Chapter Six

The themes of Buddhist mural paintings and the canonical texts

Identification of the themes of paintings:

At the beginning of last century, the trend as exemplified by Foucher was that in order to better appreciate works of art, it is necessary to understand them and that the first thing one has to do, after having duly admired their beauty, is to identify the subjects they represent.\(^1\) This notion clearly indicates that themes were considered one of the major aspects of any artistic creation. Without doubt, this aspect is particularly applicable to the Buddhist wall painting traditions of the ancient period of India and Sri Lanka as well. Nevertheless, in the context of this thesis it is evident that as in other areas, the themes of Buddhist mural paintings of the two countries have also been separately discussed, but none has focused attention on a comparative study of these themes to comprehend the similarities and differences between the two traditions though they have satisfactorily documented these themes. Hence the main objective of this chapter is to enquire into these matters in detail.

It has to be noted at this point that one of the drawbacks to the identification of themes is that unfortunately many of the Buddhist wall paintings of the two countries, which belong to the period concerned have peeled off or deteriorated, due to various

reasons. For instance, the shrine of cave no 4 at Ajanta originally bore paintings, traces of which still linger in patches. Cave no 6 was also originally painted with many Buddha figures, of which hardly anything can now be made out. It is evident that on the left wall of the antechamber of the cave was painted the 'Miracle of Sravasti' and on the right wall the 'Assault' and 'Temptation of Mara' etc. Unfortunately, many of these paintings have peeled off. Similarly, cave no 7 was once painted all over, but nothing substantial has survived. Cave nos. 12 and 15 were also originally painted as evident from the patches of plaster sticking to the ceiling of the hall and traces of painting on the ceiling of the antechamber and shrine. In addition, most of the paintings of cave nos. 20 and 21 have also now disappeared although in cave no 21 a fragment of a panel representing Buddha preaching before the congregation can be seen on the left wall between the porch and the pilaster. In cave no 26 also much of the painting, which had little scope for originality due to lack of plain uncovered surface, has perished.

According to the descriptions given in the fourth chapter it is obvious that a majority of the paintings at the sites of the two countries consisted of narrative cycles containing numerous individual scenes though only small portions of the original paintings are extant. Taken collectively, these cycles are not so difficult to identify if the whole story is well preserved. Nevertheless when large sections of these stories have been destroyed or perished, as already noted above, the identification of the themes is

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often extremely difficult. Due to this fact some early scholars had wrongly concluded that Ajanta was rich in murals representing the incidents of the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and that the site depicted amongst others, the arrival of Mahinda, the elk hunting of Devanampiyatissa and incidents of the monarch's reign in Sri Lanka while another painting depicted the bringing of the tooth relic into the island. In addition, problems of another kind are presented by the paintings, in particular those at Ajanta, Dimbulagala and Tivamka shrine where narrative cycles are available. Here a complex series of events in the narrative are reduced to only a few scenes in the picture. Consequently, in interpreting them, the main difficulty is in determining the remaining individual scenes based on parallels in literature and iconography. Under these conditions the identification of the murals in the caves of Ajanta as well as in other sites needs to be evaluated within the context of historiographic developments at least briefly.

In the 1870s, Burgess provided a systematic description of all the paintings surviving at Ajanta at the time and it is evident that their state of preservation did not differ significantly from that of today. He succeeded at that time in identifying two scenes as legends of the Buddha's former births. In the year 1895, Oldenburg also identified eight or nine Jatakas in the paintings, based solely on descriptions of Burgess mentioned above. Afterwards, in the year 1902, Lüders with the help of painted inscriptions identified two scenes, including one already proposed by Oldenburg, with Jataka stories

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5 HCP Bell, "Interim report on the operations of the archaeological survey at Sigiriya in 1895," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch), Vol.XIV, No.46, 1895, p.57.
6 HCP Bell, "Interim report on the operations of the archaeological survey at Sigiriya, 1897," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch), Vol.XIV, No.48, 1897, p.123.
7 J Burgess, Notes on the Buddha rock temples of Ajanta, Bombay, 1879, pp.9-78.
as given in the \textit{Jatakmala} of Aryasura. Later, in the years of 1919 and 1920, though Foucher definitively identified around 20 paintings, it is evident that about a dozen Jataka stories had already been studied by former scholars such as Bhau Daji, Burgess, Oldenburg and Lüders etc. However, Foucher’s interpretations succeeded in identifying a much larger number, so that he could justifiably claim that the bulk of the work of interpreting the wall paintings was two-thirds finished.

Subsequently, there have been some other stray endeavours for fresh identifications of the murals. Of these, the latest and most significant is the work of Schlingloff in which the main aim is to identify and interpret the paintings of Ajanta. But, according to some other identifications, it is clear that the paintings of Ajanta continue to be debatable. For instance, it had earlier been established that at Ajanta, except one or

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Ajanta, except one or perhaps two, the scenes depicted contemporary historical episodes, the subjects throughout being exclusively Buddhist. Under this impression, up to very recent times, the court scene on the front wall to the right of the main doorway of cave no 1 at Ajanta had been a subject of controversy. At the centre of this picture is seen a royal personage seated at ease on a high backed throne and surrounded by his courtiers and attendants. To the right are several ‘foreigners’ some outside the gate of the hall, some entering it and the rest within it. They wear peaked caps and some of them have beards. The three nearer the throne are respectfully approaching the king with rich presents; the one leading the party offers a pearl necklace, the second most probably holds a purse and the third carries a tray of jewellery.

This scene had been interpreted as the Chalukya king Pulakesin II (610-642 AD) receiving an embassy from the Sassanian king Khusrau II (596-628) of Persia by Fergusson. In fact, before him, although Burgess had only cautiously suggested this idea of interpreting the scene as an interesting memento of some embassy from Persia, Fergusson and others took it up, located the alleged embassy historically and used it to even date the painting. For instance, among such contradictory interpretations, Yazdani

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17 J Burgess, Notes on the Buddha rock temples of Ajanta, Bombay, 1879, p.23.
discusses in detail that these are Iranian themes. Based on the information given by the historian Tabari, he argued that the fame of the king Pulakesin II of the Deccan spread beyond the limits of India and reached the areas of Khusrau II (Khusrau Parviz), king of Persia who in the thirty-sixth year of his reign 625-626 AD, received an embassy from Pulakesin II. He further concludes that the courtesy was subsequently reciprocated by a return embassy sent from Persia, which was received with due honour at the Indian court. Thus, according to Yazdani, the exact year of this return embassy is not given, but it must have taken place two or three years after the Indian embassy visited the Persian court, so that the event may be assigned roughly to 630AD and the painting of the scene on the walls and ceiling of cave no 1 date to a still later date. 19

This type of interpretation is further said to be supported by the visitors standing before the king in the reception hall wearing garments that would appear to have resembled contemporary Persian clothing. It is noteworthy that apart from this unique episode, several other features are also seen as suggesting an association with Persia and the arts of that country 20 or even artistic inter-change. 21 These include so-called representations of servants of Iranian origin with Persian dress; the famous ‘wine drinking scene,’ in which all the participants wear Persian coats, Persian caps, high boots or socks

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20 Ibid, p.35.

and tight Persian trousers.\textsuperscript{22} The paintings thus executed on the canopy of the same cave have also identified a representation of a Persian king, though there is nothing regal in his appearance or actions nor is he accompanied by any of those regalia, which are generally employed to distinguish royalty in the East.\textsuperscript{23} In addition, it is necessary to point out that though all these four paintings executed on the canopy are intended to represent the same persons, they can hardly be recognised by their likeness. It is equally impossible to identify the portrait of the king in these pictures from any of the sculptured representations of him.\textsuperscript{24}

On the other hand, if it be correct, it would show that Khushru’s Indian correspondent was Pulakesin, but it would not suffice to connect the court scene in the Ajanta picture with that king alone.\textsuperscript{25} This view becomes practically untenable when we compare the styles of architecture, sculpture and painting also of this cave with those of others, which bear inscriptions. Besides all these facts as there is no record of a Persian king having sent any embassy to the court of Pulakesin, the identification of the royal portrait with the latter is ruled out. Thus, the identification was shown to be wrong long ago, but it is so catching that it has been repeated even in some recent works.\textsuperscript{26}

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\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, pp.163-164.
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In contrast, in view of the fact that all the wall paintings of Ajanta are for the edification of the Buddhists, it is but natural to seek in these paintings, too, the representation of some subject connected with Buddhism. Under this impression, unlike other scholars, Debala Mitra wrongly suggested that this panel is faintly reminiscent of the celebrated Buddhist emperor Aśoka's reception of foreign embassies, which has not received scholarly attention since she has not given any reason for the identification.  

Accordingly, it is obvious that it is difficult to say to what incident the painting actually refers to. But it is noteworthy that recently Schlingloff has rationally identified this scene of the so-called ‘Persian embassy’ as a depiction of a Buddhist story. As he has pointed out, in Buddhist literature, there is an ancient legend in which the presentation of gifts to a king plays a dominant role. It is the tale of king Mahasūdharṣana in the city of Kusavati, later known as Kusinagara. Shortly before his death, the Buddha tells his disciple Ananda this story in order to change his low opinion of the city in which the Buddha wants to enter Nirvana. Certainly, this legend is well known in all the Buddhist schools and is frequently handed down in a canonical context as a single story. It recounts how the grateful residents presented the ideal king of the prosperous flourishing city of Kusavati with a number of gifts. Though reluctant to accept them at first, he finally decides to use the presents to construct a religious hall. According to Schlingloff, if we

assume that the so-called ‘Persian embassy’ painting illustrates this event, we can easily explain why the king’s visitors are wearing ‘Persian clothes.’ The artist wanted to convey not only the splendour and wealth of the citizens of Kusavati, but their foreign appearance as well. 31

Unlike Ajanta, it is evident that the Buddhist mural paintings of Bagh caves were in an unidentifiable condition even during the 19th century AD, due to their sad state of preservation. Hence no scholar has attempted to identify these paintings unlike those at Ajanta. However, in one of the remaining scenes at cave no 4, popularly known as the Rangamahal cave, the first episode beginning from the left shows a princess and her companion, one weeping and the other consoling her. Some scholars have concluded that in all likelihood this must be the scene of the foster mother Gotami trying to console Yasodara when all efforts to bring back Siddhartha failed. 32 Meanwhile in the next scene, two divine and two princely figures are shown seated in conversation; Sakra among them clearly indicated by his peculiar crown. The third scene shows some monks and probably some lay female devotees: the former performing the miracle of flying in the air, the latter appear to be musicians playing musical instruments as may be seen from a portion of the lute, that is preserved. It is evident that the fourth scene presents a mirthful dance. 33

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32 Krishna Chaitanya, A history of Indian painting: The mural tradition, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1976, p.43; See also Debala Mitra, Buddhist monuments, Sahitya Samsad, Calcutta, 1971, pp.100-102.

The scene beyond this shows a procession of people on horseback and elephants. It consists of seventeen equestrians moving towards the left in five or six rows. In the centre, is a cavalier over whose head appears the royal umbrella. All the figures are gaily attired and the horses are also richly caparisoned, some of them with blue and white saddles and wearing blue decorative plumes. It is apparent that conventionally drawn rocks separate the cavalcade from the elephant procession. In the front rides a royal personage, mounted on an elephant with an ochre coloured housing. Men and women mounted on elephants follow behind.\textsuperscript{34}

Although some have identified this event as king Asoka riding an elephant\textsuperscript{35} what episode these mute scenes are intended to convey is a mystery, not yet unravelled.\textsuperscript{36} However, of these scenes it is evident that particularly the women dancers are drawn with the same skill and feeling that is shown at Ajanta.\textsuperscript{37} Consequently some scholars have believed that the paintings of Bagh appear to have been copied from the paintings at Ajanta, since not only their similarity in technique and in poses and dresses, but the dance – scene of the Mahajanaka Jataka painted on the left wall of cave no 1 at Ajanta is reproduced with almost identical figures on the wall at Bagh.\textsuperscript{38}

Besides, near the upper corner of the window of cave no 4 at Bagh, it is possible to trace two other figures perhaps representing ascetics or monks. The one to the proper right

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\item \textsuperscript{34} Krishna Chaitanya, A history of Indian painting: The mural tradition, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1976, p.43.
\item \textsuperscript{35} See Benjamin Rowland and Ananda Coomaraswamy, The wall paintings of India Central Asia and Ceylon: A comparative study, 1937, Alfa Publications, Delhi, (reprinted) 1985, p.79.
\item \textsuperscript{36} G. Yazdani Ajanta: Monochrome reproductions of the Ajanta frescoes based on photography, Swati Publications, Delhi, Vol.III, 1945, p.4.
\item \textsuperscript{37} MS Randhawa and JK Galbraith, Indian painting: The scenes, themes and legends, Oxford and IBH Publishing co, Calcutta, 1968, p.5.
\item \textsuperscript{38} G. Yazdani Ajanta: Monochrome reproductions of the Ajanta frescoes based on photography, Swati Publications, Delhi, Vol.III, 1945, p.4.
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is fairly distinct; his head in particular is well preserved. He is dressed in a white upper garment with long sleeves; his undergarment, too, is white-coloured but relieved by little blue adornments. He is seated cross-legged, his right hand raised in front of his chest and the left resting in his lap. This is perhaps the personage whom Impey describes as a figure of Buddha seated under a plantain tree. If so, the proposed identification cannot be correct, as the figure in question does not show the characteristic marks of the Buddha.

In addition to these remains of cave no 4, it is to be noted that in cave no 3 also at Bagh, some beautiful painting remnants are preserved. Among these, there are two paintings of graceful women on both sides of the doorway of the pujagriha though the subject matter of these is uncertain. Thus, it is obvious that in consequence of the very fragmentary state of the paintings in the caves of Bagh no scholar has succeeded in properly identifying the particular story to which they refer. Although some scholars believe that these paintings depict the life story of the Buddha, since the subject matter of the paintings cannot be identified as parts of any definite Jataka story, others have argued that they do not appear to illustrate any subject taken from the life story of the Buddha but in all probability relate to some Jataka or Avadana. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that some recent works have reasonably concluded that the subject matter of the paintings is

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39 For the description of remaining scenes of cave no 4 at Bagh, please refer to Sudhakar Nath Mishra, Gupta art and architecture, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1992, pp.191-203.
41 J Ph Vogel, “Paintings,” The Bagh caves in the Gwalior state, India Society London and Department of Archaeology, Gwalior, Delhi Printers, Delhi, 1927, p.59.
42 Sudhakar Nath Mishra, Gupta art and architecture, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1992, p.192.
44 J Ph Vogel, “Paintings,” The Bagh caves in the Gwalior state, India Society London and Department of Archaeology, Gwalior, Delhi Printers, Delhi, 1927, p.46.
clearly a *Jataka* or *Avadana* yet to be identified while some others have gone to the extant to state that the subject matter of the paintings of Bagh does not appear to be Buddhist as it seems to be related to contemporary life.

Thus, according to this short description, it is clear that some identifications of the paintings of Ajanta as well as Bagh still continue to be debatable. But, unlike in India no long series of paintings, which represent continuous narration, are available in Sri Lanka except those extant at the Tivamka shrine of Polonnaruva, although a number of sites are known in the island. Of these various sites, the themes of the murals at Sigiriya and the Tivamka image house have been identified by scholars like Bell from the beginning of the last century. This effort has subsequently been continued by later scholars like Godakumbura who has tried to identify the themes painted at Tivamka shrine differently from Bell’s interpretations in the middle part of the last century while Paranavitana discusses the themes of the other sites in his numerous publications although briefly. But, in contrast, unlike the interpretations of Indian paintings, there is no controversy among various scholars of the subsequent periods. Hence, except the identification of the

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subject matter of Sigiriya, no attempt has been made in this analysis to discuss the history of identification of the themes of the paintings of Sri Lanka in detail and the relevant information has been presented where it is applicable. In this context, it is to be noted that since a number of themes have been utilized by the painters of both countries, for the convenience of this comparative study the themes depicted in these murals have been divided into the following subdivisions: Jataka or the former birth stories of the Buddha; the Buddha caritaya or the life story of the Buddha; the concepts of thousand Buddhas or the Buddha sahasa, Bodhisattvas and divine beings; and other themes covering the sphere of Buddhist teachings like the wheel of life or Bhavacakra and the decorative motifs etc.

The Jataka stories:

Of the themes that have been used for the Buddhist mural paintings of the two countries, it is evident that the representations of the Jataka stories are prominent. These have been predominantly used and painted on the spacious, whitish walls of the front portions of the temples, close to the main entrance, where enough sunlight is available to observe the paintings easily. It is to be noted at this point that these Jatakas, the births of the Bodhisattva are said to be five hundred and fifty although the Pali Jataka collection contains only five hundred and forty seven Jatakas. In these former lives, the Buddha was an ascetic eighty-three times; a monarch fifty-eight; the Deva of a tree forty-three; a religious teacher twenty-six; a courtier twenty-four; a Purohita Brahman twenty-four; a

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49 It has been given a detailed account of the Jataka stories and their chronology in the letter part of the chapter.
prince twenty-four; a nobleman twenty-three; a learned man twenty-two; the Deva Sakra twenty; an ape eighteen; a merchant thirteen; a man of wealth twelve; a deer ten; a lion ten; a swan eight; a snipe six; an elephant six; a fowl five; a slave five; a golden eagle five; a horse four; a bull four, Mahabrahma four; a peacock four; a serpent four; a potter three; an outcast three; a guano three; twice each a fish, an elephant driver, a jackal, a crow, a woodpecker, a thief and a pig and once each a dog, a curer of snake bites, a gambler, a mason, a smith, a devil-dancer, a scholar, a silver smith, a carpenter, a water fowl; a frog, a hare, a cock, a kite, a jungle fowl and a kindura. Nevertheless, it is observable that this list is also imperfect. 51

However, it is implied that each Jataka story exemplifies the efforts that the Bodhisattva made to develop one of the ten virtues or dasa paramitas. These paramitas are considered virtues like Dana (liberality), Sila (moral precepts), Kshanti (forbearance), Virya (energy), Prajna (knowledge), Satya (truthfulness) etc. 52 As in the case of the aspiration of the Jatakas, it is noticeable that the ancient artists like painters and carvers also selected the necessary themes carefully to display such virtues. For example, the Chaddanta Jataka to demonstrate the Bodhisattva’s boundless generosity, the Vessantara Jataka to show his charity, the Vidhurapandita Jataka to display his wisdom etc. Thus, it will be seen that the narrative elements, either painting or relief also play a dominant part as the intention was to emphasise the importance of virtuous living rather than the doctrinal aspect of Buddhism. 53

At the same time, according to the main contour or framework of these stories, it is apparent that the Jatakas were meant for illustrating the effect of Karma on the repeated births of man, ultimately leading to heaven or hell according to whether it was good or bad. As a result, the Jataka stories of these previous existences of Buddha through which the perfect Bodhisattva had passed provided the subject for an immense quantity of Buddhist art. Certainly, each of them offers a moral example of Buddhist behaviour and illustrates the kind of complete self-abnegation for the good of others, which leads ultimately to Buddhahood. Thus it is evident that there is a strong reason for presenting these Jatakas in the special form of reliefs or illustration on the walls of the temples during the period concerned. It is indeed noticeable that no subject could achieve this purpose better than stories from these previous lives of the great master, where the would-be Buddha, in his career as the Bodhisattvas, outshone others by his supreme intelligence, the nobility of his character, his spirit and selfless service and sacrifice and his boundless

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56 In fact, the Jataka legends that seem to have been most popular among the early Indian carvers are the following; the Jatakas of Nigrodhagina, Chaddanta, Ahiguntika, Kakkata, Cullabodhi, Culladhammapala, Duta, Ghoshaka, Kavikumaravadana, Losaka, Mahapaduma, Mandata, Mora, Somnassa, Vessantara, Mahamayagga, Mugapakka, Ladukika, Alambusa, Andhabuta, Sasa, Sibi, Kurungamigga, Sandhibuda, Candakinnara, Asadisa, Dasarata, Mahakapi, Cunnasataka, Migapotaka, Mahajanaka, Aramadusaka, Kapota, Vidiurapandita etc. See Nandadeva Wijesekara, "An introduction to the 550 Jataka stories," Selected writings, Tisara Press, Dehivala, Vol.I, 1983, pp.128-137; Amita Ray, Life and art of early Andhradesa, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1983, p.130. Of these, more than twenty-five odd Jatakas that are represented on the reliefs of Bharhat, two alone, namely the Vessantara and Vidiurapandita Jatakas, find representations on the early Andhra reliefs. In Sanchi, the number of Jatakas represented in reliefs is more than a dozen of which at least five are represented on the relief of Amaravati. In Gandhara however, the most popular Jataka, seems to have been Dipankara, which at least three times have been repeated in the Andhra reliefs. The Jataka stories represented at Nagarjunakonda include the Jatakas of Ghata, Sibi, Mandata, Mahapaduma, Sasa, Dasarathe, Champeyya, Vessantara, Dighiti Kosala and Hamsa seem to have been most popular, since they have been repeated more than once. Ibid, pp.142 and 164.
compassion, no matter whether he was born as a human or a celestial being, a small animal or a mighty elephant.

In contrast, of the various sites in the ancient Buddhist world where these Jataka murals were painted, the caves of Ajanta unquestionably receive the most important place. From the extant paintings alone it is evident that numerous Jataka tales are represented on the walls of the site. Interestingly enough, some of them are repeated a number of times in the various caves as discussed below and many of them treat human form rather than the animal incarnation of the Buddha. In this context, it is to be noted that among the earliest caves of Ajanta, in cave no 10, which probably belongs to the second century BC as discussed in the third chapter in detail, though the murals are very badly deteriorated two Jataka stories have been successfully identified. Of these two initial stories, on the left, behind pillars 11 to 15 of the cave, is depicted the Sarna Jataka and to the right of this is

58 Both these are again found represented in cave no 17 also, which belongs to the later period, probably somewhere in the fifth century AD.  
painted the Chaddanta Jataka in a long horizontal frieze occupying the rest of the wall behind pillars 2 to 12. Of the two stories, though the Sarna Jataka is badly damaged, it is evident that the arrangement of the Chaddanta Jataka has a certain significance from the point of view of the artist, who for an impressive demonstration of his skill has kept the scenes relating to animal life and to the beauty of natural scenery almost separate from those depicting human feelings, wherein the gloom of sorrow and suffering is illumined by the light of faith and devotion. It is interesting that among the scenes of animal life in a forest the artist has painted with great effect a fight between an alligator and an elephant, the elephant having thrown his rival on its back and placed one of his forelegs on its belly and being in the act of exerting further pressure with his trunk in order to crush the alligator. Close by a huge python has caught one of the legs of an elephant who seems to be in great agony and has raised his trunk as if to shriek and call to his companions of the

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herd for help. Another delightful scene is the bath of a herd of elephants in a lotus lake, where they are shown raising and curving their trunks in a variety of characteristic styles as they revel in the comforting luxury of the water.\(^61\)

Besides these two stories, in the second stage, around fifth century AD, the Jataka stories of Sibi,\(^62\) Samkhapala,\(^63\) Mahajanaka,\(^64\) Mahaummagga\(^65\) and Champeyya\(^66\) have


\(^{63}\) George Michell, The Penguin guide to the monuments of India Buddhist Jain Hindu, Penguin Group, England, Vol.I, 1989, pp.337-341. The story of Samkhapala which has been depicted in cave no 1 runs thus; Bodhisattva, born as the prince of Magadha, desired to be born in the naga world at the sight of the splendour of the naga king Sankhapala, who used to visit his ascetic father in the hermitage. Born in his next birth as the naga king Samkhapala, he soon grew sick of his state of glory and by way of atonement for his former desire, lay on an anthill offering his body to any body who might want it. One day, a party of sixteen men wounded him and dragged him along by means of a rope running through his nostrils, but Sankhapala offered no resistance. Alara a kind hearted householder, who was passing that way with five hundred wagons, took pity upon the serpent and delivered him from persecution by paying coins and oxen to the maltreats. Sankhapala took his benefactor to his aquatic palace and entertained him with great pleasures for a year, after which Alara became an ascetic. EB Cowell, The Jataka or stories of the Buddha’s former births, tr. Robert Chalmers, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, (reprinted) 1990, Vol.V, Jataka No. 524, pp.84-91.


\(^{65}\) This is a much-obiterated panel, in which found the Mahaummagga Jataka, where Amaradevi, wife of the sagacious Mahosada, outwitted four wicked men pretending to be wise. Debala Mitra, Ajanta, Archaeological Survey of India, Eleventh edition, New Delhi, 1996, p.24; G. Yazdani, Ajanta: Monochrome reproductions of the Ajanta frescoes based on photography, Oxford University Press, London, Vol.I; See also MG Dikshit, “An unidentified Jataka scene from Ajanta,” The Journal of the Bihar and
been painted in cave no 1 and in cave no 2, the Jataka stories of Hamsa, Vidhurapandita, Ruru and Kshantivadi were painted while there are few verses


The Champeyya Jataka is delineated on the back wall to the right of the richly bejewelled Bodhisattva of Délïi, the Champeyya Jataka occupies a large portion of the right wall of the hall of cave no 2. In order to gain the presence of the royal couple who were satisfied with the discourse and set them free. EB Cowell, The Jataka or stories of the Buddha’s former births, tr. WHD Rouse, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, (reprinted) 1990, Vol.IV, Jataka No.506, pp.281-290.

Ramesh Shankar Gupta and BD Mahajan, Ajanta, Ellora and Aurangabad caves, DB Taraporevala and sons, Bombay, 1962, pp.62-71; George Michell, The Penguin guide to the monuments of India Buddhist Jain Hindu, Penguin Group, England, Vol.I, 1989, pp.337-341. According to the story, in fulfilment of his desire Bodhisattva was born as the naga king Champeyya feeling disgusted, however, with his reptile existence, he went to the world of men to observe penance and stationed himself on an ant-hill. He allowed himself to be caught by a snake charmer that made him dance. One day when he was dancing in the presence of the king of Varanasi, the latter set him free at the request of the nagi Sumana, Champeyya’s wife. Out of gratitude Champeyya conducted the king to the abode of the serpents and lavishly entertained him for seven days; then he sent him back loaded with treasures. EB Cowell, The Jataka or stories of the Buddha’s former births, tr. WHD Rouse, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, (reprinted) 1990, Vol.IV, Jataka No.502, pp.264-267.


Debala Mitra, Ajanta, Archaeological Survey of India, Eleventh edition, New Delhi, 1996, pp.32-33. To the left of the Vidhurapandita Jataka of cave no 2, between the cell door and the pilaster, painted the Ruru Jataka. According to the story, Bodhisattva, born as a golden deer, having rescued a drowning man was betrayed by the latter to the king of Varanasi, who had declared a rich reward to the finder of such a deer, as his queen had taken into her head to listen to the sermon of a golden deer seen in her dreams. Bodhisattva forgave his betrayer and converted the royal couple. See EB Cowell, The Jataka or stories of the Buddha’s former births, tr. WHD Rouse, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, (reprinted) 1990, Vol.IV, Jataka No. 482, pp.161-166. Unfortunately most of the panel has now been perished.
written on the walls of the porch to the left of the veranda of cave no 2 which include quotes from the Kshanti Jataka, found in the Jatakamala. In addition, on the right side wall of the same chamber, near the front corner of the cave, there is a figure of a king seated on a throne, which bears an inscription that early scholars uncertainly read as Chaitrivalorki raja and explained as king Chaitra of Valorka. The correct reading, however, is without doubt Maitribala raja and therefore obvious that the scene represents the Bodhisattva in his former birth as the king Maitribala given in the Maitribala Jataka. It is to be noted at this point that as in the case of the Kshantivadi Jataka mentioned above, this story also forms the subject of a story of the Jatakamala. It is thus evident that in the second phase, Aryasura’s Jatakamala was one of the canons that was used for the selection of the themes of the paintings of Ajanta, which will be discussed later in detail.

Of the Jatakas painted in cave no 16, two can be recognised on the front wall of the hall near the left corner and the left wall of the front aisle. The first depicts the Hasti...
Jataka\textsuperscript{75} and the second shows certain episodes from the Mahamaggā Jataka.\textsuperscript{76} In the same cave fragmentary paintings of the Mahasutassoma Jataka, also represented in cave no 17 in detail,\textsuperscript{77} can be seen on the architrave above the front pillars of the Veranda.\textsuperscript{78} Besides, it is apparent that the walls of the hall of cave no 17 are also all embellished with various Jatakas as in the case of cave no 16. Starting from the front wall to the left of the main entrance is encountered the Chaddanta Jataka\textsuperscript{79} (Plate XXIV), an earlier version of which we have already met with the initial paintings of cave no 10. Meanwhile, it is significant that the Mahakapi Jataka was twice painted and the first\textsuperscript{80} is highlighted over the window and the space between the window and small door of cave no 17.\textsuperscript{81} Beyond the


\textsuperscript{77} George Michell, The Jatakamala by Aryasura, ed. JH Kern, Harvard Oriental Series, Boston, 1891, p.200. In Hasti Jataka where the Bodhisattva born as a benevolent elephant, flung himself down to death from the top of a precipice to serve as food to hungry travellers, who are seen in the left panel making a feast on the elephant's carcass.

\textsuperscript{78} Debala Mitra, Ajanta, Archaeological Survey of India, Eleventh edition, New Delhi, 1996, p.54.


\textsuperscript{80} There are two Jataka stories of Mahakapi in the Pali Jataka collection, which have been used for the paintings of Ajanta. See the Jataka nos. 407 and 518 of EB Cowell's version of The Jataka or stories of the Buddha's former births, tr. EB Cowell and WHD Rouse, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, (reprinted) 1990, Vol.VI, Jataka No. 546, pp. 156-246.

\textsuperscript{81} According to this Jataka story, Bodhisattva born as the king of monkeys lived with his retinue on the bank of the Ganga and ate the fruits of a mango tree, to get the delicious fruits of which king Brahmadatta of Varanasi besieged it. Finding his troops in imminent danger of death, Bodhisattva made a bridge partly by means of a bamboo shoot and partly by stretching his own body for the safe escape of his followers. His rival Devadatta, also born as a monkey, finding it an opportunity to crush him, jumped on his body with such
side door of the cave, the Hasti Jataka is represented, which occurs in cave no 16 too. 82

The Hamsa Jataka is also painted in cave no 17, 83 in addition to the Vessantara Jataka, which covers the entire left wall between the two pilasters of the cave. 84 The adjoining story to the right of Vessantara Jataka is the Kumbha Jataka 85 and the lower half of the wall between the back pilaster and cell-door of the cave contains the representation of the spring that is broke his heart. Brahmadatta, touched by the spirit of self-sacrifice, gently brought him down. Before his death, Bodhisattva gave the king an instructive discourse. EB Cowell, The Jataka or stories of the Buddha's former births, tr. HT Francis and RA Neil, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, (reprinted) 1990, Vol.III, Jataka No. 407, pp. 225-227.

83 MN Deshpande, "The murals: Their theme and content," Ajanta murals: An album of eighty-five reproductions in colour, ed. A Ghosh, Archaeological Survey of India, 1967, p.36; Debala Mitra, Ajanta, Archaeological Survey of India, Eleventh edition, New Delhi, 1996, p.60. In the Hamsa Jataka the essential characteristic of the swan, its wisdom is specially emphasised and the narration of the story has for its main theme the capacity of the golden swan to expound dharma or ethical principles to queen of the land who having dreamt listening to the bird, desired that it should be caught and brought for purpose. The story is vividly represented in a painting of arresting in Ajanta. CSivaramamurthi, Approach to nature in Indian art and thought, Kanak Publications, New Delhi, 1980, p.95.
84 Ramesh Shankar Gupta and BD Mahajan, Ajanta, Ellora and Aurangabad caves, DB Taraporevala and sons, Bombay, 1962, p.88; MN Deshpande, "The murals: Their theme and content," Ajanta murals: An album of eighty-five reproductions in colour, ed. A Ghosh, Archaeological Survey of India, 1967, p.36; George Michell, The Penguin guide to the monuments of India Buddhist Jain Hindu, Penguin Group, England, Vol.I, 1989, pp.337-341. The story of Vessantara Jataka has been depicted in art form at the sites of Bharhut (Second century BC), Sanchi (first century BC), Amaravathi (first to third centuries AD), Goli (third century AD) and Gandharan reliefs in addition to the paintings of Ajanta. See Margaret Cone and Richard F Gombrich, The perfect generosity of prince Vessantara, Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1977, Introduction, p.xxxiv; Ajanta paintings twenty plates in colour, Lalit Kala Academy, Calcutta, New Delhi, 1956. In this Jataka story, Bodhisattva born as prince Vessantara was an incarnation of generosity and charity. His farther, king Sanjaya, was forced by his subjects to banish him to Mount Vamka, as he had given away a supernatural elephant, gifted with the power of causing rain, to the Brahmans of Kalinga, which was suffering from drought. Vessantara left the capital with his wife, son and daughter in a chariot. On his way, he gave away first his horses and next his chariot to supplicants and arrived on foot at the hill, where he lived with his family in a hermitage provided by god Sakra. The prince next made a gift of his children to a Brahmin called Jujaka and even gave away his wife Maddi to Sakra disguised as a Brahmin. Sakra however, gave her back and through his grace Vessantara was reunited with his farther and children. EB Cowell, The Jataka or stories of the Buddha's former births, tr. EB Cowell and WHD Rouse, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, (reprinted) 1990, Vol.VI, Jataka No. 547, pp.246-395.
second Mahakapi Jataka. Besides, it is believed that the battle scene painted above the Mahakapi Jataka may be related to the Mahasutasoma Jataka, the subject matter of the back wall to the left of the antechamber of cave no 17, though some have wrongly suggested that this is an episode quoted from the Sakra Jataka.

In addition, on the back wall to the right of the antechamber also of cave no 17 can be recognised a few other Jataka stories. The one occupying the major portion of the upper half of the wall is the Sarabhamiga Jataka. To the right of the Sarabhamiga Jataka is

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87 Dieter Schlingloff, Studies in the Ajanta paintings: Identifications and interpretations, New Delhi, 1987, p.101; Ramesh Shankar Gupta and BD Mahajan, Ajanta, Ellora and Aurangabad caves, DB Taraporevala and sons, Bombay, 1962, pp.90-100; George Michell, The Penguin guide to the monuments of India Buddhist Jain Hindu, Penguin Group, England, Vol.I, 1989, pp.337-341. In this Jataka, the Bodhisattva was the son of a king in Hastinapura named Sutasoma. One day while out riding with his retinue, he met a Brahman to whom he promised to return in return for the imparting of wards of wisdom. Before he could make good his promise, however, a man-eating monster, the former king of Benares, captured him. As the man-eater was carrying him off to be lained in order to slaughter him, Sutasoma wept because his imminent death would cause him to break his word to the Brahman. On seeing this, the man-eater allowed Sutasoma to go free, but only after he had given his word of honour to return once the Brahman had been paid. After fulfilling his promise, Sutasoma did indeed voluntarily return to the man-eater, who was so deeply impressed by the Bodhisattva's sense of honour even though certain death was awaiting him that he refrained from killing him. He listened to, be influenced by the Bodhisattva's preaching, and after his conversion, swore to renounce the eating of human flesh. EB Cowell, The Jataka or stories of the Buddha's former births, tr. HT Francis, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1990, (reprinted) Vol.V, Jataka No.537, pp. 246-279.

88 Vidya Dehejia, Discourse in early Buddhist art: Visual narratives of India, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1997, pp.222-223. However, it is certain that there is no any story by the name of Sakka Jataka in the Pali Jataka collection.

89 Debala Mitra, Ajanta, Archaeological Survey of India, Eleventh edition, New Delhi, 1996, p.63. In the Sarabha-miga Jataka where Bodhisattva, born as a stag, rescued the king of Varanasi, who had fallen into a deep pit while pursuing the former. The hunting party appears in the middle portion, while on the right is seen the stag, first practising with a stone to enable him to carry the weight of the king and next carrying the king himself on his back. EB Cowell, The Jataka or stories of the Buddha's former births, tr. WHD Rouse, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, (reprinted) 1990, Vol.IV, Jataka No. 483, pp.166-167.
represented the Machcha Jataka\textsuperscript{90} and below the Sarabhamiga Jataka, between the two cell-doors, is the representation of the Matiposaka Jataka.\textsuperscript{91} The next Jataka story, beyond the cell door of cave no 17 is the Sama Jataka.\textsuperscript{92} Besides, the Mahisa Jataka is also painted on the right wall to the left of the cell door of the cave\textsuperscript{93} while the next Jataka story is that of Sibi.\textsuperscript{94} In addition, the Sasa Jataka is also painted on the wall of the back aisle of the cave.\textsuperscript{95} The subject of the next painting covering the front wall to the left of the window of the cave has been identified as the Ruru Jataka, though there is an absence of the essential details of the story.\textsuperscript{96} It is apparent that the rest of the wall upto the door of the cave...

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{91} George Michell, \textit{The Penguin guide to the monuments of India Buddhist Jain Hindu}, Penguin Group, England, Vol.I, 1989, pp.337-341. In this Jataka story, Bodhisattva, born as an elephant once carried a strayd forester on his back out of the forest. The state elephant having died, the king of Varanasi caught Bodhisattva following the clue given by the forester. In the palace the animal nourishment thinking of the helplessness of his blind mother, to whom he was greatly attached. Moved to pity the king released him. EB Cowell, \textit{The Jataka or stories of the Buddha's former births}, tr. WHD Rouse, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, (reprinted) 1990, Vol.IV, Jataka No. 455, pp. 58-61.
\item \textsuperscript{93} John Griffiths, \textit{The paintings in the Buddhist cave temples of Ajanta Khandesh}, Caxton Publications, Delhi, 1983, p.13; Ramesh Shankar Gupta and BD Mahajan, \textit{Ajanta, Ellora and Aurangabad caves}, DB Taraporevala and sons, Bombay, 1962, pp.90-100; Debala Mitra, \textit{Ajanta}, Archaeological Survey of India, Eleventh edition, New Delhi, 1996, p.64. In this story, Bodhisattva in his birth as a buffalo used to rest under a tree and suffered a monkey to torture him with impunity. Once another buffalo happened to stand under the same tree. The monkey started his unusual cruel pranks but was thrown away and trampled to death. On the bottom the monkey is seen putting his hand on the eyes of Bodhisattva; above, the monkey now thrown down, is looking with awe at the fierce buffalo. See EB Cowell, \textit{The Jataka or stories of the Buddha's former births}, tr. WHD Rouse, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, (reprinted) 1990, Vol.II, pp.262-263.
\item \textsuperscript{95} Dieter Schlingloff, \textit{Studies in the Ajanta paintings: Identifications and interpretations}, New Delhi, 1987, pp.123-128.
\end{itemize}
contains the Nigrodhamiga Jataka. However, of these Jataka tales the scenes of the Sasa and the Kumbha Jatakas suggest that the literary source of the artists is the Jatakamala, as in the case of the some of the murals in the cave no 2.  

In contrast, from the extant paintings alone it is obvious that the following Jatakas have been represented at the caves of Ajanta: Sibi, Sankapāla, Kshantivādi, Maitribala, Mahākapi, Sāma, Chaddanta, Vessantara, Mahasutāsāma, Matsya, Hasti, Mahājanaka, Champeyya, Mahāummagga, Hamsa, Vidurapandita, Sarabhamiga, Ruru, Matipōsaka, Kumbha, Sasa, Mahīsha and Nigrōdgamiga etc. Of these various stories, in cave nos 1 and 16, the Mahāummagga Jātaka story was painted twice, while the Sibi Jātaka has been painted in cave nos. 1 and 17. Similarly, in cave nos. 2 and 17 also the Ruru and Hamsa Jataka stories were painted twice, while the Jataka stories of Mahasutasoma and Hasti have been painted in cave nos. 16 and 17. In addition, the Jataka stories of Chaddanta and Sama have been painted in cave nos. 10 and 17 though the chronological gap of the paintings is considerably wide. Although it is thus evident that some of the Jataka stories have repeatedly been painted in the caves of Ajanta, as in the case of the Buddhist reliefs, it is needless to state that the sequence of events or the scenes of narration of these same
Jatakas are conspicuously different from each other. Most probably these depended on the various tastes of the painters, donors and the incumbents of the caves and also according to the available space on the walls.

It is obvious that except at Ajanta, the paintings of Jataka stories have not been preserved at other Buddhist painting sites of peninsular India of the period concerned. The situation is quite the same even in Sri Lanka since a series of Jātaka paintings are no longer extant, except those found at Tivamka image house at Polohnaruva and Maravidiya in Dimbulagala both belonging to the twelfth century AD. Although these are also now in a dilapidated condition it is obvious that as in the case of Ajanta, the main themes of these two places were also the Jātaka stories and the major events of the life story of the Buddha. But, of the Jataka stories thus painted at Tivamka shrine, so far only a few have been identified. 100 They are Vessantara, 101 Asanka, 102 Sasa, 103 Tundila, 104


101 The painting in the middle panel, according to Bell’s belief, depicts the Vessantara Jataka story. HCP Bell, Archaeological Survey of Ceylon: North Central, Northern and Central provinces Annual Report for 1907, Government Printer, 1911, p.33. Nevertheless, Godakumbura does not agree with Bell’s identification. CE Godakumbura, Murals at Tivamka pilgrimage, Archaeological Department, Colombo, 1969, pp.16-17. In fact, for the Sinhalese Buddhists, the Vessantara Jataka story has occupied a special place among the paintings from earliest times up to modern period. See Margaret Cone and Richard F Gombrich, The perfect generosity of prince Vessantara, Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1977. This story involving a series of difficult situations regarding the Dana paramita (preparation for perfect generosity) has a strong impact in stimulating pious intentions and emotions. It is therefore capable, in every way, of arousing an intense delight and satisfaction among pilgrims. The massage given to pilgrims by this Jataka painting is, that the Buddha made all those sacrifices not merely for his own emancipation but for the purpose of liberating other humans and gods undergoing incessant suffering in Samsara. This story can contribute towards increasing faith in Buddha as well as motivating people to follow the path shown by Buddha. Thus, the Vessantara Jataka painting was intended on the one hand, to bring enjoyment to pilgrims and on the other to enhance their religious faith. Nanda Wickramasinghe, "Mural paintings: 800 AD -1200 AD," Archaeological Department centenary (1890-1990) commemorative series, Volume five - Painting, ed. Nandadeva Wijesekara, State Printing Corporation, Colombo, 1990, p.57; EB Cowell, The Jataka or
Delhi, (reprinted)

Vidurapandita, Guttila, Cullapaduma, Maitribala, Mugapakka, Sama, Mahasudassana, Kusa, Mahaumma, etc. Nevertheless, unlike the Jataka

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102 The Asanka Jataka is painted on the right wall of the building, which forms a part of the access to the vestibule near the entrance. See HCP Bell, *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon: North Central, Northern and Central provinces Annual Report for 1907*, Government Printer, 1911, p.33. At present, this painting has been affected to a great extent. The summary of the story, which relates of a heavenly being born as a girl in stories of friends, a monkey, a jackal and an otter. On a certain fast day, the Bodhisattva decided in order to test them, came in making futile efforts revealed himself in his celestial form and in order to make the virtue of the Bodhisattva known throughout burning flames; but by the power of its virtue and the might of alone had nothing suitable to offer and lest it should sent the Brahmin to kindle a fire and jumped into the a lotus growing in a lotus pond and brought up by a Brahmin the Bodhisattva. The king of the country who aspired for her hand was set to guess her name as a condition. The king, after having spent three years making futile efforts to guess the elusive name, accidentally hit on it when about to depart in'dudgeon. See EB Cowell, *The Jataka or stories of the Buddha's former births*, tr. HT Francis and RA Neil, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, (reprinted) 1990, Vol.III, Jataka No.380, pp.161-164.

103 The story of Sasa Jataka is as follows. Once upon a time, the Bodhisattva was born as a hare and had three friends, a monkey, a jackal and an otter. On a certain fast day, the Bodhisattva decided to observe the moral practices and persuaded his friends also to do the same. He exhorted his friends, particularly on the virtue of almsgiving. Sakka, king of the gods, became aware of the practice of virtue by these four animals and in order to test them, came in the guise of a Brahmin and begged for alms. The otter gave him some fish which it had for its meal, the jackal a jar of curds and some meat and the monkey some ripe mangoes. The hare alone had nothing suitable to offer and lest it should sent the Brahmin to kindle a fire and jumped into the burning flames; but by the power of its virtue and the might of Sakka, the fire did it no harm. The Sakka then revealed himself in his celestial form and in order to make the virtue of the Bodhisattva known throughout the world, he painted the figure of the hare on the orb of the moon. Ibid, Vol.III, Jataka No. 313, pp.34-37.

104 The summary of Tundila Jataka runs as follows. An old woman reared, as children, two young pig deserted by the sow, naming the elder Mahatundila and the other Cullatundila. Unwilling when sober to sell either, under the influence of "strong drink" she consented to part with Cullatundila to certain persons of the baser sort. Bringing food to entice the young porker to the trough thirty fellows stood by with nooses in their hands ready to seize it. Cullatundila being called by the old woman and seeing the preparation for his capture, in fear of death turned back, shaking, to his brother Mahatundila who was no other than the Bodhisattva. Then the great being expounded the law in a sweet voice with a Buddhist charm. The drunkenness left the old woman and the lewd fellows throwing their nooses away stood listening. His voice extended over twelve leagues, even to Benares. Thereupon the king and the courtiers came death. His voice identified the figure with a head like hat of a dog, as Musila, the musician. As he grew up he mastered all the branches of music and under the name of Musila, the musician of Ujjeni, being belittled by persons who had heard Guttila, the former decides to put himself under the tuition of Guttila. That master taught his pupil everything that he himself knew. Musila having made boastful claim before the king to be the more expert, a contest of skill is arranged between the two great musicians. Sakka then assures Guttila of divine aid and directs him, whilst playing his
paintings at Ajanta, due to their bad state of preservation most of these paintings are now unidentifiable. But it is apparent that as in the case of Ajanta, the pilgrim in his progress

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from the outer entrance to the inner shrine of the Tivamka image house, had a visual demonstration of the perfection of the various virtues of the Bodhisattva, which ultimately led to the great awakening.\textsuperscript{113}

Apart from these Jataka stories painted at Tivamka shrine, in the caves of Maravidiya of Dimbulagala too, the Jataka stories of Sasa and Vessantara were painted.\textsuperscript{114} In addition to their contemporaneity, it is evident that these two Jataka stories are common to both the places. Thus, the painted Jataka stories of Sri Lanka during the ancient period consist of Vessantara (Tivamka shrine and Maravidiya), Asanka (Tivamka shrine), Sasa (Tivamka shrine and Maravidiya), Tundila (Tivamka shrine), Vidhurapandita (Tivamka shrine), Guttila (Tivamka shrine), Cullapaduma (Tivamka shrine) Mugapakkha (Tivamka shrine), Sama (Tivamka shrine), Mahasudassana (Tivamka shrine), Kusa (Tivamka shrine), Kalagola story of Mahaummagga Jataka (Tivamka shrine) and Maitribala (Tivamka shrine). As in the case of the murals of Ajanta, the last story of the list is not found in the Pali Jataka version and unmistakably has been borrowed from the text of Sanskrit \textit{Jatakamala}.\textsuperscript{115} However, in contrast, the under mentioned table which contains these representations of Jataka stories of peninsular India (as extant at Ajanta) and Sri Lanka (as alive at Tivamka shrine and Maravidiya) during the ancient period unambiguously elucidates the similarities as well as the differences of the Buddhist mural paintings of the two countries in the context of their themes, though chronologically these belong to two distinct periods.

cross-examination, the truth was elicited and Digitala restored to Kalagola. Ibid, Vol.VI, Jataka No. 546, pp.156-246.
\textsuperscript{113} S Paranavitana, \textit{Art and architecture of Ceylon Polonnaruva period}, Art Council of Ceylon, Times of India Press, Bombay, 1954, p.36; See also CE Godakumbura, \textit{Murals at Tivamka Pilimage}, Archaeological Department, Colombo, 1969, p.15.
\textsuperscript{114} Nandadeva Wijesekara, \textit{Heritage of Sri Lanka}, The Times of Ceylon, Colombo, 1984, p.121.
\textsuperscript{115}
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Jataka</th>
<th>Paintings extant at</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ajanta</td>
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<td>1 Asanka</td>
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<td>3 Champeyya</td>
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<td>4 Cullapaduma (Temiya)</td>
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<td>5 Guttila</td>
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<td>6 Hansa</td>
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<td>7 Hasti</td>
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<td>11 Mahajanaka</td>
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<td>21 Nigrodhamiga</td>
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<td>22 Ruru</td>
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<td>24 Samkhapala</td>
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<td>25 Sarabhamiga</td>
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<td>26 Sasa</td>
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<td>27 Sibi</td>
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<td>28 Tundila</td>
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<td>29 Vessantara</td>
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<td>30 Vidhurapandita</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
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</table>

In contrast to the 36 identified Jatakas at the sites of Ajanta, Tivamka shrine and Maravidiya of the two countries (i.e. 23 Jatakas at Ajanta and 13 at Sri Lankan sites) only six Jatakas are common to both. They are Maitribala, Sama, Vessantara,

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Mahaummagga, Sasa and Vidurapandita Jatakas. Thus, it is obvious that the percentage of commonality of these Jatakas is only 16.6. Since this is an indication of a very low level of harmony of the themes of the two countries, unquestionably this speaks for the tremendous popularity of some of the Jatakas and their continued influence upon generations of Buddhists throughout the South Asian region rather than an impact of the themes of the mural paintings of Ajanta on the Sri Lankan painting sites, although some have concluded that this striking similarity cannot be explained away as due to mere accident.\textsuperscript{116}

**The life story of the Buddha:**

As in the case of the Jataka stories, the life story of the Buddha was also one of the most popular themes among the ancient Buddhist mural painting sites of the two countries. Of these, though the subject matter of the earliest paintings of cave nos. 10 and 9 at Ajanta has not been fully identified,\textsuperscript{117} in the middle part of the best-preserved scene of cave no 10, Yazdani recognized a Bodhi tree, the tree of enlightenment and he therefore identified the scene as the arrival of a king with his retinue to worship the Bodhi tree.\textsuperscript{118} Pursuing this thought further, Yazdani called the next scene to the right, in the middle of which a wheel of law is to be seen the royal party worshipping the stupa.

Consequently, he was of the opinion that the painting must depict the arrival and then the return journey of the same king, whom he identified as one of the Andhra kings of the second century BC. Contrary to this view, Schlingloff has more convincingly identified this scene as a representation of the "war of the relics" and the other scenes of the frieze as also the depictions of the major events of the life story of the Buddha; more precisely the Bodhisattva in Tusita heaven, Maya devi’s dream, Siddhartha’s birth, his walk of seven steps, his first meditation etc which were also represented in the early Indian reliefs. As it was mentioned in the fourth chapter, it is particularly to be noted that these painting do not represent the Buddha in human form and instead various symbols have been used.

In the paintings of the later period of Ajanta, the two sidewalls of the antechamber of cave no 1 clearly depict two important incidents from the Buddha’s life. The one on the left represents the Assault and Temptation of Mara on the eve of Enlightenment. The other on the right wall of the antechamber of the same cave is painted with the Miracle of Sravasti or the concept of thousand Buddhas, which will be discussed later in detail. If the scene represents an illustration of the Miracle of Sravasti, the story tells that in order to confound the six heretical teachers, Buddha performed a few miracles in the presence of a group of spectators headed by king Prasenajit of Sravasti. Thus, one of the miracles was his multiplying himself into innumerable Buddhas in different mudras, poised on

120 Dieter Schlingloff, Studies in the Ajanta paintings: Identifications and interpretations, New Delhi, 1987, pp.3-9. It is to be noted that the most popular stories from the life of the Buddha among the early carvers of Buddhist reliefs included the following themes: Bodhisattva’s descent as a white elephant to the Maya devi’s womb, Suddodhana’s visit to Maya devi in the Asoka grove, dream of Maya and its interpretation, the birth of Rahula, great renunciation, the temptation and the opening of the Ramagram stupa, the great enlightenment, a monkey offering honey to Buddha, the first sermon in the deer park, Rahula’s inheritance, king Prasenajit entertaining the Buddha and his disciples, the division of relics, the preaching of Buddha to his mother in heaven, The story of Udayana and his queens, the story of Angulimala, conversion of Nanda,
Accordingly, it is obvious that unlike the earliest paintings at the site, in these paintings the Buddha has been represented in human form in various attitudes.

Besides, of the scenes of the life story of the Buddha painted in cave no 2, the top panel above the cell door can be identified as the Tusita heaven, the abode of the last Bodhisattva before his descent to the human world. The princely figure, with an aureole around his head and seated in the teaching attitude, is obviously the Bodhisattva. In the next panel, the nativity scene of Siddhartha is painted on the left wall of the hall between the front pilaster and the third cell door. Although much damaged, it is apparent that the bottom left panel depicts the bedchamber of queen Maya who dreamt of a white elephant entering her womb. The elephant, the form in which Bodhisattva alighted from the Tusita heaven, is not very clear in the panel, as the portion has suffered much. A royal couple is painted above the panel, apparently Maya saying something regarding her dream to her husband Suddhodana. The scene to its right relates to the interpretation of Maya’s dream. When Maya told her dream to the king, he sent for the Brahmans, who declared that the queen had conceived a son destined to become either a universal monarch i.e. ‘Chakravarti’ or a ‘Buddha.’ Consequently, the next scene shows a beautiful princess, apparently Maya, standing in a pensive mood between the pillars. Below is shown the birth scene of prince Siddhartha; Sakra holds the baby in his hands, while Maya stands holding the branch of a tree. The seven steps, which Siddhartha took immediately, afterwards are painted to the right of the scene.¹²²

In addition, it is evident that the right wall of cave no 16 is also devoted to the illustration of incidents from the life story of the Buddha. Though the painting is much darkened and effaced today, some of the incidents can be easily made out. Among these: the sleeping figure of Maya, to the left of which in a circular pavilion, is a royal couple, apparently Suddhodana and Maya, conversing over the prospect of the dream which the latter had; birth of prince Siddhartha; the prediction of Asita; Siddhartha’s first meditation during the ploughing festival; the prince at school and his practice of archery; sleeping Yasodhara and Siddhartha’s great renunciation; Sujata’s offering of milk-rice; the offering of Tapassu and Bhalluka; Buddha with his begging-bowl on the street of Rajagaha etc are preserved. Similarly, on the left wall of the hall of the same cave is observable a masterly depiction of the pathos and sentiments in the fainting of a beautiful princess at the sight of a crown held by a servant, which is popularly known as the ‘dying princess.’ She is identified with Sundari, the wife of Nanda; the latter’s religious conversion forming the subject of the panel also relating to the life story of the Buddha. Thus, it is evident that the painters of the cave have portrayed these major events of the life story of the Buddha at least in thirty-one scenes, which are not, placed according to their temporal sequence as in the case of the Jataka stories as discussed in the fourth chapter in detail.


Of the other caves at the site, it is apparent that the front wall of the porch of cave no 17 depicts the subjugation of Nalagiri, one of the eight great miracles in the life of the Buddha\textsuperscript{125} though the rest of the incidents have not been preserved. But, it is obvious that the walls of the antechamber of the same cave are also painted with the incidents from the life story of the Buddha depicting some of the other miracles of the Buddha. Of these, the right wall depicts the well-known Miracle of Sravasti. The incidents following the miracle were delineated in three vertical scenes on the left wall. Of these, on the top Buddha is preaching the Abhidamma to his mother in the Trayatrimsa heaven; in the middle is his descent at Samkissa from the heaven in the company of Sakra and Brahma by means of stairs provided by Sakra, another miracle of the life of the Buddha; down below is the great assembly at Samkasya where Buddha made known to the world the wisdom of Sariputta by putting him more and more difficult questions.\textsuperscript{126}

However, as pointed out by Foucher, since most of these episodes of the miracles are independently depicted in the murals at Ajanta, the meaning of the eight miracles cannot be separated from the eight major places associated with the Buddha's earthly life and activities.\textsuperscript{127} Accordingly, these eight miracles may be divided into two main groups, each associated with a place where it occurred the spot being in turn revered as a pilgrimage centre. The main group: Birth at Lumbini, related to which are also the dream of queen Maya and the great renunciation; Illumination or the Enlightenment, related to it the defeat of Mara at Bodhgaya; the First Sermon at Migadaya near Saranath: Extinction

\textsuperscript{125} Ajanta paintings twenty plates in colour, Lalit Kala Academy, Calcutta, New Delhi, 1956. Nevertheless, Coomaraswamy has wrongly interpreted this as the Nalagiri Jataka. Ananda Coomaraswamy, History of Indian and Indonesian art, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, (reprinted) 1972, p.89.


\textsuperscript{127} A Foucher, The beginnings of Buddhist art and other essays in Indian and Central Asian archaeology, (tr. LA Thomas and FN Thomas), London, 1914, See pp.147-184.
or the final attainment at Kushinagar. The second group are: the Miracle at Sravasti; Descent from the Tusita heaven at Sankissa; the monkey offering honey to the Buddha at Varanasi; Taming of the elephant Nalagiri at Rajagaha.\textsuperscript{128} Thus, it is apparent that while not all the episodes are actual miracles or \textit{pratiharyas}, for instance, the birth by itself is not a miracle, nevertheless, once the Buddha was deified and ceased to be a historical person, all these incidents took on the significance of miracle or miraculous occurrence interwoven around them.\textsuperscript{129}

In addition to these miracles, the back wall of the antechamber, to the left of the door of the same cave i.e. cave no 17 depicts Yasodhara putting forward Rahula, the latter begging his patrimony of Buddha who puts forward his begging bowl.\textsuperscript{130} It is interesting to note that the left wall, opposite the sixth pillar of cave no 19 also represents Buddha giving his begging-bowl to Rahula, the latter pushed to the front by his mother Yasodhara\textsuperscript{131} though the other incidents of the series are not clear.

Except at Ajanta, at the other Buddhist mural sites of India the paintings of life stories of the Buddha are not extant. Unlike the murals of Ajanta nothing remains of such large and long panels of paintings in the Sri Lankan sites. As in the case of the Jatakas, the only survivals of these are the remaining portions of the paintings of Tivamka shrine, which belong to the 12\textsuperscript{th} century AD. Though the principal piece is too small, the fragment of Hindagala painting is the earliest representation of the life story of the Buddha on the island since its chronology has been assigned to the seventh century AD

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid, p.1. But, it is to be noted that since the actual meaning of pratiharya is miracle in the sense of a magician's tricks in that sense, only the miracle at Sravasti is appropriately a miracle.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, p.71.
as discussed in the third chapter in detail. This contains two large figures of the Buddha and several subsidiary groups of smaller figures though what these scenes illustrate is not at all clear. But, it is apparent that the principal divine figure kneeling at the feet of the Buddha in the mural wears a particular type of head-dress characteristic of Indra (Sakra) in early Buddhist art. Therefore some scholars have identified the scene as a representation of Indra’s visit to the Buddha in the cave named Indasala while some have gone to the extent of stating that the word Hindagala itself derived from that of Indasala.

Besides, though the early scholars have identified this scene as Buddha in the Tusita heaven, preaching Abhidamma to his mother born as a Devaputta some later scholars suggest that the scene represents incidents of the first seven weeks of the Buddha after his enlightenment. Consequently, they have identified the Buddha under the Rajayatana tree where he receives water and tooth brush from the god Sakra, a stone bowl from the four gods of the regions and subsequently alms from two merchants Tapassu and Bhalluka during the fourth week after the enlightenment. In addition, it is believed that a part of the same painting depicts the supplication of Brahma to preach the Dhamma. This is under the Ajapala banyan tree during the fifth week after the


enlightenment. Accordingly, it is believed that perhaps at the site all the other major events connected with the seven weeks after the realisation of Buddhahood may also have been depicted.\textsuperscript{137}

It was mentioned in the third chapter that the paintings found at the relic chamber of Mahiyangana stupa are also very fragmentary in nature. Hence the identification of the figures at the site is indeed difficult, although some scholars have stated that it is possible to call the remaining figures Lokapalas; the four guardian gods (Satavaradham devi) who protect buildings from entry of evil spirits from the direction of the quarter under their respective regency.\textsuperscript{138} But, according to Paranavitana’s more convincing explanation the largest preserved fragment, (1 ft. 4 in. by 1 ft. 7 ½ in.) depicts the Buddha seated under the Bodhi tree with a bearded sage, probably a denizen of a Brahma world (Brahma loka), to the right\textsuperscript{139} (Plate VIII). Hence, he believes that the main scene represented in the painting appears to have been the enlightenment of the Buddha, on which occasion, the gods and other superhuman beings of the three worlds are said to have come to pay homage to him.\textsuperscript{140} It is certainly interesting to recognise, among these divine personages, four-armed Vishnu holding a tray of flowers in two of his hands and Siva with his trident. In addition, it is significant that above the head of one of the superior Brahmas is seen a flying figure

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, p.48.
\textsuperscript{140} S Paranavitana, \textit{Glimpses of Ceylon’s past}, Lake House Investments, Colombo, 1972, p.149.
armed with swords and shield who may represent Mara, the evil one, retreating from the scene after his discomfiture.\textsuperscript{141}

However, some critics believe that the themes of the paintings of the relic chamber of Mahiyangana stupa are inclined more towards the Mahayana tradition than Hinayana form of art. Supporting evidence for this is seen in: the symbols of the trident or \textit{Vajrayudha} found deposited in the relic vault; the circle of five Buddhas in trance; and the protruding crown in Mahayana style in the Buddha painting; as well as the fact that the stanza “\textit{Ye Dharma Hetuprabhava}” was found on the back of a Buddha image written in Nagari characters used in the Pala period.\textsuperscript{142}

It is apparent that in the extent painting of cave no 2 of Pulligoda at Dimbulagala, the scene represents devotees in the attitude of veneration. In this scene, five figures, all male, are seated on lotus cushions placed on a broad seat, grouped together and are shown paying attention to the direction where the personage venerated wearing tall \textit{makuta} headgear would have been positioned (Plate III). Much of the original painting, which probably included either the Bodhisattva or a king or a \textit{deva} thus worshiped, is now no more, sporadic patches of ground adhering to the rock surface being mute witnesses to the losses suffered by a large painting. On a separate fragment of ground, there are a few details of similar figures, which were evidently well painted,\textsuperscript{143} but the subject matter cannot be identified today.

\textsuperscript{143} HCP Bell, “Dimbulagala: Its caves, runes and inscriptions,” \textit{The Ceylon Antiquary and Literary Register}, Vol. III, part II, October 1917, p.71; Raja de Silva, “Painting: Early period 247 BC to 800 AD,”
In addition, in a painting extant in the cave of Maravidiya, also at Dimbulagala, there is the figure of a man holding up an elephant by its trunk. The figure of the man is only partly preserved; the head as well as the feet being defaced; but the elephant is clearly visible. Behind the elephant are faint traces of a crouching man who may be the mahout. Although the subject matter of the painting is not at all clear it is generally believed that this depicts an episode relating to the life story of the Buddha connected with the gift received by prince Siddhartha. Nevertheless, it is more probable that this is a scene surviving from the representation of the Vessantara Jataka, depicting the incident of the donation of the white elephant, which was very popular in Sri Lanka throughout the ages. It is presumed that the other remaining paintings of the cave also belong to a Jataka story, more precisely the Sasa Jataka as discussed above and not relating to the life story of the Buddha.

Unlike the other painting sites of the island the paintings at Tivamka shrine are found in three sections: in the entrance porch; the vestibule; and the sanctum. These have been divided and arranged in sequence, to conform to the psychological make-up of the worshippers. As a result, immediately on entering, the pilgrim first comes across the paintings on the walls of the porch. These are the paintings dealing with the Jataka stories


144 This story runs as follows. A moment before prince Siddartha exhibited his skills in learning and sports he received a white elephant as a gift. At this moment Devadatta to show his strength lifted the elephant with his left hand, gave it a blow with his right hand and killed it. The carcass of the elephant was lying on the road blocking the entrance to the city. Prince Siddhartha grabbed it by the tail and threw it away to fall beyond seven ramparts and seven moats. Due to this belief, Paranavitana thinks that the elephant seems to be resisting, by placing its hind legs firmly on the ground, the man is shown bending forward in the act of drawing the elephant’s trunk towards him. S Paranavitana, “Archaeological summary,” Ceylon Journal of Science Section G, Vol.II, 1928, pp.159-160.

that were already mentioned and then the life story of the Buddha. Thus, in the vestibule of the shrine, the invitation from the gods in the Tusita heaven to the Bodhisattva who was there as a god, to be conceived in a human womb and to be born as a human being is depicted in detail. A large number of figures of gods drawn skilfully are to be seen in this section. But unfortunately the sequence of other events of the life story of the Buddha has been broken due to exposure to the elements though the dream of queen Maya on the occasion of the Bodhisattva being conceived in her womb, and attainment of Buddhahood on an anterior part of the building are noticeable. Of these, in the first scene Mayadevi lies on her left side with arms by her sides, wearing a complete dress. Her body is painted in a lovely green tint. Below this is depicted the presentation of the Bodhisattva to the five ministers in the presence of king Suddhodana. Then there is the Lumbini grove where Mayadevi and four female attendants stand under a tree. The scene represents the birth of prince Siddhartha, but he is not portrayed in the painting. 146

In the sanctum, events after the enlightenment are depicted. Of these, unfortunately almost all the paintings have deteriorated but only one remains that depicts the return journey of the Buddha to the city of Sankissa from Tavatimsa heaven where he preached the Abhidhamma to the gods and Brahmans including the mother-god (Matru Devaputta). In this painting, three ladders are shown side by side. As in the case of the paintings of cave no 17 at Ajanta, the Buddha is climbing down the middle ladder. To the right of the Buddha, one of the two gods, Brahma or Indra, slightly behind, bears the parasol over the Buddha. One of the gods, again Brahma or Indra climbing down the

small ladder on the left is holding a flower in homage to the Buddha.\textsuperscript{147} Devas float in the air and on the ground at the foot of the ladder. Monks and other worshippers are all ranged conventionally in some four or five rows one above another. It is exceptional that the figure of the Buddha is 8 feet or much above ordinary life size and the ladders slant upwards to proper left for 15 feet or more.\textsuperscript{148}

In addition, it is believed that the boat scene, which had also been painted in the sanctum, may have represented the Buddha passing the river Hiranyavati, near Kusinagar on his way to the sala groves of the Mallas before the attainment of Parinirvana.\textsuperscript{149} This centrepiece on the south wall of the shrine shows a boat, like the modern Sinhalese angula propelled by rows at bow and stern. On a platform is seated the Buddha under a canopy, stiffly facing front, with a disciple to either side and an additional attendant\textsuperscript{150} though unfortunately this scene cannot be seen today.

In contrast, it is obvious that these mural compositions of the life story of the Buddha thus represented in both India and Sri Lanka constitute a veritable pictorial biography of the Buddha depicting his childhood, spiritual journey from his sheltered life of worldly pleasures and temptations as a young prince to his attainment of the highest knowledge, eventually to reach the state of final attainment (Parinirvana). No doubt that these episodes of the Buddha’s life not only continued to fascinate artists but also retained

\textsuperscript{147} For a description of these paintings see Nanda Wickramasinghe, “Mural paintings: 800 AD -1200 AD,” Archaeological Department centenary (1890-1990) commemorative series, Volume five - Painting, ed. Nandadeva Wijesekara, State Printing Corporation, Colombo, 1990, p.60.
\textsuperscript{149} HCP Bell, Archaeological Survey of Ceylon Annual Reports, 1909, p.40.
their popularity with devotees as well as the masses. But, according to the discussion so far, it is obvious that as in the case of the Jataka stories, there is a considerable dissimilarity between the extant and identified mural paintings of the two countries in the context of themes of the life story of the Buddha too. This is particularly evident from the themes depicted at Ajanta, Hindagala and Mahiyanganaya etc. For instance, the incidents of Indasala cave where god Sakra met Buddha or the main incidents of the seven weeks of the Buddha after the enlightenment which have been depicted in the murals of Hindagala have not at all been represented among the murals of Ajanta. Similarly, the events like enlightenment and the defeat of Mara, which have been painted in the murals of Mahiyanganaya relic chamber also cannot be seen among the murals of Ajanta.

But, it should not be forgotten that there are some similarities between the painted themes of the life story of the Buddha at Ajanta and the Tivamka image house though the time gap between the two is considerable since the latter belongs to the 12th or 13th century AD. This is particularly evident from the incidents of the invitation of gods, Maya’s dream, nativity of prince Siddartha, descent from the Tusita heaven at Sankissa etc. Nevertheless, apart from these similarities, it is to be noted that incidents like eight miracles of the life of the Buddha, which were popular among the artists of Ajanta have not received the same attention of the painters of the Tivamka image house, while the other incidents like Buddha passing the river Hiranyavati, which had been painted at the Tivamka shrine have not been depicted at Ajanta. Thus, in contrast, it is obvious that there is considerable dissimilarity between the themes of the life story of the Buddha painted at the Buddhist mural painting sites of Sri Lanka, particularly in the oldest phase of the

\[151\] Ratan Parimoo, *Life of Buddha in Indian sculpture (Ashtamaha pratharya): An iconological analysis*.
period concerned, instead of a very close similarity, which had been suggested by early scholars.

The concepts of thousand Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and divine beings:

It was mentioned in the fourth chapter that with the decline of artistic standards of Ajanta, the narrative scenes were replaced by representations of the repetitive Buddha figures in various attitudes. Of these, the countless Buddha figures included in the Miracle of Sravasti though likely to be allied with the life story of the Buddha as mentioned above, are certainly representations of the concept of thousand Buddhas as the painted records themselves clearly suggest that the figures are ‘Budhasahasa’.152 Thus, it is significant that at Ajanta the side walls of the shrine, walls of the antechamber, part of the left wall of the hall and left half of the back wall of cave no 2 were painted with countless Buddhas in various attitudes though some scholars have counted 1055 of them, measuring about cm 20 high and covering a surface of 22 square metres.153 In this manner, the scene is repeated no less than six times in the cave, but only in the portrayal on the rear left wall of the cave does it retain its original character.

Similarly, in the damaged painting on the back wall to the left of the shrine, between the cell door and the door of the left aisle of the cave no 16 the Miracle of


Sravasti or the thousand Buddhas in the same form can also be recognised. In addition, in the same cave, after the incident of Nanda's conversion, a panel appears abruptly containing seated figures of Buddha in two rows. Beyond this is another panel representing Buddha seated in teaching attitude. It is evident that the walls of the hall of cave no 19 are also painted with figures of Buddha in different panels.

Apart from these repetitive Buddha figures, it is noteworthy that the topmost panel on the doorway of cave no 17 depicts the figures of seven Manushi Buddhas of Vipasyin, Sikhin, Viśvabhu, Krakuchchanda, Kanakamuni, Kaśyapa and Śakyamuni together with Maitreya the future Buddha, seated under their respective Bodhi trees (Plate XXV). Similarly, on the right wall of the shrine of cave no 22 these seven Manushi Buddhas are also painted with Maitreya, under their respective Bodhi trees. Interestingly enough the names of each of the Buddhas and the Bodhi trees are also written below and above each representation. Accordingly, it is obvious that the theme of the thousand Buddhas or the Miracle of Sravasti became popular and also the rows of Buddha figures one above the other came to be painted during the last phase of Ajanta. Indeed, this repetitive theme reflects the artistic tendency of the age though the paintings lack the vigour, imagination and delicacy of the earlier ones.

However, it is interesting to note that the concept of thousand Buddha or the Miracle of Sravasti cannot be found anywhere in the painting sites of Sri Lanka of the period concerned. But, it is noteworthy that the paintings in cave no.1 of Maravidiya at Dimbulagala consist mainly of Buddha seated on vajrasana in the dhyana attitude.

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155 Ibid, pp. 56 and 74.
surrounded by other Buddha figures of smaller size, seated in the same pose. Although the painting is not clearly visible today, it may perhaps be a depiction of the theme of the repetitive Buddha figures sometimes similar to those at Ajanta.

Besides these Buddha figures, it is obvious that in Ajanta paintings a more prominent place is given to the Bodhisattvas. The depiction of these Bodhisattva figures at the site not as attendants of Buddha but as viable subjects also came into vogue. Of such figures, the two attractive Bodhisattva painted in cave no 1 are conspicuous. Of large dimensions they are yet weightless; full-bodied in solid rounded plasticity, they are yet melting in karuna and seemingly in motion in the midst of a radiantly moving and rejoicing world, they seem to have become stilled into silence before a great realisation. Of the two, the one on the left is the most famous Bodhisattva, which is five feet nine and a half inches from knee to tiara, two feet five and a half inches across the shoulders and one foot from chin to forehead though the lower legs, from above the knees, are missing. According to the Buddhist belief he is the lotus holder, Padmapani, who dwells now on earth, performing the functions of Gautama Buddha until the Buddha of the future, Maitreya, appears. Consequently, at Ajanta he is shown as a prince of noble birth and breeding, wearing the jewels of the highborn, aloof but not detached from the beings

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158 See PS Sastri, AK Coomaraswamy, Indian Writers Series No.8, Arnold – Heinemann Publishers, New Delhi, 1974, p.66.
161 It is noteworthy that Avalokitesvara, Padmapani or Karunamawa in Tibetan is the “on looking lord” called also Abhayamudra “the remover of fear.” Avalokitesvara is held in special reverence in Tibet as the protector of the country and the Dalai Lama are regarded as his successive incarnations. J Burgess, Report
who crowd around him, seeking salvation.\textsuperscript{162} Among these, to his left is probably his consort, also holding a lily, a dark beauty brightened by the highlight on the nose and the lips. Between them is a \textit{chāmara} bearer wearing a blue long-coat, while to the left of the Bodhisattva is a dark mace-bearer wearing a white long-coat. The other figure on the right of the cave leaning in a graceful pose against a personage is wearing a long-coat. The fine ornamentation of his diadem is captivating. To his right is a king offering him lilies on a tray. Of the two dark ladies near the bottom, of whom only the busts have survived, one is offering lilies to the other: commonly labelled as ‘Dark Princess,’ the latter’s features are extremely delicate and refined.\textsuperscript{163}

Similarly, in cave no 2 also three large sized Bodhisattvas are painted, one on the back wall of the hall, two on the front wall of the hall and three on the front wall of the shrine. Of the latter, the one to the left of the doorway does not represent Maitreya, as is commonly supposed, but Avalokitesvara in the role of the saviour of mankind threatened with the eight great perils of lion, elephant, fire, snake, robber, water, fetters and demon.\textsuperscript{164} In addition, in cave no 17 the nine Bodhisattvas are also painted with four unadorned disciples standing in front and five lay devotees in the background, bejewelled and crowned.\textsuperscript{165} Apart from these exquisite Bodhisattva figures at Ajanta, there is a badly damaged Bodhisattva figure painted at one of the caves of Bagh, which indicates that the theme was popular even among the painters of the Bagh caves.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid, p.30.
These figures of the Bodhisattvas have all the qualities that youth, high birth, noble character and religious temperament can produce: strong masculine limbs, a broad chest, and a fine neck; a high intellectual forehead; large, meditative eyes; firm lips and an elegant nose etc. It is particularly apparent that the eyebrows, slightly raised and the highlight on the nose and chin give an air of spirituality to the countenance. The supple body is full of latent vigour. It is the youthful body of a noble prince, standing with a graceful bearing. On the head is a high crown or tiara with large blue sapphires, emblematic of royal birth. The jewelry is not profuse but select: a pearl necklace with a sapphire in the centre; longer strings of pearls across the chest and around the arms. Long black hair fall uncoiled on the shoulders. The serene compassionate face is full of renunciation, yet gentle in its expression, without scorn or disgust for the sweetness of life.\textsuperscript{166}

Although the representations are smaller in number, as in the case of the murals of Ajanta and Bagh, the two painting sites of Gonagolla and Karambagala provide data on the painted Bodhisattvas of ancient Sri Lanka. Of these, the Gonagolla painting presents an extant part of the face; draped torso of a Bodhisattva figure, apparently holding a lotus stalk; and an exquisitely executed female figure, in an attitude of reverence or supplication. Similarly, the theme of the painting fragment found at Karambagala of Situlpavwa, where the chronology is uncertain, has been identified as a representation of the Bodhisattva and a nymph though the painting is now in a very bad state of preservation.\textsuperscript{167}

\textsuperscript{166} Heinrich Zimmer, \textit{The art of Indian Asia: Its mythology and transformations}, Bollingen Series No. XXXIX, Pantheon Books, Toronto, Canada, 1955, p.189.
Apart from the themes of thousand Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, it is evident that the painters of Sri Lanka, especially during the latter part of the period concerned had used the figures of *devas* or divine beings more frequently for their paintings, unlike the painters of Ajanta and Bagh. Of these, apart from the *devas* depicted in the painting of Hindagala discussed above, outline sketches of divine beings rising from the clouds were discovered from the relic chamber paintings of Mihintale.¹⁶⁸ The faint lines below the waist are apparently conical peaks of clouds and not traces of underwear, foundation garments or bathing dresses.¹⁶⁹ As in the case of the *apsaras* of Sigiriya, which will be discussed later the divine nature of the figures is indicated by their being immersed in these clouds, which cut them off just below the waist.¹⁷⁰

It is conspicuous that many *deva* figures were painted among the murals at the Tivamka image house also (Plate II). Among these, most have gold coloured bodies, while some of them have a bluish green colour. It is noteworthy that these two types of figures occur among the paintings of Pulligoda cave also.¹⁷¹ Among the Sigiriya paintings too there are figures of golden coloured and blue coloured *apsaras*. Of these, some scholars have identified the golden coloured figures at Sigiriya as representations of princess of lightning and the blue coloured ones as princess of clouds as discussed below in detail. If this interpretation is correct, similar coloured gods at the Tivamka shrine and Pulligoda cave also have to be identified as representations of the same theme. But, it is obvious that they have nothing to do with such recognition of lightning or clouds.

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¹⁷¹ S Paranavitana, *Glimpses of Ceylon’s past*, Lake House Investments, Colombo, 1972, pp.75-76.
Of the divine beings, a portion of the strip of paintings on the right side of the entrance, among the surviving paintings of Galvihara, is important. Though this portion has survived in a good condition some of the associated figures are seriously damaged. It is obvious that the remains consist of three rows of figures one behind the other representing gods, Bodhisattvas and aged devotees. Of these, the top row has only one surviving figure. It is believed that the figure of a bearded old man painted there with a sage looking countenance and holding a flower, probably represents a denizen of the Brahma world. It is noteworthy that the bottom row and the one above that contain figures of gods, shown in quarter to nearly full face.

When considering the theme of heavenly beings, the representation of figures of *apsaras* instantly comes to one's mind since it was one of the popular themes among the ancient painters of both the countries, though there is hardly any extant evidence among the Buddhist mural paintings of India. Among the exceptional remains, the *apsara* painting of cave no 17 at Ajanta occupies an important place. Although the left part of the doorway on the outer back wall of the veranda of the cave is much damaged, gods flying amidst clouds, celestial nymphs and musicians have been painted on the left of the fairly well preserved upper part. Of these, particularly attractive is the figure of the *apsara* with a turban like headgear.

By far the most popular and important representation of the theme can be seen at Sigiriya, though scholars have expressed various interpretations on its subject matter. It is obvious that their fragmentary nature and unusually dramatic location have led to the

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Sigiriya paintings being interpreted in a number of ways. It is also evident that these expressions of various interpretations are mainly due to the lack of information in painted form or literary form dealing directly with the subject matter of the paintings. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the third chapter, it should not be forgotten that a large series of inscriptions, popularly known as graffiti,\textsuperscript{173} have been discovered engraved on the polished surface of an ancient wall, usually called the 'mirror-wall' at Sigiriya close to the area where the murals are painted. Apart from their palaeographical and chronological value these embody descriptions, appreciative expressions and mental reactions of the visitors to the site.

These graffiti range in date from about 5\textsuperscript{th} century AD to about 13\textsuperscript{th} century AD. It is obvious that apart from the verses written in Sinhala characters there are some indited in other characters too. These, however, are exceedingly few in number and included among them are verses in the Nagiri script of about the 9\textsuperscript{th} century AD and in the Tamil script of about the 11\textsuperscript{th} and 12\textsuperscript{th} centuries AD. Hardly any other script is known in Sri Lanka and south India in the 7\textsuperscript{th} or 8\textsuperscript{th} centuries AD. In addition, it is recorded that 14 graffiti were discovered in a cave under the cistern rock in the course of removing the upper layer of plaster, left blank for the most part. These graffiti were in the under-layer of plaster thus exposed. One of these graffiti is in the later Brahmi script and has been assigned to the 5\textsuperscript{th} or 6\textsuperscript{th} century AD.\textsuperscript{174} In contrast, although some of these graffiti both on the mirror wall and on the plastered wall of the cave can be ascribed to a period as early as 5\textsuperscript{th} century AD on palaeographical ground, yet these early graffiti do not definitely allude to any of the

\textsuperscript{172} S Paranavitana, \textit{Art and architecture of Ceylon Polonnaruva period}, Art Council of Ceylon, Times of India Press, Bombay, 1954, p.35.
figures painted at the site. Unquestionably, definite references to the paintings depicted on the main rock occur in the graffiti, which may be dated to a period at least earlier than 8th century AD.\footnote{A Total of 685 of these graffiti dating between the 8th and 10th centuries have been deciphered, translated and edited by Paranavitana. See S Paranavitana, Sigiri graffiti, Government Press, Colombo, 1956, 2 vols.}

Without doubt, these records establish the fact that people visited the place, to seek consolation, find delight, marvel at the sight of graceful womanhood or the beauty of the painting etc. In this context, it is particularly evident that when they stood before the paintings, these poets or visitors imagined various situations in actual life; according to their experience and temperament, sometimes even rising to philosophical heights and these graffiti reflect not only their intensity of feeling, but also the joy of life which evidently was overflowing in most of them.\footnote{WB Marcus Fernando, Sigiriya, Archaeological Department, 1967, p.16.} Although no doubt most of these poems have the paintings as their principal subject,\footnote{Nandadeva Wijesekara, Selected writings, Tisara Press, Dehivala, Vol.I, 1983, p.269.} they treat the ladies as actual people or as expressions of feminine beauty, mixing poetic feeling and emotion with the projection of similar sentiments. Consequently, as in the case of the modern writings it is evident that there is no consensus among the authors of the graffiti of the site particularly on the subject matter of the paintings. Thus, as evident from these graffiti themselves ancient writers exercised their poetic licence to interpret the paintings in subjective and imaginative ways, which is not very helpful to understand the themes of the paintings to day.

\footnote{Indrani Weerasinghe, Sigiriya the abode of king Kassapa, Godage and Brothers, Colombo, 1996, p.36.}

\footnote{John Lindsay Opic, “The mysteries of Sigiriya,” Island Ceylon, Thames and Hudson, London, 1970, p.131.}
However, it is evident that a large number of graffiti refer to the women as the consorts of a dead king, occasionally identified as Kassapa\textsuperscript{178} while a few suggest that the women have committed suicide at the loss of their lord.\textsuperscript{179} Thus it is evident that poet after poet, retails the then popular belief that these beauties were members of the court.\textsuperscript{180} In addition, at least nine verses either identify them as immortals or compare them to immortals\textsuperscript{181} while the usual explanation is that like \textit{apsaras} their eyelids never close.\textsuperscript{182} It is noteworthy that only a single poem, out of these seven hundred, comments on their lack of lower limbs and none at all refers to their close connection with clouds.\textsuperscript{183} A far larger number, however, suggest simply that the women stand mourning, some raising the question why they have not taken off their ornaments like proper widows. One writer reminds us that the inscribed verses accompanied oral reactions to these paintings.\textsuperscript{184} Interestingly enough the idea that the dark maidens personify clouds, which will be discussed later in detail, is not borne out by any of the graffiti. But, only one verse

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{178} Thirty-three refer specially to a king; four of these mention Kassapa. Another 55 refer to a dead or absent lover without specifying that he is a king. See Joanna Williams, "The construction of gender in the paintings and graffiti of Sigiriya," \textit{Representing the body: Gender issues in Indian art}, ed. Vidya Dehejia, The Book Review Literary Trust, New Delhi, 1997, p.62.
\end{footnotes}
invokes a cloud directly as “My lord” and at least in two, the ladies’ hair is compared to dark clouds. However, lightning is thrice evoked metaphorically.

Thus it is obvious that even according to these graffiti at the site it is not possible to obtain any reliable information on the theme of the paintings now extant there. Certainly, it is evident that even some of the early writers of the graffiti have themselves questioned the identity of these ladies. Accordingly, considerable speculation has helped to advance at least five or six major theories in the attempt to find a solution. Of such theories of various critics, the earliest scholar Bell expressed the view that the scene intended to be portrayed would seem to be a procession of the queens and princesses of king Kassapa’s court, with attendants, on the way to worship at the Buddhist temple of Piduragala, the hill about a mile north of Sigiriya. He concludes that the flowers carried by the females were suggestive of their setting forth to worship at the temple and the fair ladies represented royalty who were accompanied by the dark-skinned attendants. But it is to be noted that the origin of the concept of the theory has further antiquity since an ordinary Buddhist monk also expressed the same view a decade ago. As Murray has recorded in 1890s, this

190 HCP Bell, Archaeological Survey of Ceylon Annual Reports, 1905, pp.16-17; 1907, pp.7-19; “Interim report on the operations of the archaeological survey at Sigiriya (Second season) 1896,” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch), Vol.XIV, No.47, 1896, pp.255-256; “Interim report on the operations of the archaeological survey at Sigiriya in 1895,” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch), Vol.XIV, No.46, 1895, p.55; GA Joseph has accepted Bell’s opinion. See “Sigiriya paintings,” The
recorded in 1890s, this Buddhist monk made a critical examination of the paintings, remarking that they must be portraits of some of king Kassapa’s wives and that they were all very beautiful.\textsuperscript{191} Hence, most probably the opinion of Bell thus expressed on the subject matter of the paintings of Sigiriya originally derived from the concept that had earlier been expressed by this particular Buddhist monk.

It is interesting that standing amidst the two theories of Bell and Coomaraswamy, which will be discussed later, Havell also concludes that the subject matter of the murals of Sigiriya is a procession of royal ladies, supposed to be Kassapa’s queens, with attendants bringing offerings of flowers to a shrine which seems to be located in the Tusita heaven, for the figures appear as if half immersed in clouds, the usual convention for the heavenly spheres.\textsuperscript{192} But, there are difficulties in accepting Bell’s and Havell’s proposition that the paintings represent specific human beings. Particularly, Bell’s explanation that the reason for half figure portraits cut off by cloud formations was to economise space due to the concavity of the surface of the rock support appears to be untenable. For instance, within pockets A and B, close to the winding staircase, there is enough surface area more or less plane, to paint full female figures without distortion of the perspective of the viewer down below.\textsuperscript{193} In addition, it is obvious that Bell’s and Havell’s idea that the paintings portray the ladies of Kassapa’s court in a devotional procession either to the

\textsuperscript{191} AL’CK Murray, "The rock paintings of Sigiri," Ceylon Literary Register, (Supplement to the Daily Observer), Vol.VI, No.1, 4th August 1891, pp.85-86.

\textsuperscript{192} EB Havell, A handbook of Indian art, Indian Academy, Varanasi, 1972, p.203.

\textsuperscript{193} See M Somathilake, “The paintings of Sigiriya and their theme,” Sahitya Journal of the Cultural ministry of Sri Lanka, ed. SG Samarasinghe, Deepani Press, Nugegoda, 1995, pp.69-88. In addition, it is to be noted that according to the aesthetic of early Buddhist art and the theory of ancient Indian painting gleaned from literary sources, it was not considered proper to paint the likeness of human beings though sometimes practice seems to contradict the theory. AK Coomaraswamy, Christian and oriental philosophy of art, Dover Publications, New York, 1956, p.117.
shrine at Piduragala or Tusita heaven is a purely imaginative reconstruction of a creative mind and has no precedent in the artistic and social traditions of the region or the period. This is particularly evident from the fact that none of the graffiti at the site mentions such kind of notion though they have supported the other theories.

Apart from these views, in the middle part of the last century, Paranavitana also propounded another fictional theory to account for the paintings high up on the rock of Sigiriya. Evidently, this opinion forms part of his elaborate hypothesis, which attempts to explain Sigiriya as an expression of the cult of divine royalty, the entire palace complex being a symbolic reconstruction of the abode of the god Kuvera of Alakamanda. Certainly, it would appear that one of the stanzas given in chapter 39 of the Mahavamsa provided the clue for Paranavitana’s theory. After giving a thumbnail sketch of the site, the chronicle in which reference is briefly made to Sigiriya’s more important features, characterises the palace on the summit as a second Alakamanda and adds that Kassapa dwelt therein as if he were Kuvera.

It is a belief that Kuvera or Vaisravana is, in Buddhism as well as in Hinduism, one of the Dikpalas (guardians of the quarters) or Lokapalas (protectors of the world), his special function being the protection of the northern quarter. Particularly, in Buddhist cosmology, he is one of the four maharajas (great kings) who shared the sovereignty of the lowermost heaven, under the suzerainty of Indra, popularly known as Sakra the king of gods, residing in the heaven immediately above, at the top of Mount Meru. Kuvera being the ruler of the demigods known as yaksas, who are represented as guardians of treasures,

came in time to be regarded as the god of riches and the giver of wealth. Due to these facts, Paranavitana believes that the presence of these paintings halfway up the face of the rock would have suggested to the spectator that the palace of Kassapa was above the sphere of the clouds, i.e. in the heaven of Kuvera.

He further explains that the drawing of naturalistic clouds on the rock face would not have impressed the beholder and if the clouds had been fully personified, their nature would not have been evident to him, at first sight. The mastermind that was responsible for the designing of Sigiriya therefore made a compromise between these two methods and showed the clouds half personified and half naturalistically. The dark damsels rising from the clouds would thus represent the cloud maidens or damsels (Meghalatha) and their fair companions are the representations of the lightning princess (Vijjukumari), which issues forth from the cloud and is golden in colour. Paranavitana further presumes that Alakamanda being thus the place from which the clouds originate, one who is symbolically its lord can claim to be able to control rain on which the life of an agricultural community ultimately depends and this is the real political significance of the king's assumption of the title of 'Alakapati.'

Thus, eventually, the theory says that the

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197 S Paranavitana, "Sigiri: The abode of a god king," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch), Centenary volume 1845-1945, (New Series), Vol I, p.142. However, it is worth to note at this point that the Kailasa is now thought of more as the abode of Siva than of Kuvera. But Kalidasas in his Kumrasambhava, which was written to glorify Siva, refers to Kailasa as Kuvera-saila (the mountain of Kuvera); Kuvera in Sanskrit writings is the associate of Siva. See Ibid p.144.
paintings of Sigiriya are not the result of individual caprice nor an expression of aesthetic feeling as understood today, but a means of applying age-old and deeply rooted beliefs to political theory designed to bend the people to an individual’s will.

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that by itself the reference in the Mahavamsa to Kassapa or Sigiriya has hardly any significance, since it is obvious that Vessavana or Kuvera and Sakka are referred to in many similes in the Mahavamsa itself and in other Sinhalese literary works too. In addition, it is apparent that there is no instance of any king earlier or later in India or in any other eastern country having identified himself with Kuvera. Besides, with regard to the paintings, if they are intended to represent clouds and lightning, the fair ones to represent lightning and the dark ones the clouds, what explanation can be suggested for placing in the hands of the fair maidens flowers and in those of others some kind of box or casket is certainly problematic. In addition, it is clear that to the general viewer the meaning of a good painting is conveyed by its content, provided the message is not cryptic as in modern abstract art. Indeed, unless one had a knowledge of the literary allusions referred to by Paranavitana, which could hardly be expected from an average intelligent citizen of today, if not of the 5th century AD, one would not be able to associate the paintings with personifications of clouds and lightning in the context of Sigiriya being considered as the mountain Alakamanda and Kassapa being considered as the god Kuvera living on the summit. Hence, if Paranavitana’s theory is correct, then the artist has failed to convey his message to the general viewer; verily, the theory appears to be too complicated to explain.

199 This opinion has been expressed by PEE Fernando when the discussion was held on paper of S Paranavitana, “Sigiri: The abode of a god king,” Journal of the Royal Asiatic society (Ceylon Branch), Centenary Volume 1845-1945, (New Series), Vol.I, 1950, See p.165.
the paintings. In addition, if Paranavitana's interpretation is accepted then similar
coloured gods (though they are not maidens) at the Tivamka shrine and Pulligoda also
have to be identified as representation of lightning and clouds though they have nothing to
do with such recognition as already mentioned above. According to all these facts, as
Wijesekara also rightly pointed out, there is nothing in the content of the paintings to
imply that lightning should be associated with them.  

Among the other theories, Wijesekara is of the opinion that the paintings of
Sigiriya are the representation of a scene of the mourning of queens of Datusena or
Kassapa. As he believed, every one of those figures is portrayed in a studied pose of
mental preoccupation. There is nothing light about them. The step appears heavy even in
its rhythmic movement and swaying action. Deliberate and serious in expression, not one
figure betrays a smile. Buoyant with hope and pregnant with emotion not one strikes a
discordant note in the whole scheme of the composition. On this presumption, he
further states that the visitors refer to the figures as ladies of the court or queens of
Kassapa and this poignant theme of mourning permeates the spirit of a number of the
graffiti. As he pointed out, among these one even refers to a scene portraying a woman
with a broken lute in a state of lamentation, which is not available there now. Assuming
similar scenes to have found a place in the composition, the picture of sorrow would be
complete. Accordingly, Wijesekara believes that on Sigiriya rock, the grandest scene of
all Sinhalese painting mourning Kassapa may have been painted and concludes that as

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200 This opinion has also been expressed by PEE Fernando when the discussion was held on the paper read
by S Paranavitana, Ibid, See p.166.
201 Nandadeva Wijesekara, "There were no cloud damsels and lightning princess in Sinhalese painting."
203 Nandadeva Wijesekara, Early Sinhalese painting, Saman Press, Maharagama, 1959, p.46
for the patron, if the work was not undertaken by Kassapa himself, in which case the mourning must be for Datusena, it was done by a very close successor. Hence, it may be his repentant brother Moggallana. Although Wijesekara thus strongly believes that the whole scheme woven around such a central idea of deep loss or mourning may be for Kassapa or even his father, mainly based on epigraphical evidence, as we have already noted, it is obvious that one cannot obtain reliable information from the descriptions given in the graffiti alone particularly relating to the subject matter of the paintings of Sigiriya, since almost all the graffiti have interpreted the paintings in subjective and imaginative ways in subsequent periods.

As in the case of the theory presented by Paranavitana, according to another recent theory it is said that the whole court of Sigiriya consisting of queens, daughters and maidservants too could have been conceived of as celestial ladies attending upon Kuvera. According to the theory, this hypothesis is substantiated by two facts. Firstly, all the figures are females in contrast to the usual convention of depicting flower scattering celestials in pairs of males and females. Secondly, the ladies are not stereotyped generalized configurations of celestial beauties. Instead, they seem to belong to different phases of maturity and each maintains certain individual traits in outlook and expression. All of them are exceedingly charming and yet among them there is a mature and older figure with a sedate look, in contrast to the young maidens with near innocent charm.

In this surmise, it is further believed that the ladies often appear in pairs, each consisting of a yellow-complexioned damsel and a dark-coloured one. Many such pairs

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were apparently meant to represent a golden royal lady and her attendant dark-skinned maid and yet one such pair, golden-hued and dark-skinned, appears to be equal in status floating side by side in the same proud attitude and wearing nearly equally rich ornaments. According to the theory, it is noteworthy that the blues worn by the dark maiden is not always an indication of a lower rank as usually assumed, since it is also worn by another golden lady as well as by her maid. The dark skin, usually considered a sign of lower social status and less refined type, is evidently not confined only to the ladies’ companions. It is believed that this noteworthy feature in the Sigiriya painting recalls an item of information concerning Kassapa’s household as told in the *Mahavamsa*. It is recorded in the chronicle that Kassapa had two favourite daughters, Bodhi (light) and Uppalavanna (blue lily complexioned) together with whom he consecrated the newly reconstructed Isurumuniya temple, renamed as Bo-Upulvan Kasubgiri vihara. Consequently, the theory says that the pair of light complexioned and dark hued ladies could, therefore represent the two royal princesses whose complexion was apparently reflected in their names, deified as celestial beauties roaming the paradise of the god-king.206

However, as in the case of Paranavitana’s belief no doubt this is also another fictitious theory, which arose in a creative mind since it is not available in any reliable source. In addition, it is obvious that it is full of contradictory conclusions. For instance, it has been concluded that the ladies are usually depicted as being bare-breasted, but the bodices are worn by some of them in contradistinction to the standard custom where such

206 Ibid, p.41.
a garment is usually confined to women of lower status. At Sigiriya, it appears to have been used by mistresses and maids alike, although the latter are sometimes seen wearing an additional breast-band.\textsuperscript{207} In addition, according to the theory itself, it is obvious that "they seem to belong to different phases of maturity and each maintains certain individual traits in outlook and expression."\textsuperscript{208} Hence, these different 'mature' and 'elder' figures which form the subject of the murals cannot certainly be identified as Kassapa's daughters by any means, while similar dark and yellow coloured divine beings can be found even among the paintings of the Tivamka shrine and Pulligoda cave too.

Besides, on the subject matter of the paintings of Sigiriya, there is another recent theory, which is centred on the personal account of Swamy Gauri Bala, formerly a German Buddhist monk to Raja de Silva. Based on this opinion, De Silva has concluded that the theme of the paintings of Sigiriya is representation of goddess Tara of the Mahayana Buddhist pantheon, since Buddhism prevailed in Sigiriya area during the 5\textsuperscript{th} and 6\textsuperscript{th} centuries AD. As he concluded, the Mahayana doctrine was the reason for the presence of temples of this persuasion in and around the capital in the time of Kassapa I and his successor Moggallana I.\textsuperscript{209} Due to this belief, he concludes that the form, more or less life size, the blending of colours, the grace of movement captured for an instant, lend a feeling of peace and happiness to the mind of the viewer and the pleasure is increased by the suggestion of their being deities in the heavens identifiable as the goddess Tara, consort of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara.

\textsuperscript{207} Ibid, p.44.
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid, p.41.
According to the theory, all these create in the mind of the beholder a disinterested or detached judgement and the contemplation of beauty, which results in pleasure. This, then, is the meaning of the Sigiriya paintings and their significance is that the artists wanted their viewers to conceive piously the true beauty of the divinity of Tara for their serene joy and emotion. Thus he believes that the paintings of Sigiriya are, like other wall paintings in Sri Lanka, religious in content.\textsuperscript{210} Nevertheless, according to the short description given above, it is obvious that de Silva has not given any acceptable reason for his theory except only superficial characteristics of the paintings dealing only with emotions. Hence, it is needless to state that as in the case of the other theories, this is also a baseless, fictitious theory. But, the Buddhist identification of the themes of the paintings of Sigiriya that he believes is important, since it is more plausible than the other views, will be discussed later in detail.

Beyond doubt, of the various theories on the subject matter of the paintings of Sigiriya, the most popular one that prevails at present is that these paintings depict some \textit{apsaras}, which had been articulated by Coomaraswamy in the first part of the last century. He has reasonably concluded that the subject of the paintings at the site depicts celestial women, with their attendants, casting down a rain of flowers\textsuperscript{211}(Plate XIII). As some later scholars have also admitted, representation of the theme of supernatural \textit{apsaras} is a common feature among the ancient paintings throughout Asia\textsuperscript{212} and particularly this identification is in keeping with well-established South Asian traditions. Hence, it is not only the simplest but also the most logical and acceptable interpretation, especially since

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid, p.15.
\textsuperscript{211} AK Coomaraswamy, \textit{Mediaeval Sinhalese art}, Broad Campden, 1908, p.178; \textit{History of Indian and Indonesian art}, London, 1927, p.163.
they are shown among and half hidden by clouds in the sky, although the method of
displaying the clouds is different from the manner that has been followed by the painters
of Ajanta. 213 It is obvious that these clouds also harmonize with the rock-contours,
whatever else they may have been meant to serve and they, together with the poses of the
hands (mudras) and the traditional mode of depicting apsaras have combined to make
Coomaraswamy's view the most popular. 214 Consequently, most scholars today would
tend to agree with the basic notion that the figures of Sigiriya are celestial nymphs or
apsaras while some have added few supplementary descriptions to it. For instance, as one
such writer believes, they must represent some of those same heavenly apsaras who
bewildered the sight of Nanda and led him to desert his mistress for the religious life. The
reason for their presence on the rock is not far to seek. They were there to flatter the
transcendent vanity of a king. In many Indian works of art some great being is shown
surrounded by troops of flying celestials who arrive bearing offerings. Here, a whole rock
face once bore images of these divinely beautiful inhabitants of the heavens bearing their
tribute to the occupant of the glistening palace at the summit. 215

In contrast, as Prof. Ratnasuriya also stated in proposing the vote of thanks to the
paper presented by Paranavitana on “The abode of a god-king” in 1950, it is evident that
there can be many interpretations of Sigiriya and that the last word has not yet been said
about it. The archaeologist, the artist, the scholar and the historian will necessarily

212 PEP Deraniyagala, “Some sidelights on the Sinhalese monastery fortress of Sihagiri,” Spolia Zeylanica,
213 The celestial beings of Ajanta are not shown as cut off below the waist by clouds, as the damsels of Sigiri are.
instance, cave no 17 of Ajanta, where the apsaras are literally floating in space with fleecy clouds all about
them and rising well above the figures are conspicuous. MD Raghavan, “The Sigiriya frescoes,” Spolia
interpret this monument each in their own way. 216 But, on the whole most of the theories so far discussed clearly demonstrate the secular nature of the paintings of Sigiriya since it is believed that they might have some affinity to the royalty at the site. Nevertheless, it should also not be forgotten that although the paintings at Sigiriya are likely to be a representation of a secular tradition at first glance, 217 when only considering their superficial appearance and the main characteristics of the ruined royal centre at Sigiriya, some critics have concluded specifically on the basis of their subject matter, that they also belong to the Buddhist painting tradition, at least to the Mahāyāna school, 218 as in the case of the other extant mural paintings of the island. 219

It is to be noted at this point that the epigraphical evidence from the summit as well as from the western base of the Sigiriya rock prove its occupation by Buddhist monks and

216 This discussion was held on the third April 1950. For the details of this discussion please refer to S Paranavitana, “Sigiri: The abode of a god king,” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch), Centenary Volume 1845-1945, (New Series), Vol.1, 1950, pp. 162-183. For the opinion of Ratnasurya see p.164.
217 Sri Gunasinghe, “Buddhist paintings in Sri Lanka,” Vision of the Buddha: The Buddha and his teachings, ed. Naradha Maha Thero, Singapore Buddhist Meditation Centre, Singapore, 1964, p.2; He further states that these, however, are not examples of Buddhist paintings: the Sigiriya ladies are clearly of no religious significance; the flowers they carry are not offerings to the Buddha and they are not on their way to pay homage to him. Sri Gunasinghe, “Buddhist painting in Sri Lanka - An art of enduring simplicity,” Spolia Zeylanica, Vol.XXXV, Nos. 1 & 2, 1980, p.479; See also Nandana Chutiwongs and others, Paintings of Sri Lanka: Sigiriya, Central Cultural Fund, Colombo, 1990, p.47.
218 Of such critics, Wijesekara believes that it may be inferred that the paintings were in no way associated with Hinayana or its adherents. According to Culavamsa Kassapa himself was in disfavour with the Mahavihara monks who adherent to the Hinayana that the temple built on the rock presented by him was rejected by them. Nandadeva Wijesekara, Early Sinhalese painting, Saman Press, Maharagama, 1959, p.45.
monastic buildings from pre-Christian era as discussed in the third chapter in detail. In addition, according to the description given in the Culavamsa it is obvious that Moggallana handed over the two temples of Dalha and Dalhakondanna built on the Sigiriya rock to the adherents of the Dammaruchi and Sagali sects of the Mahayana school immediately after the death of Kassapa. These evidences clearly show that the site had a Buddhist association at least from the pre-Christian era to the period of fifth century AD while Kassapa was ruling there. More precisely, this establishes beyond doubt that at least Mahayana Buddhism prevailed at Sigiriya before and after Kassapa’s death in continuous succession for at least a period. Interestingly enough, such buildings are said to have survived until the tenth or eleventh centuries AD, though the writers of the graffiti in the 8th and 9th centuries AD do not make any mention of this.

But, it is noteworthy that another evidence in the Culavamsa mentions that the king Sangatissa II (611 AD), his minister and his son were assassinated by Mugalan II (614-619 AD) at Sigiriya. Similarly, it was recorded that Silameghavarna (617-626) had killed Mugalan II also on the summit of the Sigiriya rock. Unmistakably these help to understand the condition of the site at the time. Certainly, had the place been in occupation by the Mahayana sects in this subsequent period, the tragic events of wicked murders could not possibly be perpetrated. Hence, this shows that the site had been abandoned and jungle had overgrown at least after the first decade of the seventh century AD. This is further evident by the fact that even at the time of the eighth century AD the

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221 Nandadeva Wijesekara, Early Sinhalese painting, Saman Press, Maharagama, 1959, p.45.
224 Ibid, chap. 44; 60-61vv.
figures painted on the main rock appear to have been damaged and their colours faded. This shows that the paintings as well as the site had even then been neglected.

According to all these facts it is obvious that except for a short reigning period of Kassapa who created secular buildings there, the Buddhist religious nature, at least the Mahayana influence would have been predominant in the Sigiriya area for a very long period. In addition, according to the descriptions given in the previous chapters, particularly in the third chapter, it is obvious that the chronology of the paintings at the site also cannot be assigned to the reigning period of Kassapa with any certainty since there are not enough reliable sources. Consequently, the conclusion that the paintings of Sigiriya portray a number of nymphs or goddesses, who belong to the Buddhist tradition, can be accepted as the correct interpretation. In this assumption, the long eyes of these female figures and their enticing nature, the long shape of limbs including fingers, fully developed breasts, the postures, and the feelings found in the faces all these expressions indicate indirectly that they are a number of *apsaras* (Plates XIII and XX). Similarly, these paintings impress upon the onlookers that the flowers in the hands and the ornaments worn by the *apsaras* and the dark coloured figures of women, which can be identified as attendants, all represent the prosperity of heaven. This may be the reason why bright and shining colours like emerald and light yellow had been used in accordance with the concept as in the case of most of the *deva* figures of the ancient paintings of the two countries. In this presumption, it is particularly to be noted that the countenance of these female figures has much similarity to the portrayals of the nymphs and the Bodhisattvas painted at Ajanta. Certainly when one looks at these figures, the *apsaras* of

cave no 17, the figure of Padmapani Bodhisattva and the face of Indra both painted in cave
no 1 instantly comes to one's mind. Besides all these facts, the divinity of _apsara_ figures
is clearly indicated by the clouds represented below the waist or around the body and by a
sort of _Uma_ that some have on the forehead. Indeed, it is an established fact that this mark
is regularly used for the figures of Bodhisattvas and _devas_. Hence, as Bandaranayake
has also concluded, we can say with certainty that the Sigiriya ladies are celestial nymphs,
but probably had more than one meaning and function.

In contrast, according to the discussion so far it is clear that as in the case of the
themes of the Jataka stories and the life story of the Buddha, there is no close similarity or
connection, except in rare cases, between the Buddhist wall painting traditions of
peninsular India and Sri Lanka even in the context of themes of the thousand Buddhas,
Bodhisattvas, divine beings etc.

**Other themes:**

Apart from the above mentioned themes that have been used by the ancient
Buddhist mural painters of the two countries, the ' _Bhava-chakra_ ' or the wheel of life,
painted on the left wall of the veranda of cave no 17 at Ajanta is a unique concept of
philosophical import (Plate XXVI). The painting, which is still typical for all Buddhist
countries, represents two giant green hands hold the wheel that is partly obliterated and

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226 M Somathilake, "The tradition of wall paintings of Sri Lanka from earliest time to the twelfth century AD: Chronology and Themes," *Annual of the Department of Sociology*, University of Peradeniya, Bravi Press, Kandy, 1996/97, pp. 87-121.


when complete must have had eight compartments, further divided into sixteen in all. It is assumed that this wheel of causation represents an analogy with a Tibetan version and some scholars have concluded that this represents an earlier conception of ‘Samsara’ as narrated in the Saundarananda of Ashvaghosha, wherein Ananda therro while pointing out the absurdity of Nanda’s infatuation with paradise, tells him of the real nature of the world encompassed by the disasters of birth, disease and death and revolving still in the cycle of existence, whether in heaven, among men, in hell, among animals or pretas.

However, according to the arrangement, it is apparent that the painting depicts in its various compartments different facets of life: scenes from gardens, market places, the workshop of a potter, royal apartments, wooden sheds of the poor, monkeys and elephants all intended to show the endless surroundings in which beings are placed as a result of their past actions. Thus, although the painting is interesting, it is noteworthy that representations of this kind cannot be found among the paintings of other Buddhist sites of peninsular India or Sri Lanka, which belong to the ancient period.

As already discussed in the fourth chapter in detail, the decorative motifs are also one of the popular themes among the painters of both countries during the period concerned. This feature is more conspicuous among the larger scale ceiling decorations of Ajanta (Plate IX). As especially evident in the paintings of cave nos. 1 and 2, most of the caves of Ajanta are remarkable for the survival of such beautiful ceiling paintings of the

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halls, antechambers, shrines, chapels and verandas with side porches. As mentioned in the fourth chapter, in most of these caves, the paintings on the ceilings take the form of compartments filled in with a variety of designs, including floral patterns, birds, fruits, flying figures, comic figures and geometric and ornamental motifs etc. Hence, in contrast to the murals on the walls, it is obvious that the paintings on the ceilings of Ajanta are decorative in character and innumerable small panels form a rich treasure house of floral, vegetal and animal motifs etc. It is also evident that in most cases, the artist has demonstrated his keen observation of animal life and painted scenes like the fight of two cocks or buffaloes as in the case of the remaining ceiling paintings of cave no 17. In addition, as already mentioned in the first part of the chapter, among the other subjects of the ceiling paintings, the one showing foreigners in typical Iranian costume enjoying drinks and attended by male and female associates on the canopy of cave no 1 is particularly noteworthy. 233

When considering the decorative themes of the paintings of Sri Lanka, it is evident that there are not many paintings, which belong to this category. Nevertheless, according to the few extant decorative paintings it is evident that as in the case of the motifs of Ajanta and Bagh, the purpose of the decorative motifs of Sri Lankan murals was also to fill the empty space with pleasing designs. Consequently, the ceilings, columns, arches, borders and all the other empty spaces on walls or pillars or canopies were painted though

233 Some scholars have wrongly interpreted this scene as the representation of Khusrau II of Persia and his beautiful wife Shīrīn. For instance, see Debala Mitra, Ajanta, Archaeological Survey of India, Eleventh edition, New Delhi, 1996, p.25.
very few survive today. Although these decorative embellishments attained excellence, it is apparent that these always remained of secondary importance in the main scheme.\textsuperscript{234}

However, the most extraordinary and dramatic manifestations of the decorative art of the period are the very minute remnants of ceiling paintings in cave no 9 popularly known as Cobrahood cave at Sigiriya, and the outer ceiling of Dambulla cave. Of these, the decorative motifs in Cobra-hood cave record a sophistication unparalleled in the art history of the classical period in Sri Lanka. Fortunately adequate designs are still found on the ceiling to reveal a decorative scheme, which is remarkably rich, grand and well ordered. It is apparent that animated forms with all their vigorous movements and intricate details are made to conform to geometrical shapes of squares, diamonds, circles and straight lines. Thus, it is obvious that more attention has been paid to the details of the designs.

It is to be noted at this point that some scholars have concluded that here is a painter’s adaptation of the theme in comparison with the delicate patterns that ornament the halls of Ajanta and Bagh.\textsuperscript{235} But, as these scholars themselves have admitted, in spite of the inspiration of Ajanta the artists at Sigiriya display much originality in the successful integration of the animal forms into the strict geometric frames of diamonds and circles and these are without any parallels from Ajanta.\textsuperscript{236} Even though they themselves have concluded in another instance that the decorative motifs on the ceiling of the Cobra-hood cave are similar in style and concept to those found in cave nos.17 and 1 at Ajanta. According to them, particularly, the exuberance of these designs at Sigiriya seems closer

\textsuperscript{234} Nandadeva Wijesekara, \textit{Early Sinhalese painting}, Saman Press, Maharagama, 1959, p.49.
to the latest style of cave no 1 at Ajanta. Nevertheless, it is obvious that there are some conspicuous dissimilarities between the two ceiling painting traditions of Ajanta and Sigiriya particularly in the context of forms, line drawings and colouration etc. For instance, it is apparent that the Sigiriya ceiling painting has not been confined to the form of compartments unlike the ceiling paintings of Ajanta. In addition, the multi coloured lines of Sigiriya ceiling painting are much broader and more curvaceous than the line drawings of Ajanta, for which only black and white colours have been used. Hence, all these evidence suggest that these belong to two distinct traditions.

Although a number of fragmentary paintings of decorative motifs of the ancient period have been similarly found in many places within the ruined cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva, only one well-preserved painting was discovered near the Ruvanvali Dagoba. It is conspicuous that in the painting, the patterns consist of small circles and lozenges, elaborate and well designed arrangements of leaves and flowers of the lotus plant in different stages of development, with a bird, a dwarf, vase of flowers and dancing figures. A scroll formed by the leaves, bud and flowers of the lotus constitute the main motif of decoration. In addition, there are flowers compositely arranged in panels, flowers springing out of a foliated scroll and supporting a bird having a human head. It is marked by a variety of design, no two patterns or subjects being precisely alike.

236 Ibid, p. 47.
Except these decorative motifs, all the other themes of the ancient Buddhist mural paintings of both countries are intensely religious in tone and mostly centred round the Jatakas or the Buddha's previous lives, incidents from the life story of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Buddhist beliefs and teachings etc. In this context, it is obvious that each of the paintings tells its own story in subject matter, form and meaning. There is only one final goal of all the themes and there prevails an atmosphere of spiritual fulfilment and deep religious emotion as the main aim of the paintings. Indeed, it is evident that for illustrating these fundamental Buddhist virtues with actual examples culled mainly from the previous lives of the Buddha the stories have provided material of a unique nature a mechanism unrivalled by any other type of story. In most cases, all the weaknesses and virtues of humanity have found expression in one form or another. Consequently, a host of good things of lasting benefit to parents, teachers, elders, husbands, wives, servants, neighbours, citizens and kings can be learnt by all even today. Thus, it is evident that meant as they are for the edification of all devotees irrespective of their intellectual and spiritual attainments, specially the Jatakas do not go beyond human dimensions and cover no more than the simplest ethical propositions. Consequently, the most one could see in them, beyond the limits of their immediate social significance, is the goodness of the Buddha himself who, in this case, is looked upon as prototypical of the ethical man, the ultimate symbol of all virtue.


On the other hand, it is also obvious that sometimes without detracting from the sacred purpose of the paintings they integrated the larger and fuller life of the material world into the religious themes and thereby imparted an intensely humanistic character to their paintings. There are, therefore, intimate glimpses at monasteries of the throbbing and colourful everyday life of the period, which have been painted invariably with unflinching fidelity to truth. For instance, there are scenes from the life of the crowd with all its splendour along with the life of the devotee dedicated to devotion, piety and faith. Kings and queens surrounded by wealth, power, ordinary men and women in the glory of youth and engaged in the realisation of the moral sources of life, attract spectators’ attention. Accordingly, it is obvious that these themes generally afforded the painter an unlimited scope for depicting the whole gamut of human life from birth to death-men, women and children of all stations of life, from the king to the slave, from the rich to the beggar, from the saint to the sinner- in the crowded drama of sublimity and coarseness, love and hatred, joy and sorrow, triumph and tribulation, compassion and ingratitude, pageantry and poverty, longing and death all pervaded by an intense religiosity. Consequently, if a person reading the Jataka stories of Mahajanaka, Vessantara, Chaddanta or any other in the Jataka book derives a certain pleasure, a person looking at the paintings depicting these Jataka stories derives the same kind of pleasure. The only conspicuous difference is literature in the old tradition is an auditory medium while the paintings are a visual medium. Hence, no doubt that particularly these Jatakas

243 Shanti Swarup, 5000 years of arts and crafts in India and Pakistan, DB Taraporevala sons & co, Bombay, 1968, p.132.
are a remarkable collection of beautiful stories that have a flavour for everyone whatsoever his race or religion may be.\textsuperscript{245}

However, it is apparent that some mundane matters, which are available among the descriptions of some of the Jatakas, have also been included in these murals (Plates XVI, XVII and XVIII). For instance, the paintings in many of the caves of Ajanta represent interesting and spirited delineations of hunting scenes and battles etc.\textsuperscript{246} In addition, sometimes, the artists who did the paintings at the sites like Ajanta and Tivamka image house have depicted female figures, full of sex appeal and beauty in such a way as to arouse sensual feelings in the viewers. Certainly, special attention has been paid to such aspects as the gracefulness of those figures and how beautiful the figures look when viewed from various angles. The women including the most famous ‘toilet scene,’ the occasion of ‘consecration’ and most of the other episodes painted at Ajanta are conspicuous in this respect. Beyond these limits, it is noteworthy that in one of the panels of the paintings considered to be part of the Asanka Jataka painted at Tivamka shrine, a man and a woman both naked are lying on the ground embracing each other though the scene is now in a defaced condition. Sometimes, a person seeing this scene will derive sensual pleasure from it. Consequently one may conclude that the subject matter of these paintings are not entirely of a religious order, a certain amount of them being of a secular nature.

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that there is no erotic tendency at Ajanta or any other Buddhist painting sites of the two countries such as we notice in the classical art

of Europe or in the later Brahmanical sculpture of India. Certainly, to the artists of Ajanta and elsewhere a woman was a source of happiness and delight and her activities extended to all aspects of domestic, religious, moral and social life.\footnote{James E Alexander, "Notice of a visit to the cavern temples of Adjunta in the East Indies," Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Vol. II, 1830, p. 369.} For instance, among the paintings of women at Ajanta the best is perhaps of a black princess, which shows perfect modelling, exquisite decorative treatment and marvellous expression indeed without manifestation of any sensual feelings.\footnote{G Yazdani, "The wall paintings of Ajanta," Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Vol. XXVII, 1941, p. 20.} Certainly, it is evident that all these figures are associated with some aspect of the Buddhist beliefs or rituals, which have been derived from the Jatakas or the canonical texts. Concerning all these aspects, it can be reasonably concluded that the general atmosphere of these paintings suggests an earthly paradise, containing sacred attitudes and people with semi-divine beings.\footnote{Percy Brown, Indian painting, YMCA Publishing House, 1927, pp. 33, 72.}

But, in this context it has to be realized that these artists had knowledge of a larger and fuller life, other than that bounded by the temples. For instance, in most of the scenes of the murals, the king is seen surrounded by the pageantry of his court, with its entire attendant opulence and circumstance. Thus, although the murals as well as the scenes are fundamentally religious, they pulsate with vitality and action, showing again an interest towards the secularism, which is distinctly marked. Consequently, the viewers have been equally at home in ably representing the dazzling magnificence of the royal court, the simplicity of rural life and the hermit’s tranquil life amidst sylvan surroundings etc. For instance, the scenes of Vessantara Jataka of cave no 17 of Ajanta illustrates the prince as the very picture of the hermit and the poor Brahmin as an inexorable beggar. In the same
story, the illustration of prince Vessantara, with his consort, driving on the main road, shows different merchants in pursuit of their trade, which is a beautiful illustration of economic life in ancient India. In addition, costumes, customs, manners domestic life etc, appropriate to an eastern culture, have also been faithfully recorded and provide a rich source of information will be discussed in the next chapter in detail.

Thus, it is evident that before starting their work at a temple the painters have studied life around them and natural scenes of beauty with intense sympathy and appreciation of plant and animal life. As a result, they have lovingly treated such themes of flora and fauna as they have chosen to depict not only on canopies where animal forms have been largely used, but also on the walls. The elephants under the Banyan tree in the Chaddanta Jataka of cave nos. 10 and 17, the geese in the Hamsa Jataka and the deer in the Miga Jataka from cave no 17 at Ajanta, pigs in the Tundila Jataka and rabbit in the Sasa Jataka from the Tivamka shrine may be cited as few examples of the tender approach of the painter to the themes of animals. It is noteworthy that sometimes even minute scenes have been borrowed from the environment and inserted into the paintings. The scene of a train of ants walking on a trunk of a tree depicted in the Chaddanta Jataka in cave no 17 at Ajanta is one of the glaring examples.

Certainly, the painters not only possessed consummate skill in delineating both human and animal figures in vivid style, but their decorative genius in adorning ceilings, pedestals of columns and door and window frames created patterns and motifs of kaleidoscopic variety, each exhibiting extraordinary powers of conception and a highly

250 C Sivaramamurti, Indian painting, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1970, p.35.
developed technique. The panel in the ceiling of cave no 1 at Ajanta representing two freakish animals sporting with one another or the parrot in the ceiling of the same cave perched on a lotus stalk or the arhat shown flying in the ceiling of cave no 2 or the panel of fabulous animals in the hall of the cave or the delightful pairs of merry-makers on the door frame of the latter caves at Ajanta, as well as hundreds of other subjects similar to these, all show the versatility of the artist's mind, his love of beauty and his joyous outlook upon life. 252

**Buddhist canonical texts:**

At this stage, it is necessary to concentrate on Buddhist literature or the canonical texts that have been used by the painters, donors, incumbents or whoever the selecting authority of the themes was, since it is evident that there were many versions of the actual doctrines, which the Buddha is supposed to have preached. Thus, although it is evident that there are Pali and Sanskrit, northern (Chinese, Tibetan) and southern (Sinhalese) versions and speculations on even earlier or original Magadhi versions, possibly in oral form, it is to be noted that when the Buddha's life story has been reconstructed by scholars from these extant texts there is no specific agreement regarding the chronological sequence of the dates when these texts were written. 253 But, it is generally accepted that none of these was written down less than three centuries after his death and they display the special sectarian prepossessions of their authors. 254 However, it is obvious that at the time when the earliest pictorial representation of the Buddha's life was painted at Ajanta,

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(around second and first century BC) the Buddha legend had already evolved to such an extent that the main events in the life of the Buddha were handed down in all the literary sources in similar fashion without major differences in content. But, later, in the various Buddhist schools, which to a large extent developed their own literary activities independently of one another, new episodes were given literary form and incorporated into the traditional account of the life of the Buddha, without altering its basic content in any significant way.

In this context, although some recent studies have suggested that none of the inscriptions discovered at Ajanta give the slightest indication of the nature of the monastic sect in residence there and as a result we have no idea from which traditions and texts its monks derived their stories or commissioned the paintings, some other recent studies have reasonably concluded that there is a close relationship between Ajanta’s painted cycle of the life story of Buddha and the biography of the Buddha contained in the *Vinaya* of the school of the Mulasarvastavadin. For instance, it has been rationally found that the life story of the Buddha as represented in cave no 16 at Ajanta contains some elements that are part of the Mulasarvastivadin *Vinaya* version. Similarly it is revealed that the story of Simhalavadana in cave no 17 has also been painted mainly based on

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255 Andre Barcau and Amina Okanda, *Ajanta*, Brilbasi Printers, 1996, p.14; Parimoo, particularly regarding the Buddhist carvings, has expressed a similar idea. According to him, it is doubtful whether the artists necessarily followed written texts and these can at best be considered records of the known details of episodes. Ratan Parimoo, *Life of Buddha in Indian sculpture (Ashtamaha pratiharya): An iconological analysis*, Kanak Publications, New Delhi, 1982, p.4.
Mulasarvastivadin Vinaya⁵²⁷ In addition, it is believed that the Divyavadana, which draws on the Mulasarvastivadin Vinaya for a significant portion of its material, may have been the source for the wheel of life painted on the outer wall of cave no 17.⁵²⁸

Besides, it is believed that the murals of birth sequence of cave no 2 at Ajanta depict seven lotus flowers beneath the Buddha’s first seven steps, a detail specified in the Lalitavistara and suggesting that text as its source.⁵²⁹ Similarly it is established that most of the painted events of the life story of the Buddha at the other caves of Ajanta are also devoted to the version of Lalitavistara which contains the mythical life of the Buddha: the conception and birth of the master, the visit of Asita, Siddhartha at school and in the archery competition, the four drives of the Bodhisattva, Sujata offering alms to the Buddha, the offering of Tapassu and Bhalluka, the visit of the king of Magadha, the conversion of Nanda, the Buddha preaching on a lotus held by naga kings, the great assembly etc.⁵³⁰ Of these, particularly certain features of the story of the conversion of Nanda painted in cave no 16 indicate that Asvaghosha’s poem Saundarananda, also served as one of the artist’s inspiration. It is obvious that while this story is briefly alluded to in Pali canonical sources, the Ajanta painters gave considerable space to the heartbroken condition of the wife of Nanda after his induction into the monastic order and this seems to be echoing Asvaghosa’s poetic version.

Although it is evident that the painters or the monks or the donors of Ajanta have mainly devoted their attention to the Mahayana Sanskrit versions of the stories, when they

⁵²⁷ Ibid, pp.34-35 and 257; See also Himanshu Prabha Ray, The winds of change: Buddhism and the maritime links of early South Asia, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, p.154.
⁵²⁹ Dieter Schlingloff, Studies in the Ajanta paintings: Identifications and interpretations, New Delhi, 1987, p.35.
were selecting the themes for the murals, for the life story of the Buddha painted in Sri Lanka of the period concerned the artists have differently as well as thoroughly followed the Pāli versions of canonical texts as embodied in the Hinayāna.261

Apart from the life story of the Buddha, when attention is focussed on the Jataka stories, it is evident that some of these legends occur even in canonical Pitakas. Thus, at least the Jataka stories of Sukhavihari, Tittira and the Khandhavatta are found in the Cullavagga of Vinaya Pitaka and there are several other examples in similar Buddhist canonical texts. For instance, one of the minor books of the Sutta Pitaka (Charya Pitaka) consists of 35 Jatakas told in verse. It is to be noted at this point that the Sutta and Vinaya Pitakas are generally accepted as at least older than the third Council of Vesali.262 This conclusion may be confirmed by the fact that the Jataka scenes are found in early sculptured form on the railings round the stupas of Sanchi (first century BC), Amaravati (second century AD) and especially those of Bharhut (second century BC) where the titles of several Jatakas are clearly inscribed over some of the carvings.263 Accordingly, these bas-reliefs prove that most of the previous birth stories of the Buddha were widely known.

262 Edward J Thomas, The life of Buddha as legend and history, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1992, p.251; EB Cowell, The Jataka or stories of the Buddha’s former births, tr. Robert Chalmers, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, (reprinted) 1990, Vol.I, preface, pp.xxi-xxii. However, it is to be noted that the period assigned to the incidents referred to in the Jatakas is according to the scholars who have worked in the field and the trend of thought expressed in them, pre Buddhistic and post Vedic. This is also corroborated by the fact that the stories of atitakata cannot come under the category of a Jataka story unless it is a story of the past at the time of its narration and if their origin can be traced to the very lifetime of the Buddha, hence these references necessarily go back to the pre-Buddhistic times. De, MA Gokuldas, Jataka gleanings bearing on ancient Indian civilisation, (reprinted from the) Journal of the Department of Letters, Calcutta University Press, Vol.XXV, 1934, pp.1-3.
somewhere in the third century BC and were then considered as part of the sacred history of the religion. Although it is evident that the Jatakas existed before the rearrangement of the Buddhist canon at the third Council of Vesali, it is quite uncertain when these various birth stories were put together in a systematic form. Notwithstanding, it can be surmised that at first, they were probably handed down orally, but their growing popularity would ensure that there kernel, at any rate, would ere long be committed to some more permanent form.

However, according to tradition, it is believed that the 550 Jataka stories composed in Pali were taken to Sri Lanka by Mahinda Thero somewhere in the third century BC. It is in this commentary alone that the text of the Jatakas has come down to us. Indeed, the local tradition of Sri Lanka is that the original Jataka book consisted of the gathas or stanzas alone and that a commentary on these, containing the stories, which they were intended to illustrate, was written in very early times in Sinhalese. This was translated into Pali about 430 AD by Buddhaghosa who translated so many of the early Sinhalese commentaries into Pali and later this Sinhalese origin was lost. However, it is evident that subsequently, mainly based on these Pali Jataka stories few other Jataka collections have also come into being as in the case of the Sanskrit Jatakamala mentioned below.

266 Max Muller, Sacred Books of the Buddhists: Jatakamala, 1895, preface.
267 It is believe that the Sinhalese version itself was probably a translation of an older Pali work, as several of the tales have been preserved in other parts of the canon in a more ancient style. Edward J Thomas, The life of Buddha as legend and history, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1992, p.274.
In this context, when concentrating on the Jataka stories painted at Ajanta, at least two important texts appear to have served as the main textual sources for the artists. Of these, the foremost text is the Sanskrit Jatakamala of Aryasura. Particularly, the painted inscriptions of Ajanta mentioned in the fourth chapter, unmistakably testify to the popularity of Aryasura’s Jatakamala and suggest that the artists painting the murals are likely to have followed the version narrated in the text. For instance, some verses from this text were also painted along with the murals illustrating two of its stories in a veranda cell of cave no 2 at Ajanta as mentioned in the fourth chapter in detail. In addition, it was revealed that at least thirteen of the seventeen narratives painted in cave no 17 at the site are from Aryasura’s Jatakamala collection of thirty-four Jatakas; only four came from other sources. Besides, some scholars have reasonably concluded that a complete collection of the Jatakamala stories is painted along the inner front portion of cave no 16 while the Maitribala and Hasti Jatakas are unknown to the Pali Jataka collection, but included in Aryasura’s Jatakamala. Of these, the Maitribala Jataka is painted in cave no 2 and Hasti Jataka is painted in cave nos. 16 and 17 at Ajanta.

Besides this Sanskrit Jatakamala, it is obvious that the second textual source of the painters of Ajanta of lesser importance is the Pali Jataka collection. This continuing

269 It is to be noted at this point that the Jatakamala is also called Bodhisattvavadanamala for Bodhisattvavadana is synonyms with Jataka and indeed the Jatakas are nothing but Avadanas the hero of which is the Bodhisattva. Thus works like the Kalpanamanditika and Jatakamala often coincide with the texts of the Avadana literature and numerous Jatakas are also contained in the Avadana books, which will be discussed later. See. Maurice Winternitz, (tr. V Srinivasa Sarma), History of Indian literature. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1993, Vol.II, p.266.


272 Dehejia wrongly concludes that the Maitribala Jataka has been painted in cave nos 1, 16 and 17 at Ajanta. See Ibid, p.210.
appeal of the Pali Jataka collection is evident in cave no 1 where artists, patrons and monks chose to portray stories such as Sankhapala, Champeyya and Mahajanaka that are unknown to Aryasura’s *Jatakamala*. In addition, in relation to the Jataka story of Vessantara painted in cave no 17, it may be mentioned here that the Pali Jataka version calls it the Vessantara and Aryasura refers to it Visvantara, while the name Vaisvantara is given to it in the painted inscriptions at the site. Similarly, it may be noted that though Aryasura’s *Jatakamala* does not provide the name of *Brahmin Jujaka*, one of the painted inscriptions of Ajanta has given his name. It is therefore likely that the story of Vessantara illustrated at Ajanta is from a version, akin to that found in the Pali Jataka. Nevertheless, it is believed that the Sibi Jataka story which is represented in cave no 1 at Ajanta follows the version of the *Sutralankara* and not the Pali Jataka, which do not mention the pigeon episode. But, it should also not be forgotten that according to these few extant paintings alone one cannot conclude that one text takes clear priority over the other, since most of the narrative paintings of the site are already lost.

However, it has been revealed that unlike the painters of Ajanta, for the paintings of Jataka stories of the ancient period of Sri Lanka the artists, monks and donors have predominantly followed the Pali Jataka versions as embodied in the Hinayana tradition, as in the case of the themes of the life story of the Buddha as already mentioned above.

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Consequently, it is generally accepted that there are no known examples of Mahayana paintings existing in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, it is evident that at least in a later period, about twelfth or thirteenth century AD, the northern Indian version of Buddhism in the Sanskrit form also began to appear as can be seen from the paintings of Maitribala Jataka of Tivamka shrine, which does not occur in the Pali Jataka collection. In addition, although it belongs to the life story of the Buddha, the story of the gift of the elephant received by prince Siddartha which is believed to have been painted in the cave of Maravidiya of Dimbulagala is included only in the book Lalitavistara and is not found in Pali literature though the text belongs to the Sarvastivadi sect. If the theme of the painting of the cave of Maravidiya is the story narrated in the Lalitavistaraya, it is evident that in addition to the Maitribala Jataka painted at Tivamka image house of Polonnaruva, in the 12th century AD, to which the Dimbulagala painting also belongs, themes from various Buddhist sects, apart from the Pali versions, particularly the popular stories, got assimilated into Sri Lankan Buddhism.

It is equally interesting to note that apart from the Jataka stories and the events of the life story of the Buddha mentioned above, the stories narrated in the Avadana literature have also been used by the painters, at least at Ajanta, as the themes of the murals. The word Avadana means a “noteworthy deed” generally in the sense of “a heroic deed,” “a feat” with the Buddhists a “religious or moral feat” and then also the “story of noteworthy deed or feat.” Such a feat may consist of the sacrifices of one’s own life, but

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277 Nandasena Mudiyanse, Mahayana monuments in Ceylon, Gunasena and co, Colombo, 1967, p.76.
also merely of a gift of incense, flowers, ornaments, gold and precious stones or the erection of sanctuaries like stupas and so on. These stories, as a rule, show that "black deeds bear black fruits and white deeds bear white fruits." Hence, as in the case of the Jatakas they are also Karman stories, which show how the actions of one existence are very closely connected with those of former or future existences.\textsuperscript{280} Thus, just like the Jatakas, the Avadanas are also a kind of sermon. It is therefore usually told, by way of introduction, where and on what occasion Buddha related the story from the past and at the end, the lesson is deduced from the story by Buddha. A regular Avadana then consists of a story of the present, a story of the past and a moral. If the hero of the story of the past is the Bodhisattva, this kind of Avadana can also be called a Jataka. There is another special kind of Avadana, namely those in which the Buddha, instead of telling a story of the past, gives a prophecy of the future. Like the usual story of the past, this story of the future serves to explain the present Karma.\textsuperscript{281}

It is evident that all these kinds of Avadanas occur sporadically in the Vinayapitaka, but are mostly to be found in large collections, which were compiled either purely for the purpose of edification or with literary ambitions as well.\textsuperscript{282} However, due to their popularity, it is significant that some of these stories have been depicted on the walls of Ajanta. For instance, on the left wall of the left aisle in cave no 1 at Ajanta, after the fourth cell door there is a painting, which was formerly thought to be a part of the

\textsuperscript{281} Ibid, p.267.
\textsuperscript{282} Ibid, p.267.
Mahajanaka Jataka,²⁸³ but Schlingloff has correctly identified this portion as the story of Kalyānakārin,²⁸⁴ which indisputably occurs in Avadana literature.²⁸⁵ In addition, below the Vidhurapandita Jataka, of cave no 2 at the site is the Pūrna Avadāna, which is to be found in the Divyavadana.²⁸⁶ Similarly, the right wall between the two pilasters of cave no17 depicts with great effect one of the largest compositions, the story of Simhala’s conquest of Sri Lanka as also narrated in the Divyavadana,²⁸⁷ formerly, known as the

²⁸⁴ Dieter Schlingloff, “Kalyanakarin’s adventure: The identification of an Ajanta painting,” Artibus Asiae, Vol.LXXVIII, pp.5-28; Studies in the Ajanta paintings: Identifications and interpretations, New Delhi, 1987, pp.81-85; See also MN Deshpande, “The murals: Their theme and content,” Ajanta murals: An album of eighty-five reproductions in colour, ed. A Ghosh, Archaeological Survey of India, 1967, p.36; Debala Mitra, Ajanta, Archaeological Survey of India, Eleventh edition, New Delhi, 1996, pp.23-26. The story of Kalyanakarin runs thus. The generous prince Kalyanakarin along with his wicked younger brother set out on a voyage to obtain treasure. On their return journey, the ship sank but Kalyanakarin succeeded in saving himself and his brother. In order to get possession of the jewels, the wicked brother blinded Kalyanakarin while he was asleep and returned home with his loot. In the course of wanderings Kalyanakarin reached the capital of a king. The king’s daughter chose him as her husband. After regaining his eyesight by means of a ‘satyakriya’ (solemn profession of truth), the prince returned along with his wife to his father’s kingdom and ruled there after the death of his father.
²⁸⁵ It is evident that there are no less than ten known versions of the Kalyanakarin story; three in Sanskrit, four in Chinese, two in Tibetan and one in Uigur. However the Sanskrit name of the prince Kalyanakarin is to be found in Bodhisattvakavadanakalpalata while the evil brother is called Akalyana in the text. See Dieter Schlingloff, “Kalyanakarin’s adventure: The identification of an Ajanta painting,” Artibus Asiae, Vol.LXXVIII, pp.5-28.
²⁸⁶ The Divyavadana, ed. EB Cowell and RA Neil, Cambridge, 1886, p.24. In the bottom, left was found Puma in front of Buddha signifying his conversion. To the right is a boat in danger and its owner, apparently Bhavila, the brother of Puma, praying for succour, in response to which an angel, followed by a monk, apparently Puma, as narrated in the Avadana, comes to his rescue. Above this is the sandalwood monastery built by Puma and said to have been visited by Buddha. See Debala Mitra, Ajanta, Archaeological Survey of India, Eleventh edition, New Delhi, 1996, p.32.
²⁸⁷ The Divyavadana, ed. EB Cowell and RA Neil, Cambridge, 1886, pp.523-28. See also Madanjeeth Singh, The cave paintings of Ajanta, Themes and Hudson, London, 1965, p.29. According to the story, Simhala was the accomplished son of a rich merchant Simhaka. Despite his father’s warning, he set out on sea voyage in the company of five hundred other merchants. Simhaka’s fears came true, for the ship, loaded with precious cargo, was wrecked and the merchants were cast ashore near a city of ogres called Tamradvipa. These wicked, man-eating women lured on the merchants with their charms and devoured them all. Simhala himself however, was miraculously saved by the celestial white horse, the Bodhisattva and was flown away to Jambudvipa. Later, an ogre who had earlier failed to entice Simhala lured the king Simhakesari into admitting her to his harem and eventually, with some of her friends, she devoured the king and all his family. Simhala then raised a powerful army, drove away the ogresses and colonised their island. Tamradvipa was thus renamed Simhaladvepa.
‘landing of Vijaya in Ceylon,’ supplemented by some details from the Valahassa Jataka. Thus, although it is obvious that the painters of Ajanta have used Avadana literature considerably for their paintings, there is no any evidence to show that the selecting authority of the themes of the paintings of Sri Lanka has used this Avadana literature for their murals during any period of history of the island.

According to the discussion so far, it is obvious that instead of a close relationship, a significant difference can easily be noted to a great extent between the murals of peninsular India and Sri Lanka in the context of themes and the cannons used. These differences unmistakably indicate that they represent two distinct traditions and this may be mainly due to the different approaches and diverse cannons used by the selecting authorities of the themes of the murals of the two countries. But it should also not be forgotten that though these authorities were bound fairly closely by the literary tradition of a particular school, which can usually be recognized as Hinayana or Mahayana, they nevertheless retained a certain degree of freedom to pursue other traditions, which belonged to both these sects as evident from these murals themselves.

288 Fergusson and Burgess stated that whether this has any reference to the legend of Sinha or Siha as narrated in the Mahavamsa is not quite clear and they further concluded that whether this identification can or cannot be maintained there is little doubt that most of the other pictures in this cave do refer to the conquest of Ceylon by Vijaya. James Fergusson and James Burgess, The cave temples of India, Oriental Books Corporation, Delhi, (reprinted) 1969, pp.313-315. Nevertheless, it is clear that these authors have not been able to understand the difference between the two stories of Vijaya legend narrated in the Mahavamsa and in the Simhalavadana of the Divyavadana. See Ibid, p.315 and its first footnote. See also; Ajanta paintings twenty plates in colour, Lalit Kala Academy, Calcutta, New Delhi, 1956.