions. Karl Khandalavala has rightly opined that “He who does not know the canon of painting (Citra sutram) can never know the canon of image making.” 104

Certain broad features of guild rules are applicable for the development of style in painting and sculpture. The rules were laid down by Vedic canons. Such rules condition the postures and proportions of figures. Some postures are common in sculpture and painting.

Ajanta art is a combination of architecture, sculpture and painting. All these three arts flourished at Ajanta in coordination with each other.

Dr. B. K. Apte has rightly observed that, “architecture and wall paintings flourished simultaneously as limbs of a single creation and it was during this period (A.D. 320 to 750) that the spacious walls of the Ajanta caves came to have paintings in harmony with the architectural surroundings.” 105 Ajanta caves and particularly cave n° II is the best example of combination of these three allied arts.
It is interesting to know the interconnection between sculpture and painting. Bhattacharya has befittingly appreciated the comments of Stell Kramrisch “wherever the wall space had been left out by the sculptor, that became immediately covered up in colours by the painter and the sculptures were also painted with the same range of colours used in painting.” Cave n° XXI of Ajanta is the best example of such type of connection between sculpture and painting. They share a single visual conception.

5.8 Interpretation and interaction aspects of analysis through art and architecture of Ajanta caves

Architecture: (ref. plate 4)

In Buddhist architecture cave windows have a special significance along with serving the purpose of light and ventilation. Sister Nivedita has observed that, “at Ajanta the time unit that serves us from the first is the Chaitya façade ornament taken in conjunction with the Asokan rail. It would appear that the rounded roof, six seven and fifteen characterized the domestic architecture of the age. We find the spaces filled with lotus patterns and the semi circular opening no longer has a definite meaning. They are no longer windows –only decorative.”

Further E. B. Havell observed that, “these sun windows, as they may be called, in the oldest Indian buildings had no sculptured ornament, but in carved representations of them as symbols the ends of the purling which supported the rafters of the roof were shown and also as a rule the wooden screen or lattice which filled them. Later on, at Ajanta and else where, an elaboration of the symbolism was brought in.”

Manasara Silpa Sastra gave details of significance of pillars in rituals. E. B. Havell has befittingly interpreted that in Buddhist philosophy and architecture, “a square shaped one was associated with Brahma worship, an Octagona! one with that
of Vishnu; the circular or sixteen sided one with Rudra Siva as the destroyer. Translating this ascription into Buddhist terminology, it may be said that the square pillar stood for Buddha an octagonal one for the Sangha and a circular or sixteen sided one for Dharma.”

Basically pillars are meant to support the structure, the capital, shaft and base are all structural forms and decoration should add emphasize to structural functions and not to impair. Ajanta craftsmen followed religious symbolism, gave strength to the structure and ornamented the pillars also.

All the fine arts area allied with each other Krishan Mittal has opined that, “When mural paintings are related to architecture they cover almost complete cave walls and are used as decoration and to propagate morals and religious creeds.” The murals of Ajanta served a dual purpose. They propagated Buddhist morals and taught sacred gospel and also added to the elegance of the cave architecture with their decorative motifs.

Paintings:

Paintings were also properly used as a medium of cultural communication. Bhattacharya has opined that, “they are vibrant with life and unmistakably secular in spirit. This is perhaps for the reason that the painters, entrusted with the job of decorating the gloomy interior of the caves, came with a background, which was essentially secular and developed in the cultural milieu of the age. Thus the aesthetics they communicate appears to be the product of a common art movement in which poets, dancers, musicians and sculptors contributed alike.”

Bhattacharya further observed that, “the simultaneous growth of various art forms side by side, no doubt created an opportunity for the exchange of ideas and views and even enriching one art form with elements borrowed from the other. Thus
cadence and gestures, known elements of dance and drama, play significant roles in the figure composition of Ajanta paintings. This interdependence of the different branches of fine arts seems to have induced the author of the Vishnudharmottara to recommend the knowledge of dance and music as prerequisites for the understanding of paintings." 112

These prerequisites are based on philosophy of Buddhist religion and they have a common reflection in different media.

The wheel symbolism is rich in its content. The circular forms symbolize the ceaseless round of worldly life. Regarding gestures and symbolism McArthur has observed that, "the gesture symbolizes one of the key moments in the life of the Historical Buddha the first sermon that he delivered after achieving enlightenment, in the Deer Park in Sarnath. At this sermon, he explained his philosophy, later known as the law or Dharma, to a group of listeners. This sermon is believed to have set the figural wheel of his teachings in motion and therefore marked the true beginning of Buddhism as faith." 113 The wheel and the gesture of turning of the wheel of law is closely associated with the life and teachings of the Historical Buddha. Hence images of Shakyamuni are often illustrated in this gesture. This gesture carries meaningful communication through symbols.

**Gesture of the turning of the wheel:**

While preaching the law, gestures have specific meaning and importance. McArthur has observed that, "Dharma Chakra Pravartana Mudra, the mudra of the turning of the wheel of the law, represents the first explanation of the Dharma by the Historical Buddha. The gesture is made by holding both hands in Vitarka Mudra, namely with the thumb and fore fingers touching or almost touching. Both hands are held close to the chest, with the right palm facing forward and the left either facing
upward or turned towards the chest and the separated fingers of the two hands nearly touching."\textsuperscript{114}

Gestures play a key role to communicate the message particularly in visual arts. So in Ajanta paintings also different gestures conveyed different meanings of Buddhist philosophy. Queen Maya’s dream and conception can also be an example of such type of gestures. Mayadevi was the wife of Suvadhana, a Sakya King. Once she dreamt that a white elephant was entering into her person.\textsuperscript{115} McArthur has observed that, “according to legend the Buddha’s mother queen Maya had a dream that she was impregnated by a white elephant, a scene in the life of the Buddha which has been portrayed quite frequently, soon afterwards, she became pregnant and gave birth to the Buddha. The white elephant was a sign that she was to give birth to an extraordinary child and future Buddhas. In Buddhist iconography the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra also rides a white elephant.”

When Queen Maya describes her dream, the court astrologer Asita explains, “He predicts that the queen is going to give birth to an extraordinary child with thirty-two marks on his body. Further he stated that the child if at all stays at home would become a monarch. Otherwise clad in orange robs, after tonsuring his head, he would be a renounced spiritual teacher. The picturisation was fantastic on the top of the wheel, a white elephant entering to the right side of queen, explaining and interpreting the queen’s dream, Mayadevi leaning to a pillar and listening Asmaka were illustrated in a sequential manner” \textsuperscript{116} (ref. plate XIII). This panel is one of the highly appreciated paintings in Ajanta.

Mara’s assault can also be explained as an ideal example of communication. While the Bodhisattva was nearing enlightenment, Mara tries to dislodge Siddhartha from his seat. It is observed that, “now Mara the evil spirit, fearful beast the
Bodhisattva should accomplish his ends and open up the path of salvation for others approached him trying to persuade him to abandon his queen tempting him with both the dusts of power and pleasure, even commanding his own daughters to dispart themselves before him. But the Bodhisattva rose superior to his wills.” 117

This event was painted in cave no. I and XIX and also chiselled out in cave no. XXVI. Gautama due to the virtue of his good deeds as Bodhisattva called upon the Earth-Goddess to safe guard his rights. Goddess Earth responded and Mara was defeated. On the succeeding night, Gautama attained enlightenment.

Simhala Advadana Jataka can also be interpreted in communication perspective. Simhala a rich merchant lived in Simhakalpa. He went on a sea voyage along with his friends. On the way, their ship wrecked and they landed on a dangerous island. Benoy Behl has observed that, “Simhala and his fellow merchants were ship wrecked and cast upon the shores of Tamradvipa. The inhabitant Cannibalistic Ogresses on the island, who came to the merchants, disguised as beautiful women. At first they lured the merchants with their charms, but at night turned into Ogresses to devour them.” 118

Bodhisattva in the guise of a white horse rescued them to a safer place and accompanied them to their hometown. In the panel, different types of ships are seen. Aquatic communications are depicted. It is evident that India has mercantile relations with Asian countries. Such contacts enhanced cultural transmission and spread Buddhism in Asia.

In Ajanta art emotion and decoration were properly balanced. While appreciating this aspect of Ajanta art Sufflok has observed that, “the intellectual element dominated in art and kept under control emotional display and over decoration in detail. A perfect balance was maintained between the realization of the
form as a plastic mass and the extreme delicacy and precision in the carving of ornamental accessories.” This shows the richness of cultural life in those days.

5.9 Summary

Ajanta caves reveal excellence in the art of historical period of classical age. The material culture that is depicted in the paintings is extremely helpful in building up a picture of life in ancient India in general and Deccan in particular. Throughout the historical period ‘art’ was practiced by everyone and developed through different Indian media.

Art in Ajanta is suggestive and symbolic and imaginary. Permanent expression is given to symbols through sculptures, paintings and decorative motifs. Buddhism left its mark on the art and culture, which left its impact on the art of India. Through the medium of Buddhism, Indian culture spread to overseas countries also. Indian culture was diffused in the parts of Asian countries and reacted differently because of social and political events. Buddhism contributed a lot to common people. It established a simple religion leaving behind the ritualistic Vedic culture. Art and cultures are correlated. So the higher fine art of a particular country means its cultural level is also high. A careful study of material culture shows that jewellery is influenced other arts also. The height of cultural level can be witnessed through art viz., architecture, sculpture and painting in Ajanta reflected that they reached high water mark in the classical period of Gupta Vakataka age. Ajanta art will remain as a symbol of cultural glory of India for future generations.

References: (5)

1. Subbarao B. “The Personality of India” Sayajirao University Baroda, 1958, p-145
5. Iyer Bharata “Indian Art – A Short Introduction” Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1958, p-3
6. Ibid., p-3
8. Parimoo Ratan, op cit, article by D. N. Verma, p-64
9. His Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad: “Guide to Ajanta Frescoes” Archaeological Department of Deccan, 1926, p-6
10. Dhavlikar M. K. op cit, p-27
11. Ibid., p-35
14. Dhavlikar M. K., op cit, p-46
16. Dhavlikar M.K., op cit, p-80
17. Ibid., pp-90-91
19. Dhavlikar M. K., op cit., p-104
20. Ibid., p-115
21. Griffiths, op cit., p-17
24. Meshram P. S., op cit., p-143
25. Dhavlikar M. K., op cit p-139
27. Swamy A. K. C. “Introduction to Indian Art” Munshiram Manoharlal New Delhi, 1913, p-28
29. Ibid., p-VII
31. Mathur N. L. “Sculpture in India” Caxton Press, New Delhi, 1972, p-7
35. Mathur N. L., op cit., p-6
38. Mathur N.L., op cit., p-7
39. Arthur Mc, op cit., p-123
40. Ibid., p-125
41. Ibid., p-95
42. Ibid., p-119.
43. Subramanyam B “Jataka Stories in South Indian Sculpture”, Bhartiya Kala
   Prakashan, Delhi, 2005, refer forward by Dr. V. V. Krishna Murty
44. Mujumdar R.C. (Ed.) “Comprehensive History of India” Peoples Publishing
   p-140
47. Ibid., p-140
49. Manohar Kaul, “Trends in Indian Painting”, p-15
50. Ibid., p-15
51. Ibid., p-16
52. Yazadani G. “Ajanta Text IV”, pp-50-51
53. Manohar Kaul, op. cit., p-21
54. Ibid., p-21
55. Ibid., p-9
56. Mujumdar R.C. “A Comprehensive History of India” Peoples Publishing
57. Brown Percy “Indian Painting” YMCA Publishing House, Calcutta, 1960,
   p-76
58. Ibid., PP-76-77
59. Mujumdar, R.C., op.cit., PP-1262-63
60. Ibid., p-1262
61. Sabarimala Thirupadisthaanam, op.cit., forward by V. V. Krishnamurty
62. Padmanabhaiah, "Iconography and Sculpture of Chalukya and
Kakatiya Peoples in Telangana", Ph.D. thesis, Osmania University, Hyd.,
1989, p-524
63. Sahai Brahmavat "Iconography of Minor Deities" Abhinav Publications, New
Delhi, 1975, p-213
64. Smith V. A., "The History of Fine Arts in India and Ceylon", D. B. Tarapvrala
and Sons, Mumbai, p-79
65. Ibid., p-79
Caves" D.B. Tarapvrala, Mumbai
67. Tugendhat, I., op cit., p-91
68. Dr. Radhakrishna M., op cit., p-524, Temples of Telingana, Dept. of
Publication & Press, Osmania University, Hyderaad, 1972, p-213.
69. Dr. Radhakrishna M., p-524, as referred in ref. n° 62.
70. Smith V. A., op cit., p-79
72. R. S. Gopie & B. D. Mehajan, op cit, p-105.
73. Gopie, B., op. cit., p-105
74. Sabarimala Thirupadisthaanam ""Kadaka Stories in South Indian Sculpture"" Bhartiya Kala
Prakashan, Delhi, 2008, color Preface
75. Ibid., Preface
76. Chaitnya Krishna "A history of Indian Painting the mural tradition" Abhinav
Publications, New Delhi, 1976, p-30,
77. Soundara Rajan “Art of South India-Deccan” Sandeep Prakashan, New Delhi, 1980.
79. Subramanyam B, op cit., p-20
80. Ibid., p-19
81. Ibid., p-22
82. Ibid., p-199
84. Rawson Phillip “Indian Paintings”, Paris, 1961, p-24
85. Nagpal J. C. “Mural Paintings in India” Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1988, p-1
88. Khandalava Karl “The Development of Style in Ajanta Painting” McMillan Delhi, 1974, p-32
89. Ibid., p-32
90. Sivaramamurty C., “Indian Paintings” National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1970 p-34
91. Ibid., p-34
92. Haldar Asit Kumar “Art and Tradition” Educational Publishers, Agra, 1938, p-117
94. Sivarammurty C., “Indian Painting”, National Book Trust of India, New Delhi, 1970, p-20
95. Ibid., p-3
96. Fergusson “History of Ajanta” ASI, Hyderabad, article by Griffiths, 1924., p-4
99. Mujumdar R. C., op cit., article by A.K. Bhattacharaya, p-1260
101. Ibid., p-68
103. Krishna Chaitanya “A History of Indian Painting” Abhinav Publications, Delhi, 1964, p-29
104. Khandalavala Karl “The Development Style in Indian Painting”. McMillan, New Delhi, 1974, p-6
105. Apte B. K. “Maratha wall paintings” Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture, Bombay, 1988, p-vi
106. Mujumdar R. C., op cit., article by A. K. Bhattacharya, p-1274
107. Sister Nivedita “Foot falls of Indian History” Longman, Bombay, 1915, p-65-66

162
108. Havell E. B. "The Ancient and Medieval Architecture of India" S.Chand, Delhi, 1915, p-56
109. Ibid., p-58
112. Ibid., p-1272
113. Mc Arthur, op cit, p-113
114. Ibid., p-113
115. Ibid., p-135
116. His Highness the Nizam Government, op cit, p-35
117. Ibid p-38.