Chapter Seven

Social context of the paintings

The term ‘art’ has a wider connotation in the South Asian region, as distinct from its current interpretation in modern societies where it pertained mainly to creative work. In the Indian and Sri Lankan context, in antiquity, creative work, interpretations and craft fall under this definition besides including many other activities that enrich life and make it enjoyable and spiritual. Consequently, the practitioners of such artistic works were also respected members of the society, particularly since most of these creations were affiliated either to religious beliefs or rituals of the society. As a result, their merits and services were also recognised and rewarded by the various categories of society. ¹ Accordingly, it is clear that the role of the artist is, in no way, insignificant in a study where the primary aim is an understanding of Indian and Sri Lankan art. In this context, particularly one has to discover the mental alertness of the artist, his desires and aspirations, his concept of art and of its functions in life, his conception of man and nature, his theory of art and point of view in criticism, if he had formulated any, and his treatment of the subject matter and what it meant to him etc² since indeed, a fuller understanding of

¹ IM Vittalmurthy, “The patronage of art: Some recent trends,” Art and life in India the last four decades, ed. Josef James, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1989, p.132. According to the Marxist approach also, it is believed that in the same way as art as a whole, being a form of social consciousness, is determined in the final analysis by the economic development of society, so the life of the artist, his work, his spiritual concepts, his consciousness, political convictions, philosophical views, aesthetic ideals and ethical principles are all moulded and conditioned by social being, by those social relationships which link him to his environment. Z Apresyan, Freedom and the artist, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1968, p.180.
any Indian or Sri Lankan art specially of the ancient period, would require a comprehension of all these aspects.

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that art activity in ancient India and Sri Lanka involved different sections of society besides the artisans who were responsible for creating such monuments; for instance, various patrons for financing different projects, priests for consecrating the monuments, devotees for providing labour or assisting the artists and so on. Hence, this multilateral process has to be comprehended in its totality and in its segments too, in order to bring out a profile of artists, patrons and chief incumbents and their interaction in relation to the creation of the works of art. Thus, ultimately it is obvious that art and the artist cannot exist independently of the society given any period of history and that there is no such thing as artistic creativity isolated from the social environment, in which the artist lives and works. Accordingly, it is understandable that as in the case of the overall art, the social context of the art is also an important aspect. Certainly, this would be investigated in an attempt to present an inter-disciplinary study combining art history and social history, as we have already noted, since art activity is also a social process in which the artist, the work of art and the art public are interfacing elements.

Thus, it is noticeable that art is a component of the overall historical process and the subject of art history is an investigation of such artistic works in which this historical process is analysed as it is understood today. In this context, it has to be realized that a work of art may be viewed mainly from two angles, artistic and aesthetic; the artistic

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aspect may be said to refer to the product of the artist, while the aesthetic aspect refers to the effect it produces upon the viewer. Of these, according to the artistic aspect, a creation of art may attract or impress one by its rhythmic composition, expressive form, charming line, colour combination and skilful workmanship etc, as we have discussed the elements of Buddhist mural paintings of India and Sri Lanka in the fourth chapter. This, to a certain extent, is an emotional reaction; but there still remains something else which one tries to comprehend, but fails. This comprehension depends on an understanding of the idea, theme and meaning of form etc. No doubt, this involves, on the part of the spectator, an intellectual operation akin, in some measure, to that of the artist on whom devolves the responsibility of giving visual form to a particular idea and to endow it with an easily understandable meaning. As a result, the artist has to be equipped to deal with all levels of people: the pandita (the scholar), bhakta (the devotee), rasika (the critic) acharya (the teacher) and alpabuddhijana (the common man) etc.

However, of the overall art, according to the context of the thesis, in this chapter the primary aim is to understand only the social context of the Buddhist mural paintings of India and Sri Lanka; the painters and their social position; patrons of the paintings and their interaction with the painters’ works; active participation of the Buddhist monks and their influence on the painters; viewers and donors; the creativity and the limitations of the

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7 SK Saraswati, “Indian art: Artist’s point of view,” Indian aesthetics and art activity. Proceedings of a seminar, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1968, p.89. It is certain that the true value of an understanding of art lies in its expressive nature. Particularly, by enriching our lives and freeing and translating our emotions, it replaces thought and feeling with full and significant experience and opens our eyes to true being. Margaret H Bulley, Art and understanding, BT Bats Ford Ltd, London, 1937, p.77.
painters; social perspectives of the painters; and viewer response. Of these larger issues, the under-mentioned themes would receive more attention: what are the visible effects of shifting political and religious patronage? By what means does the patron share in the selection of subjects and influence the way this is represented in paintings? To what extent do chief incumbents of the Buddhist temple act as intermediaries between donors and artists? How do the patrons and artists perceive themselves? What are the benefits of patronage for the patron or what is the artists or Buddhist monks' contribution for such patrons etc.

**Painting in society: The painters and their social status:**

As in the case of other artistic works, it is evident that the Buddhist mural painting traditions of the two countries are also the co-operative effort of a large number of people: painters, monks, kings, elite and laity who patronised the Buddhist monasteries and helped execute the paintings. No doubt the painters come foremost in the list since execution of painting is their main trade and they are the creators of murals. But, it is interesting to note that both Indian and Sri Lankan painting of the ancient and medieval periods is largely an anonymous art. This applies specially to the early Buddhist murals, which provide no means of identifying the artists and this is only partly true for the later period, since several Mughal paintings bear signatures. Hence it is needless to express that it is difficult to determine the social status of these *silpis* i.e. artists of the two countries during the ancient period or even at least their names.

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However, in this context, it is to be noted that the term *silpa* designates any or all kinds of arts in the Indian tradition. It is a pervasive term that includes within its ambit anything creative, imitative, ideational or skilful which in one sense or the other involves dexterity of hand or mind or both. *Silpa* also implies a technique, ceremonial act, an artefact indeed anything, which either leads to or is a tangible product of some craft (*kraatu*) or (*maya*) guild included. Besides this general interpretation, the term *sippam*, in a Buddhist text, constitutes all learning that exists in this world; the only exception to this rule being the learning in the three Vedas. All the rest is indeed *silpa* (*ave sesani sippam namanti*). In the *Manorathapurani*, another Buddhist text, *sippa* comprises *sara* (essence), which only a few can comprehend. This exalted status of *sippas* in the Buddhist texts is supported also by instances of the elite who practiced them. The Buddha is adept in them so is the Bodhisattva Velama. This is particularly evident from the facts given in the *Jataka* stories that the Bodhisattva was born either as a mason or a smith or a devil-dancer or a silver smith or a carpenter as already noted in the previous chapter.

In addition, the *Digha Nikaya* mentions the high military officials of royal birth also among the other practitioners of *silpas*. The *Digha Nikaya* further mentions not less than 20 such *sippas*, which are indicated by their practitioners. They consisted of elephant-riders, horse riders, charioteers, archers, sword bearers, camp marshals, camp followers, military officers of high birth, military scouts, brave men, warriors (*camma*).

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jodhino) home-born slaves, cooks, garland makers, washermen, weavers, basket makers, potter, ganaka, muddika and others (annam pi evam gatam puthu sippayatanani).

According to this text, all these people practising their crafts enjoyed the fruits of their crafts (sippam phalam upajivanti) and thus maintained themselves, their parents, children and friends. They also afforded daksina to Brahmans-sramanas for attaining bliss (sukha vipaka). This sukha vipaka (consummation of happiness) is explained in the commentary as ista vipaka (consummation of desired).14 In addition, it is interesting to note that the commentary adds citrakara, bhrmakara, kuttaka, lekhaka and vilivakara also to the Digha Nikaya list. However, a scrutiny of the Digha Nikaya list seems to indicate not more than 6-7 categories which altogether constituted silpa e.g. those relating to service, including military and royal service, vratis, manufacture of utility goods for consumption of the community, trade, agriculture, entertainment and in some cases, learning.15

As regards their status, crafts are regarded in a different manner according to their context. Certainly, it is obvious that the Buddhist texts reflect ambivalence in regard to the status of crafts. The Vinaya Pitaka refers to two kinds of crafts; low and high crafts. Low craft means: the craft of basket-makers, the potters’ craft, the leather workers’ craft, the barbers’ craft or whatever is disdained... despised in these districts— that means low craft. High craft means: reckoning on fingers (muddi), calculation (ganana), writing (lekhā), what is not disdained... what is esteemed in these districts—this means high crafts.16 It also appears from the Buddhist texts that silpas were respected even though some of them

were high and some low since their most exalted status are qualified as jnana. However, it should not be forgotten that based on such random statements, which are often contradictory, it is difficult to draw a hard and fast line to delineate a distinction of birth between those who followed different types of crafts.

Though the above statements indicate Buddhist attitudes towards artists and their social status, unfortunately nothing has been mentioned in these regarding the ancient painter’s position. Besides these Buddhist texts, although various Sanskrit sources also present some details relating to the status of Hindu painters, it is doubtful whether these discuss the actual status of painters, since artists have often traced their descent from the ancient sages or divine or semi-divine craftsmen like Kasyapa, Visvakarma and Narayana or have claimed adeptness in the theory of these early exponents of the silpasastra. Although these indicate that the ancient Indian artists claimed an exalted social status, it is obvious that this had to be reconciled with a division of ancient Indian society into varnas, a four-fold classification of society. Consequently, the silpa as vrtti was regarded as means of livelihood exclusively for sudras, the lowest category of the society in ancient India and the knowledge of arts and crafts was relegated to the position of a low

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19 But, it has to be admitted that artisan guilds in India were limited in the number of their artisan members and moreover such guilds were not very numerous nor easy to obtain at will. Karl Khandalavala, “The chronology of caves 16, 17, 19, 26, 1 and 2, at Ajanta and the Ghatotkacha cave,” The art of Ajanta: New perspectives, ed. Ratan Parimoo and others, Books and Books, New Delhi, Vol.I, 1991, p.115.
20 For a collection of these references please refer to C Sivaramanur, The painter in ancient India, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1978, pp.6-10.
21 See SC Raychoudhary, Social, cultural and economic history of India (Ancient times), Surjeet Publications, Delhi, 1985, p.159.
level\textsuperscript{23} though it has now been accepted that the \textit{varna} divisions were never the functioning groups of the social order, the principle groups of social interaction being families, lineages, clans and \textit{jatis}.\textsuperscript{24}

Some scholars have suggested that the artists' guild sometimes evolved into a \textit{jāti}, functioning therefore both as a guild and as a caste.\textsuperscript{25} It is to be noted, as Misra has reasonably concluded, that the \textit{varna-jati} model or the caste concept does not seem to be appropriate in the study of the artist's status as it theoretically bunches the \textit{silpis} together within the fold of Sudras and fails to recognise the different facets of artist's activity.\textsuperscript{26} This is particularly evident from the fact that the social status of the artists in ancient India is illuminated by the fact that instances are known of Sutrādhārās, Silpis and Rupakāras who are eulogised as knowers of the \textit{Sastras} including the \textit{Vedas},\textsuperscript{27} which had particularly been 'banned' for the Sudras. In addition, it is to be noted that an inscription refers to an artist whose name was Chhitaku as an ocean of five sciences, a perfect master of sciences as well as proficient in the \textit{silpa sastra}. Mandana, his younger brother is also described as \textit{Sastrajapi}.

\textsuperscript{28} Similarly, in the early medieval period, in matters of their specialised function artists seem to have been inter-linked with Brahmāna priests

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\textbf{Prabha Ray, Monastery and guild: Commerce under the Satavahanas, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986, p.191.}
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\textsuperscript{24} Himanshu Prabha Ray, Monastery and guild: Commerce under the Satavahanas, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986, p.192.
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probably with varying degrees of freedom about interpretation of religious or sastric requirements of work.29

Thus, at least some artists seem to have been well educated and truly professional. Consequently, by being able to induce favourable alteration in levels of occupation, income, acculturation and prestige, artists were able to achieve social mobility in their status. That some of them acquired the status of feudal chiefs is conveyed by titles like Rānaka, Thakkura and Sāmanta designating these artists, which will be discussed later in detail. Thus, references to plurality in the social status of different kinds of artists including ordinary workmen may help in appreciating social mobility of a class, which was traditionally relegated to the rank of the fourth Varna in the hierarchy of ancient Indian social structure.30 Some of these artistic works, which were practised by these artists, were also respectable trades during the ancient period. The manuscript Manasollasa, which is attributed to Somesvara the Western Chalukya king who has discussed painting elaborately in one chapter31 as discussed in the fifth chapter is an example in this respect. This clearly confirms the fact that at least the art of painting was a respectable trade during the ancient period, especially since much of it was associated with religious beliefs and rituals.

According to the above observation, the most appropriate way is to concentrate on information from inscriptions and to counterbalance this with descriptions given in the literary texts. Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that as in the case of the textual sources there are certain inherent limitations in these inscriptions too. Primarily, these inscriptions

29 Ibid, p. 69.
30 Ibid, p. 70.
recorded only the acts for which they were commissioned to be engraved.\textsuperscript{32} Hence, although these references are helpful to understand the social status of the artists to a considerable extent, as will be discussed later, a definite scheme regarding the mention of artists is conspicuously absent in them.\textsuperscript{33} However, both these epigraphical and textual sources clearly demonstrate the growth of different classes of artists\textsuperscript{34} or silpis including different types of craftsmen, smiths, painters, carpenters etc. These were all members of the wider group of artisans during the ancient times. This indicates that the artist in ancient India was not an isolated institution; in the social hierarchy, he belonged to a general class of artisans engaged in various crafts. Historically, therefore, his position and his craft have to be related to a kindred group of artisans and their occupations.\textsuperscript{35}

Of these various kinds of artists, when attention is particularly focussed on the Buddhist mural painters of India, it is evident that as in the case of the other artistic works of the subcontinent there is not one mural fragment bearing the name of an artist, though several painted inscriptions are available at Ajanta. All the painters of all the Buddhist

\textsuperscript{31} See Abhilasitārtha Cintāmāni or Mānasollāsa, ed. GK Shrigondekar, Gaekwad's Oriental Series, No.LXXXIV, 1939.
\textsuperscript{33} But, it is to be noted that particularly in the Indian context there are certain records exclusively by Sutradharas, in which these artists find specific mention as the designers and the executors of the monuments that will be discussed later. See also R.N. Misra, Ancient artists and art activity, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1975, p.34.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, p.11.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p.1.
murals of peninsular India are therefore unknown except in one case. Hence, the encounter of a small inscription, which included the name of an artist, is unique and important. In the midst of the life story of the Buddha directly above the scene of prince Siddhartha’s archery contests, depicted in cave no16 at Ajanta, this brief inscription reads “srī yugadhara sūtradhāra.” It may be simply translated as Sri Yugadhara the Sutradhara. Beyond doubt the inscription thus gives the name of one Sri Yugadhara who, by designation or profession, was a Sutradhara. Hence, although brief this epigraph is certainly extraordinary and significant. Though the meaning of title Sutradhara is not precise today, according to the descriptions given in the ancient inscriptions some scholars have suggested that when painting, drawing, sculpture, woodwork, architecture etc were multidisciplinary functions, Sri Yugadhara may have been the painter who

36 Misra wrongly located this inscription in cave no 15. (See R.N. Misra, Ancient artists and art activity, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1975, p.37). In fact, the inscription occurs in the main hall of cave no 16. It lies on the right wall of the right aisle, between the second and the third cell. It is at a height of four feet nine inches from the ground and so it is almost at eye level. It is engraved on a fragmentary painting which has as yet remained unidentified, inserted between panels showing Sujata offering food to Buddha on the left and prince Siddhartha going to school on the right. The characters have been very finely and thinly incised on the dark green surface of the wall plaster. See MK Dhavalikar, “Sri Yugadhara - A master artist of Ajanta,” Artibus Asiae, Vol.XXXI, No.4, 1969, p.302. The language of the record is Sanskrit and the script, on closer observation, can be said to bear a striking resemblance to the characters of the Vishnukundin charters. All the letters display peculiarities of the Vishnukundin script, which was the Brahmi alphabet of the southern variety. Thus the paleography of the characters in the painted inscription makes it amply clear that it belongs to the Vishnukundin epoch, which covers a period of two centuries from the end of the fourth to the beginning of the seventeenth century AD. However, it is to be noted at this point that the chronology and the genealogy of the Vishnukundin kings are a matter of controversy. It may be stated in this connection that cave no 16 in which this painted inscription occurs contains a large epigraph engraved on the left sidewall at the extreme end outside the Veranda. (See VV Mirashi, Inscriptions of the Vakatakas: Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Ootacamund, 1963, Vol.V, pp.112-119). As stated therein, the cave was the gift of Varahadeva, who was the minister of the last known Vakataka monarch Harisena whose reign is generally dated to the last quarter of the fifth century AD. The inscription of Varahadeva also makes a special mention of the cave having been embellished with paintings on its walls. Stylistically also the paintings in this cave have been taken to be in the Vakataka tradition. See Walter Spink, “Ajanta and Ghatotkacha: A preliminary analysis,” Ars Orientalis, 1966, pp.140-141. The inscription mentioning the name of an artist (Yugadhara) can therefore also be ascribed to the last quarter of the fifth century. For a detailed account of this inscription please refer to MK Dhavalikar, “Sri Yugadhara - A master artist of Ajanta,” Artibus Asiae, Vol.XXXI, No.4, 1969, pp.301-308.
finalised the murals in cave no 16 at Ajanta. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the exact meaning of the title Sutradhara and the social status of the titleholder in detail to comprehend the actual social status of the Buddhist painters of the time.

Although the term Sutradhara occurs in several inscriptions and in various Silpasastra texts it is obvious that the epigraphical data does not corroborate what the literary sources state. For instance, while the position and the duties of a Sutradhara together with the qualifications required have been prescribed in detail in the texts on ancient Indian architecture, the term has also often been employed in inscriptions to denote something altogether different. For example, in the manuscript Manasāra, the chronology of which remains uncertain, artists are first divided into four categories. Together they form the guild of artists, each expert in his own department, but possessing a general knowledge of architecture as a whole. They consist of the chief architect (Sthapati); the draughtsman or the designer (Sūtragrāhin); the painter (Vardhaki); and the joiner (Sūtradhāra) respectively. The Manasāra further describes that the chief architect or Sthapati is expected to be well versed in all artistic work and he must possess knowledge of all the Vedas and all the Sastras. A similar qualification is demanded of each of the other three artists, but the Sūtragrāhin is expected to possess an expert knowledge of draughtsmanship, the Vardhaki of painting and the Sūtradhāra of

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38 The extent work of Manasāra, which appears to be a later version, perhaps came into being sometime between the 11th and 15th centuries AD. The original work may have been composed in the Gupta period. Sures Chandra Banerji, A companion to Sanskrit literature, Motilal Benarsidass Publishers, Delhi, Second edition, 1989, pp.237-238.
39 PK Acharya, Indian architecture according to Manasāra, Bombay, 1927, p.137.
carpentry. Thus, it is evident that the position and status of the Sutradhara as prescribed in the silpasatra works is the lowest in the hierarchy of artists. It would appear that it was his duty to assist all the three superior artists as the joiner and further, he was also expected to possess an expert knowledge of carpentry. He was thus relegated to the background in the artistic sphere, being placed in a secondary position in the field.

But certainly, this is all the more enigmatic in the light of evidence furnished by a number of epigraphical records in different parts of India, although the word Sutradhara does not occur in the early inscriptions, that is, those, which belong to the pre-Gupta period. But, at least from the fifth century onwards the word Sutradhara begins to occur in several epigraphical records and continues for a long time until about the 15th century AD. If the context in which the term Sutradhara is used as also the meaning, which is

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implied it is taken into consideration, it becomes clear that the duties of a Sutradhara were multifarious. For instance, the Sutradhara is mentioned as a person to whom the work of engraving the record was entrusted in a few records.\textsuperscript{42} Sometimes, it appears that the Sutradhara was also adept in the art of sculpture.\textsuperscript{43} In addition, some of the epigraphical records refer to Sutradhara as being responsible for the erection of a particular monument.\textsuperscript{44} Accordingly, it seems that the profession of Sutradhara was in all probability a much-respected profession. This is further confirmed by the fact that there was a notion that a family, which produced many illustrious Sutradharas, was an auspicious family.\textsuperscript{45}

In addition, it was not regretted even if a son of a royal minister or a high official became a Sutradhara.\textsuperscript{46} Besides, some Sutradharas themselves have recorded that they have high

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\textsuperscript{46} Consequently, a Sutradhara by the profession, has been said to be a son of the minister for peace and war, \textit{Epigraphia Carnatica}, Vol.V, Pt.I, p.433 as quoted by MK Dhavalikar, "Sri Yugadhara - A master artist of Ajanta," \textit{Artibus Asiae}, Vol.XXI, No.4, 1969, p.307.
\end{quote}
social positions and the people of the society also respected them though one has recorded that he is a 'Vaisya Sutradhara.' Thus, the epigraphical evidence makes it amply clear that the term Sutradhara, unless otherwise specifically mentioned, always denoted the chief artist or the architect and that he was accorded a high and respectable position in the society.

But, as already noted, this is in contrast to the literary evidence furnished by the later *Silpassastra* texts, which place the Sutradhara at the lowest position in the hierarchy of artists. It is not without significance that of all the above four categories of artists i.e. Sutradhara, Sthapati, Sutragrahin and Vardhaki, the inscriptions should particularly make a mention only of the Sutradharas. The other three categories of artists, that is Sthapati, Sutragrahin and Vardhaki, who occupy higher positions according to *silpa* canons, are of extremely rare occurrence. Indeed, this would not have been the case had the Sutradhra, in actual practice, occupied the lowest status in the hierarchy of artisans. This clearly demonstrates the importance of the Sutradharas in actual practice. Obviously, they were in-charge of art activity and this is proved by inscriptive as well as by textual references in eulogical form.

Sutradhara Pithe as having planned all as Prithu did the earth. Besides, it is to be noted that unlike the other categories, the Sūtradhāras held honorary titles like sāmanta, ranaka, and thakkura also. Thus, on a close examination of the epigraphical evidence, which is obviously more reliable than the literary evidence, it will become clear that in fact it was the Sutradhara who was the most important among the artisans during the ancient period. This may be the reason why a silpa text, which is attributed to king Bhoja of Paramara dynasty naming it the Samaranganasutradhara.

However, it has to be realized at this point that in contrast to the categorisation of artists given in the silpa texts, the term Sutradhara was apparently used as a synonym of Sutragrahin. In fact, the term Sutradhara, in its theatrical connotation denoting the stage manager, has, it seems, been given this meaning from the leading importance of the manager of a puppet play who holds the threads (sutra) of the puppets. Hence, no doubt the term Sutradhara ("who holds the threads") is also closer in meaning to Sutragrahin ("who seizes or holds the threads"). The term Sutradhara thus came to substitute for Sutragrahin, as leading amongst the executive architect artists and would, furthermore, have been applied to any leading practitioner in his branch, be he architect, sculptor


PK Acharya, Indian architecture according to Manasara silpasatra, Bombay, 1927, p.137.
(carver or modeller) and particularly painter whose delineation was essential to the pictorial composition.\textsuperscript{55}

Accordingly, it is acceptable that any work of art, be it architecture, painting, sculpture or wood work was carried out under the supervision of a Sutradhara although he was normally associated with building and architectural works. This is evident from the Sutradhara’s status as a \textit{Sarvasiddhi-acharya}, the one well versed in all branches.\textsuperscript{56} This is further establishes by the fact that the Sutradhara was often mentioned as proficient in \textit{Sastras} and \textit{Vidyas}, which included the \textit{Silpasatra}, astronomy and science of numbers.\textsuperscript{57} In addition, the nature of his work demanded knowledge of rituals and legends about gods and goddesses, which he needed particularly in the \textit{dhyana} after which images were fashioned.\textsuperscript{58} Particularly relevant in this context is the case of the eye fixing ceremony of Buddha statues \textit{(Netramangalya)}.\textsuperscript{59} Hence, no doubt, the Sutradhara was a keynote figure in the entire sphere of art of ancient Indian society. This is confirmed by the fact that one such Sutradhara, most probably a painter, had been able to record his own

\textsuperscript{58} R.N. Misra, \textit{Ancient artists and art activity}, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1975, p.57. It seems that Sutradharas were usually drafted from amongst the traditional craftsmen and in such recruitment the artist’s skill would have been the deciding factor. In addition, some others might also have reached the rank of Sutradhara owing to their higher social status coupled with their proficiency in the theory and practice of fine arts. Ibid, p.57.
\textsuperscript{59} It is believed that an image is not honoured until the eyes are painted; it is the last work and when this is done and not before, the figure is considered sacred. See JG Smither, \textit{Architectural remains of Anuradhapura}, Ceylon Government Press, Colombo, 1984, p.46. This custom still prevails among the Buddhists of Sri Lanka.
name even among the paintings of cave no 16 at Ajanta, which had been dedicated by Varahadeva, the minister of the Vakataka king Harisena.  

Besides this particular inscriptive evidence available in cave no 16 of Ajanta, a statement made by Percy Brown, as regards the painters at the site is also important at this stage since this has been accepted by a few other later scholars too. Although there is not enough evidence, he is of the opinion that the early Buddhist painter was perhaps an artist-priest, learned in his religion as he was in his art. Accordingly, his system of work was probably that which prevails in Buddhist Tibet now. Thus, when it was decided that a certain building is to be decorated or a piece of sculpture executed, artists were sent for from the leading religious institutions, and these were retained in the monastery as part of the sacerdotal establishment until the commission was completed.

This unproven statement by Brown is further illuminated by some later scholars; for instance, one such writer, suggests that the artists themselves were, in all probability, the members of priesthood, who carefully chose their subject matter for its engrossing and dramatic appeal. In the same way, some recent scholars have also concluded that some of the murals may have been painted by the monks, although artists must have been employed in most cases in order to achieve the professional excellence of examples such as those visible today at Ajanta and Bagh etc. Interestingly enough, some others have gone to the extent of saying that they were probably commissioned, supervised and quite

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possibly executed by the monks living in the adjacent cave nos 8, 12 and 13 which are either the viharas or the monasteries. Still some others have gone to the extreme to state that the artist of Ajanta was invariably a monk or a bhikkhu whose main purpose was to express his religious devotion through colour and line, composition or illustration. Also some others have suggested that Ajanta stands as the brightest symbol of the spiritual vision in its best and truest perspicacity. It is therefore, quite possible that the monk-artists who created Ajanta took to art not for any personal pleasure or as has been commonly supposed for the express purpose of educating the pilgrims, but primarily for the sake of their own sadhana, as a course of art, they thought, would help them in attaining to a higher stage of spiritual infoldment.

Nevertheless, it is to be noted that some others have opposed this 'priest-artist' concept of Ajanta and suggested that if the monks who dwelt there executed these paintings then the predominance of semi-nude female forms is difficult to explain. Hence, they have concluded that there is no warrant for the supposition that the painters of these caves were artist monks and suggest that just as there were guilds of skilled sculptors, so also there were guilds of painters who no doubt were similarly employed by wealthy patrons to decorate these rock cut chapels and dwellings, for to spend money thus was considered an act of spiritual merit or piety. In this process, may be the craftsmen were directed and supervised over to some extent by monks and it is likely that some of the monks were painters themselves, but the superlative quality of the best work forcibly

points to the conclusion that these murals were by the hands of men who were not mere diletantantes.\textsuperscript{67}

Rawson and Maity also similarly suggest that some of the wall paintings at Ajanta are extremely sensual in style and highly inappropriate to the environment of a body of ascetic monks. It seems that there is no parallel to this frank and chivalrous “woman worship” of Ajanta and perhaps nowhere else has woman received such perfect and ungrudging homage (Plates XVI, XVII and XXI). Even the beggar girl who asks for alms is beautiful and sensual, as in the case of the murals of cave no 17 at Ajanta.\textsuperscript{68} Thus, these murals themselves may possibly suggest that they were not completed by the painter monks, but by secular artists, accustomed to decorating private houses, who turned their skills when required to the representation of Buddhist themes.\textsuperscript{69}

From a close observation of the murals it would appear that a number of artists were employed to carry out the commissions, since individual hands and styles may be discerned at least at Ajanta, as discussed in the fourth chapter in detail. For instance, an examination of the main doorway leading into cave no 17 suggests that several difference exist between the left and right sides of the doorway, clearly indicating that at least two

\textsuperscript{67} Karl Khandalavala, \textit{Indian sculpture and painting: An introductory study}, DB Taraporevala and sons, Bombay, (n.d.), p.52. Khandalavala’s another statement also clearly shows that he strongly believes that the painting at Ajanta in all periods is the outcome of the artistry of professional, well-trained guild painters. As he concluded, if ever there was a theory in need of refutation, it is that of the monk painters of Ajanta. This theory has unfortunately persisted though the internal evidence of the paintings themselves belies it. No doubt, the belief that the paintings of Ajanta were the creation of devout monks is a total myth. That monk supervisors as to the subject matter of the paintings and broad requirements of the monastery guided the guild craftsmen does not admit of doubt and there is always the possibility that a monk who had some experience in the art also lent an occasional helping hand. Nevertheless, largely, the Ajanta paintings are the work of hereditary guild painters who had a long tradition of practised draughtsmanship and skillful brushwork behind them, inherited by generation after generation. Karl Khandalavala, \textit{The development of style in Indian painting}, Macmillan, Madras, 1974, pp.18-19, 33.

artists worked on it with their work meeting at the centre of the lintel. Thus, the topmost band of eight earthly Buddhas reveals differences in colouring scheme with the artist of the right half favouring the use of peachy pink while the artist of the left side opted for a more sober scheme. In the underneath three horizontal bands of floral and geometric decoration also, the two artists followed quite similar, but not identical patterns\textsuperscript{70}(Plate XXV). In addition to these decorative motifs, it is to be noted that there are stylistic differences between the upper and the lower halves of the mural of Sibi Jatāka painted in cave no 17; the lower half reveals refined lines with green as the predominant colour, while the upper half displays simplified lines and a brown hue. These may be mainly due to the fact that the two artists worked together on the production. In fact, without the painted labels clearly linking the two halves, one might have incorrectly assumed that the two segments represented two different stories.\textsuperscript{71}

This evidence clearly shows that ancient Indian painters worked together at a time instead of working individually, though some have incorrectly suggested that the whole scheme at some places, particularly at Bagh, is worked out at one time and perhaps by one man, on a magnificently large scale.\textsuperscript{72} Although precise evidence is not available, the situation was probably the same even in the Sri Lankan mural sites, as some scholars have suggested that the figures in pocket ‘A’ at Sigiriya may have no connection with those of the larger cave, though both seem to represent the same scene painted by two different


\textsuperscript{70} In this decoration, one may note the fine as opposed to thick vegetal scroll; below it, the difference in the treatment of the stylised lotus flower; and lower down, the variations in the diamond and lozenge pattern. Vidya Dehejia, Discourse in early Buddhist art: Visual narratives of India, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1997, pp.214-215.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, p.218.

\textsuperscript{72} S Fyzee Rahamin, The Indian art of drawing pictures in the caves of Bagh, The Indian Daily Mail, Bombay, 1928, p.11.
artists; for the rendering is as commonplace in the former as it is natural and spirited in the latter.\textsuperscript{73}

When attention is thus focussed on the ancient Sri Lankan artists, as already mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, it is obvious that as in the case of the Indian practice, in the Sri Lankan context too it was not customary to record the name of the painter or any other artist.\textsuperscript{74} Therefore not only in stone inscriptions, but also in the Chronicles and other historical documents the names of artists who executed the paintings or any other artistic work do not appear, but instead the names of the kings and the elite who sponsored them appear there.\textsuperscript{75} Due to this practice, even in the five long chapters of the \textit{Mahavamsa} in which a detailed and long account of the construction of the Mahatupa has been presented, there is no attempt to record the names of the artists who had finalised the stupa and its paintings of the relic chamber.\textsuperscript{76} The anonymity of the artist thus, went hand in hand with the proclaimed glory of the rich and powerful patron, who certainly never renounced his ego or forsook his identity.

Although a definite scheme regarding the mention of artists is thus obviously absent, it is to be noted that some infrequent references would help to understand the

\textsuperscript{73} HCP Bell, "Interim report on the operations of the archaeological survey at Sigiriya - 1897," \textit{Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch)}, Vol.XV, No.48, 1897, p.118.
\textsuperscript{74} See M. Somathilake, "The caste system during the kandyan period: Service castes and the field of art," \textit{Memorial volume in honour of Dr. Labuduve Siridhamma maha thero}, ed. Pollamure Soratha and others, Labuduve Siridamma Memorial Foundation, Kandy, 1998, pp.358-380; \textit{An inquiry into the social status of the Buddhist mural painters of late medieval period of Sri Lanka}, Paper read at Jawaharlal Nehru University, 28. 8. 1998. Thus, it is obvious that whatever the cause may be, the artists of both countries seem to have always attempted not to give publicity to them personally, but to fulfil the desire of the sponsors who had entrusted those works to them.
\textsuperscript{75} See M Somathilake, "The tradition of wall paintings of Sri Lanka from the earliest time to the twelfth century AD: Chronology and Themes," \textit{Sociological Review}, Annual of the Department of Sociology, University of Peradeniya, Bravi Press, Kandy, 1996/97, pp. 87-121; \textit{An inquiry into the authorship of some ancient art works}, Paper read at the Sri Lanka Historical Association, 1994.
status of the artists to a considerable extent. For instance, in a Brahmi inscription of the first century AD, found at Billavagala in Vilacciya Korale, a reference has been made to a son of a painter. 77 The name of the relevant painter has been recorded as Citakara Data (Cittakara Datta) 78 and the reference unmistakably indicates that the painter and his descendants were persons of considerable standing in ancient Sinhalese society, since it records that a son of a painter made the donation of a cave to the priesthood. 79 In addition, in the Ruvanvalisaya slab inscription of queen Kalyanavathi of 12th century AD, the painters are mentioned as the first among the varieties of artists given in the list. 80 This clearly indicates their actual position in contemporaneous society.

Besides these rare epigraphical evidences, it is noteworthy that in the Mahabodhivamsa reference has been made to ancient painters, though the story is legendary in nature. According to this account when Theri Sanghamitta brought the Mahabodhi to Sri Lanka, during the reign of Devanampiyatissa somewhere in the third century BC, people belonging to the twenty-four categories (the later traditions mention sixteen clans instead) came with the Bodhi sapling. In the account of the Mahabodhivamsa, the words Citrakarakula and Sittarakulehi 81 occur and undoubtedly these refer to the people who engaged in painting works. Nevertheless, a problematic position arises as this book was compiled at the end of the 10th century AD, although

78 It is to be noted at this point that the treatises on iconography, as well as other texts of India, clearly indicate that the title or the meaning of the word chitrakara was synonymous to sculptor and not to the painter. See TP Bhattacharya, The canons of Indian art, Patna, 1963, p.371ff; See also C Sivaramanmurti, Indian sculpture, Delhi, 1962, pp.5-6.
based on an older Sinhalese version. Consequently, it can be believed that sometimes in the 10th century AD the author or the editor may have interpolated the facts given in the original book. This doubt is further confirmed by the fact that in the accounts relating to the same incident given in the Mahavamsa or Samantapasadika, the more ancient treatises as compared to the Mahabodhivamsa nothing has been mentioned of such clans. However, this account undeniably shows not only the sentiment of the artists but also the common people of the island at least around the tenth century AD who believed that the painters of Sri Lanka were descended from the Indian artisans families.

Similarly, in the land grants of the late medieval period of the island too, the history of the most famous families of the painters runs as far back as the reigning period of aforesaid King Devanampiyatissa of the 3rd century BC. For instance, in a land grant, issued by the king Keerti Sri Rajasinghe (1747-1781) of the Kandyan period, reference has been made to the ancestral history of an artist known as Balavatvala Bodhinarayana Buvanekabahu. According to this copper plate, they have been introduced as a generation of artists descending from one of the clans who accompanied Theri Sangamitta when she brought the branch of the Bodhi sprout to the island. A similar description in support of the belief that the famous Nilagama generation of painters descends from those artists who came to Sri Lanka with the Sri Mahabodhi sapling is found in the manuscript

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82 W Geiger, The culture of Ceylon in midlevel times, tr. MB Ariyapala, Gunasena and co, Colombo, 1969, p.185.
of Matale kadayimpota, the chronology of which is uncertain, but which undoubtedly belongs to the medieval period. It describes “on the occasion of the prince Aritta who went to north India to meet king Dhammasoka on the mission of bringing sapling of the Sri Mahabodhi, he was accompanied by Mudalihurst Somadatta Brahmanarala, Sri Visnu Brahmanarala etc. etc. All these people returned to Sri Lanka with the said Bodhi sapling and later Somananda was detained at Nagapattalama. Sri Vishnu Brahmanarala stayed at Aluvihara... the chief smith of Bodhipattalama was detained at Nilagama etc.”

Thus, it is evident that in both literary and epigraphical records an attempt has been made to impress upon the people that some generations of artists have an ancient history with an Indian origin though the descriptions are always legendary in nature.

Accordingly, due to non-availability of pertinent data, it is obvious that it is difficult to distinguish the actual position of the painters of the ancient Sri Lankan society. But, it should not be forgotten that there is relatively more information available on the issue particularly in the medieval and the late medieval periods of the island. Nevertheless, since society was more complex during these later periods than the ancient epoch, it is impossible to suggest even parallels or alternatives based on the evidence

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87 Thus although there is not enough evidence to examine actual social status of the painters of early Sri Lanka, some early scholars have assumed that on the analogy of Indian practice, that the Sri Lankan painters functioned in much the same way as the Indian guilds did in India: this appears to be the only supportable position which could be taken up because the positive information supplied by Sri Lankan sources about guilds scarcely exceeds the bare fact of the existence of these institutions in this country. AL Basham, The wonder that was India: A survey of the culture of the Indian sub-continent before the coming of the Muslims, Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1954, pp.217-218; CW Nicholas, “Professions and occupations in the early Sinhalese kingdom,” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch), (New Series), Vol.V, p.70.
available in this later period too. However, it is evident that there was no uniformity in the social status of the artists and that this varied with the nature and importance of the work that was commissioned. It would also seem that painters were given better recognition than those who were engaged in other forms of artistic work. This was because in addition to the drawing of religious paintings they were also entrusted with the task of making images of the Buddha and devas and the fixing of eyes to these sacred statues. Hence, payment made to an artist who finalised the artistic work in a Buddhist temple was generous and munificent. Particularly, in the case of completion of paintings of a temple and the fixation of eyes on the Buddha images the painters were gifted with large quantities of gold and silver and they were also given titles, honours, lands, rice, ornaments, cloths, elephants and other movable and immovable properties. Though this was a medieval practice, it is also helpful in understanding the social status of the artists of the island during the ancient period.

**The concept of patronage and the patrons of paintings:**

Although we have so far discussed only the artists’ involvement and their contribution to religious art, it is obvious that the ancient artistic monuments were commissioned as joint effort by a large number of people each one of whom contributed cash, material and labour donations etc. Of these various contributions, the artists’

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90 Consequently, it is an accepted fact that the social history of art explores the dynamics of the relationship between the patron, public, the artist and the work of art in the context of the social information of a given period of history. See Devangana Desai, “Social dimensions of art in early India,” Presidential Address,
partaking in the patron’s endowment is also important since it fundamentally provides the necessary financial assistance for erecting the religious monuments. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the historical and structural complexity of patronage in the artistic and religious spheres in ancient India as well as in Sri Lanka generates more questions than answers, though it is usually restricted to the relationship between the patron and the recipient of patronage - often visualised as the king or the elite and the artist who worked for them. In this context, when attention is particularly focussed on the patrons of Buddhist mural paintings of India and Sri Lanka of the period concerned, the inscriptionsal evidence at Ajanta is very important since these are the only surviving primary sources from the overall mural sites of the two countries, from which we can make a genuine picture of a Buddhist painting site, not only about the patrons of the murals but also regarding the aspirations and motivations of their donations. This epigraphical evidence, both painted and engraved, is included in the following table.


91 Certainly, it is an established fact that the patronage is in various societies, whether focused on artists, philanthropists, impresarios or the media itself, demonstrates that these are universal frameworks and topics for discussion. Joan I. Erdman, “The patronage of cultural performances in India,” Arts patronage in India: Methods, motives and market, ed. Joan I. Erdman, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1992, Introduction, p.9.

92 It is to be noted that in Hindi one of the main word for patronage is sanraksha, meaning a support, protection or guard. See A practical Hindi-English dictionary, ed. Mahendra Chaturvedi and BN Tiwari, National, Delhi, second ed, 1975; Bhargava’s standard illustrated dictionary of the Hindi language (Hindi-English and English-Hindi editions), ed RC Pathak, Bhargava Book Depot, Varanasi, (reprinted) 1973. In Sinhalese too the word anugrahaya (patronage) gives the same meaning. See GP Malalasekara, English-Sinhalese dictionary, Gunasena co, Colombo, 1984, p.658.

93 Barbara Stoler Miller and Richard Eaton, The powers of art: Patronage in Indian culture, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992, Introduction, p.1. Though Babara has applied this only to the Indian art, it is obvious that it is equally applicable to the patronage of Sri Lankan art too. See M. Somathilake, A historical study of mural paintings in Buddhist temples during the 18th and 19th centuries of Sri Lanka, Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Peradeniya, 1996, pp. 502-609.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cave no</th>
<th>Donor</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>Expectation of the contribution</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.Sakya devotee ...</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.Sakya bhiksu Buddhagupta</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
<td>Merit for all beings(^{95})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Viharasvamin Mathura</td>
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<td>Merit for parents and relatives and for the attainment of supreme knowledge by all sentient beings(^{96})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sakya bhiksu Tarana Kirttana</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
<td>Merit for attainment of supreme knowledge by all sentient beings(^{97})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.Sakya bhiksu Sanghapriya</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.Lay worshiper Jasadeva</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.Sakya bhiksu ...</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.Sakya bhiksu ...</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.Sakyabhiksu reverend teacher</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.Sakyabhiksu ...</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
<td>Merit for parents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7Sakya bhiksu reverend Bhadrasena</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Venarable Gopiputra</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
<td>Merit for parents and sentient beings</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Sakya bhiksu ...</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Reverend Dharmasena(^{98})</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Vasitiputa Katahadi</td>
<td>Gift of the facade</td>
<td>Merit for removing the misery of all sentient beings</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher ... Sachiva</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Reverend Sudatta</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Same donor</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Sakya bhiksu reverend achary</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Sakya bhiksu Samghagupta</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Sakya bhiksu reverend teacher Buddhhasena</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Reverend Buddhhasoma</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Sakya bhiksu ...</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Sakya bhiksu reverend Kesava</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Sakya bhiksu ...</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Sakya bhiksu Buddhchinaga</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Parika of the chetika</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Sakya bhiksu Dradhadharma</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Sakya bhiksu Dronavarma</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
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<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Reverend Silabhadra</td>
<td>In honor of father and mother</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Upasaka Mitradharma</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Merchant Ghanamadada</td>
<td>For the shrine</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Varahadeva, minister of Harisena¹⁰¹</td>
<td>For the excavation of cave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Sakya bhiksu reverend Dharmadatta</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Sama donor</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
</tr>
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</table>

⁹⁹ Ibid, pp.91-94.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name/Title</th>
<th>Activity/Description</th>
<th>Notes/Remarks</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sakya bhiksu, reverend Bapuka</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
<td>Same as above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sri Yugadhara – Sutradhara</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Achitya, the minister of a feudatory of Harisena</td>
<td>Excavation of cave no 17 and the construction of a grand gandhakuti to the west of it (probably cave no 19) and built a reservoir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Upendra</td>
<td>Mandapa of the cave</td>
<td>Merit for the attainment of supreme knowledge of all the sentient beings and the parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>1. Parama upasaka</td>
<td>Excavation of the cave</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Sakya bhiksu, a follower of the great vehicle</td>
<td>For the murals</td>
<td>Merit for the attainment of supreme knowledge of all beings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Sakya bhiksu Dharmadeva</td>
<td></td>
<td>Merit for parents and the attainment of supreme knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>1. Sakya bhiksu Buddhabadra</td>
<td>Excavation of the chaitya hall</td>
<td>Merit for parents and minister Bhavviraja of Asmaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Sakya bhiksu Gunakara</td>
<td>For a Buddha image</td>
<td>Merit for the attainment of supreme knowledge to all the sentient beings with parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Fragmentary</th>
<th>For a Buddha image</th>
<th>Merit for all sentient beings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Sakya bhikṣu Sanghamitra(^{107})</td>
<td>For a Buddha image</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-27 Damaged Rashtrakuta inscription(^{108})</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Thus, it is obvious that both engraved and painted inscriptions exist at Ajanta and reveal a picture of a mural site that developed under varied patronage, aristocratic, monastic and lay. In a wider context, these can be mainly divided into two groups as individual and collective donations. Of these, individual dedicatory inscriptions are found incised in cave nos 16, 17, 20, 26 and between cave nos 26 and 27. Particularly, in three major caves i.e. nos 16, 17 and 26 elaborate Sanskrit inscriptions occur. According to these, it is obvious that Varahadeva, chief minister of king Harisena (circa 475-500 AD)\(^{109}\) of the Vakataka dynasty recorded his donation of cave no 16 in 32 Sanskrit verses cut into the rock-face to the left of its façade;\(^{110}\) Achitya, the minister of a feudatory of the same king Harisena, recorded his dedication of cave no 17 in a similar location outside the

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\(^{108}\) Ibid, pp.113, 121-124.


cave, in a set of 29 Sanskrit verses. Similarly, the powerful Sakya bhiksu Buddhhabhadra, who exercised much influence with the feudatory Asmaka king, inscribed his record of the dedication of cave no 26 on its façade, above the right door, in a set of 17 Sanskrit verses. In addition, a lay follower whose name is lost donated the lesser cave no 22 according to the inscription on the pilaster at the left end of the veranda.

Accordingly, it is clear that some of the finest caves at Ajanta, along with the paintings, owe their origin to the munificence of the officials and feudatories of the Vakatakas of Vatsagulma (modern Basim, District Akola, Maharashtra state) although the inscriptions are silent about the rulers' leanings towards Buddhism. This fact indicates that the most vigorous period of architectural and artistic activity at Ajanta seems to have coincided with the second half of the fifth century AD or at least with the first half of the sixth century AD, under the supremacy of the Vakatakas. Consequently, it has been suggested by some scholars that cave nos 1 and 2 were also gifts of the Vakataka royalty. Nevertheless, the absence of inscription in these two caves suggests caution in assigning cave no 1 to king Harisena or adjoining cave no 2 to one of his

111 Unfortunately, the name of the feudatory ruler is not preserved, though the names of his ancestors and also of his younger brother are given in the record. NP Chakravarti, "A note on the painted inscriptions in caves VI-XVII," Ajanta: Monochrome reproductions of the Ajanta frescoes based on photography, ed. G Yazdani, Swati Publications, Delhi, Vol.III, 1946, p.87.
114 Though the Vakatakas were probably not Buddhists, they must have been favourably inclined towards it, for Ajanta's donative inscriptions of cave nos 16 and 17 prove that his chief minister and some of his feudatory princes were devout followers of the faith.
queens. This doubt is further confirmed by the facts given in the two painted inscriptions of cave no 2. Of these, the first one that is in the midst of multiple painted Buddhas in the antechamber, to the right of the door into the shrine refers to the meritorious gift of a Sakya devotee. The second inscription that is against the lotus throne of the painted Buddha on the back wall, to the left of the antechamber states that this was the meritorious gift of the Sakya bhiksu the reverend Buddhagupta. Although these indicate that they were the donors of the paintings, since these are written on the murals in the form of painted inscriptions, they may as well have been the donors of the cave.

However, it is obvious that at least cave nos 16 and 17 at Ajanta were fashioned under the patronage of Vakataka ‘state’ or at any rate under the support of ‘representatives’ of the same sovereignty. It is to be noted at this point that apart from the religious teachings and beliefs, which will be discussed later, the promotion of art through patronage has been considered the ‘duty of state’ since ancient times. It has to be realized at this point that the political and social dimensions of royal power also often made it necessary for there to be a range of patronage. The literary, artistic and historical evidence of individual royal patronage in India as well as in Sri Lanka is sufficiently prominent to blind us to the other modes of patronage.

120 These Vakataka caves at Ajanta although not specifically state-supported projects they must have been the work of the elite of the kingdom.
But, when speaking of the patronage of Buddhist art, particularly in the Indian context, it should not be forgotten that not since the time of Asoka, except for the period of Pala rule in Bihar and Bengal, could it be said the Buddhism was a ‘state religion.’ Nevertheless, it is evident that royal patronage in ancient India generally extended to more than a single religious sect. For instance, the Satavahanas were not of Buddhist faith and performed various Vedic sacrifices, but they were tolerant sovereigns who paid equal attention to other faiths. In addition, it is evident that the Iksvakus also presided over Brahmanical yajnas whilst their wives and sisters donated to Buddhist monuments.

Besides this glorious and magnificent royal patronage, collective and individual rich donors’ patronage was also a pan-Indian phenomenon in the first few centuries AD. Consequently, with a few exceptions, the Buddhist artistic monuments produced in the various kingdoms of India were not dependent on royal patronage alone. According to the details given in the painted inscriptions at Ajanta, it is evident that this happened even at Ajanta not only in the first phase i.e. in the second or first century BC but also in

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125 See RC Majumdar, The age of imperial unity: The history and culture of the Indian people, Vol.II, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1951, p.225; Romila Thapar, “Patronage and the community,” The powers of art: Patronage in Indian culture, ed. Barbara Stoler Miller, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992, p.28. The general nature, which appears in the religious sphere of ancient Indian society, particularly considering the caves of Ajanta, excavations were conducted at this site during the reign of Satavahanas and Vakatakas who were the devotees of Siva and occasionally of Vishnu, but never the Buddha and what evidence we have of at least Vakataka patronage clearly indicates that it never crossed religious lines. VV Mirashi, Inscriptions of the Vakatakas: Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Ootacamund, 1963, Vol V, p.xl. It is to be noted that apart from the caves at Ajanta, the earlier ones at Ellora, the elephants and several others caves are also Vakataka works. Calambur Sivaramamurti, The art of India, Harry N Abrams Publishers, New York, 1977, p.175.
the second phase i.e. in and around the fifth century AD. Thus, in the case of several
caves, a cross-section of the society, specially the monks and the lay followers have
recorded their gifts towards the excavation of a particular portion of a *caitya* or a *vihara* or
execution of a painting in a cave. For instance, in the earliest phase of Ajanta, the Prakrit
inscription of Vasithiputa Katakadi engraved on the left side of the façade records only the
gift of the façade of cave no 10. Similarly, on the back wall, to the left of the right corner
cell of cave no 12, another fragmentary Prakrit inscription records the gift of a shrine
(*thanaka*) with cells (*uvaraka*) by the merchant Ghanamada, while another inscription
in cave no 20 refers to Upendra who donated a *mandapa* there.

Besides, in cave no 4, one such dedicatory inscription remains carved against the
pedestal of the Buddha image in the shrine and records a meritorious gift of Viharasvamin
Mathura, son of Bhayanandi and Skandavasu of the Karvalya *gotra*, a lay
worshiper. Though this suggests that Mathura is the donor of cave no 4, since his title of
Viharasvamin connotes the meaning of lord of a *vihara*, as pointed out by some scholars
the argument is not entirely persuasive as this title is found in several Gandharan

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127 Vidya Dehejia, “The collective and popular basis of early Buddhist patronage: Sacred monuments 100
BC-AD 250,” *The powers of art: Patronage in Indian culture*, ed. Barbara Stoler Miller, Oxford University
Press, New York, 1992, p.44.
128 H Lüders, “A list of Brahmi inscriptions: Appendix to Epigraphia Indica and record of the
on the painted inscriptions in caves VI-XVII,” *Ajanta: Monochrome reproductions of the Ajanta frescoes
129 H Lüders, “A list of Brahmi inscriptions: Appendix to Epigraphia Indica and record of the
reproductions of the Ajanta frescoes based on photography*, ed. G Yazdani, Swati Publications, Delhi,
Vol.III, 1946, pp 88-89
inscriptions that refer to a variety of donations.\textsuperscript{132} Hence, without doubt the inscription suggests that he was the donor of the Buddha statue where the inscription is incised. In addition, while the painted inscriptions in cave no 2 record the gift of certain figural paintings, one votive inscription in cave no 6 also records the gift of Sakya monk Taranakirttana.\textsuperscript{133}

Thus, it is obvious that though a few inscriptions recorded that some of the caves or parts of the caves were made under individual donations, a majority of inscriptions recorded collective donations of specific sculptured and painted figures of the caves which belong to the last phase of activity at the site when individual wealthy donors no longer participated.\textsuperscript{134} In cave no 9 alone, more than twenty such donative inscriptions were found at the end of the 19th century, out of which a few were fragmentary.\textsuperscript{135} Another twelve inscriptions were also noticed in the middle of the last century: all are individual votive inscriptions eight of which are fragmentary and have not preserved the names of the donors. The patrons of the remaining four are the Sakya monk Sanghapriya,

\textsuperscript{134} Vidya Dehejia, Discourse in early Buddhist art: Visual narratives of India, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1997, p.212; Walter Spink, Ajanta to Ellora, Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, USA, (n.d), p.7. It is to be noted at this point that the normal assumption that dedicatory inscriptions were inscribed only upon the completion of a project must be set aside at Ajanta where major dedicatory inscriptions seem to have been incised prior to the actual finishing of a cave, probably once work was in full swing. Vidya Dehejia, Discourse in early Buddhist art: Visual narratives of India, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1997, p.212; See also Himanshu Prabha Ray, Monastery and guild: Commerce under the Satavahanas, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1986, p.185.
\textsuperscript{135} James Burgess, Report on the Buddhist cave temples and their inscriptions, Archaeological Survey of Western India, Vol.IV, 1881, pp.44-45.
the lay worshipper Jasadeve (Yasodeva), the Sakya monk bhadanta Bhadrasena and bhadanta Dharmasena.\textsuperscript{136}

Twenty-one such votive records have been noticed in cave no 10, including the four, which cannot be traced at present. Of the rest twelve contain the names of the following donors: acharya Sachiva, Sakya monk bhadanta Samghagupta, Sakya monk acharya bhadanta Buddhasena, bhadanta Buddhasoma, Sakya monk Buddhhasoma, Sakya monk bhadanta Kesava, Sakya monk Buddhinaga, Sakya monk bhadanta Dārādharmā, Sakya monk bhadanta Dronavarman, bhadanta Sudatta (two donative records) and bhadanta Silabhadra.\textsuperscript{137} Besides, there are altogether three donative inscriptions in cave no 16, the donors being the Sakya monk bhadanta Dharmadatta (two donations) and the Sakya monk bhadanta Bapuka. Although no such votive inscriptions have been found in cave no 17,\textsuperscript{138} a painted record below the figures of eight Buddhas in cave no 22 tells us that the painting was the gift of a Sakya bhikṣu while another in the same cave records a gift of Sakya bhikṣu Dharmadeva. In addition, in cave no 26 of the powerful ecclesiastic Buddhābdhaḍra,\textsuperscript{139} two sculptures of standing Buddhas, at either end of the upper façade were gifted individually, one by Sakya bhikṣu Gunakara and the second is damaged. The other sculptures and carvings within the cave were also completed through individual

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, p.86.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid, pp.86, 94.
\textsuperscript{139} The bhikṣu Buddhābdhaḍra dedicated this cave to the deceased Bhavviraja, a minister of the Asmaka feudatories of the Vakatakas. See B Ch. Chhabra, “The incised inscriptions,” Ajanta: Monochrome reproductions of the Ajanta frescoes based on photography, ed, G Yazdani, Swati Publications, Delhi, Vol.IV, 1946, pp.114-120.
gifts. This is evident from the fact that a small-seated Buddha on the wall of the right aisle was gifted by *Sakya bhiksu* Sanghamitra.\textsuperscript{140}

In contrast, all the donors of Ajanta were in all probability Buddhists, in the sense that they were lay devotees of Buddhism or active supporters of the faith. Of these, Buddhist monks’ participation at Ajanta is particularly conspicuous, since these inscriptions mention monks also as donors. For instance, though several records are badly damaged, at least 23 surviving records of cave nos 10 and 9 alone are gifts from *Sakya bhiksus*, one from a *Chetika*\textsuperscript{141} and the rest from individual monks. Accordingly, setting aside the individual patrons of cave nos 16, 17, 22 and 26 it would appear that monks (altogether not less than 34 records) rather than lay followers (not less than 6 gifts) were the active agents in the completion of the works at Ajanta.\textsuperscript{142} Among these there are fourteen names of *bhadantas* (reverend) and three *acharyas*, the latter, no doubt, being the custodians of traditional knowledge.\textsuperscript{143} Hence, as also mentioned in the third chapter some scholars have reasonably suggested that Ajanta was a Buddhist academic centre of education and its monks tried to educate different doctrines of Buddhism given in different sections of canons, which fact is elucidated by the descriptions given in the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item It is noteworthy that donations by Buddhist monks and nuns are particularly conspicuous at Matura, Sanchi, Bharhut and other monastic caves sites of the Deccan region too. See HP Ray, “Buddhism and trade in early historical India,” Explorations in art and archaeology of South Asia: Essays dedicated to NG Majumdar, ed. Debala Mitra, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta, 1996, p.547.
\item Shobhana Gokhale states that only 2 were the teachers. See “Ajanta: The centre of monastic education,” *The art of Ajanta: New perspectives*, ed. Ratan Parimoo and others, Books and Books, New Delhi, Vol.I, 1991, pp.145-149. But, this number should be 3 according to the inscriptions available at cave nos 9 and 10 at Ajanta.
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inscriptions at the site.\textsuperscript{144} In this context, it is to be noted that there is a specific painted figure depicting a monk kneeling before a colossal sculptured figure of the standing Buddha on the upper floor, left corridor, right of first cell door of cave no 6.\textsuperscript{145} Since the cave contains only one donative inscription, which was recorded by \textit{Sakya bhiksu} Tarankirttana\textsuperscript{146} and it was also written below the figure of the monk, most probably this may be a figure of the donor or at least a very specific monk's, like an \textit{acharya} 's or a chief incumbent's figure.

Thus, based on an analysis of the inscriptions of Ajanta, it may be concluded that the evolution of Buddhist art and the emergence of powerful religious artistic centres need not necessarily be linked with the rise and fall of the ruling families,\textsuperscript{147} particularly in the Indian context, since it is obvious that the Buddhist community as a whole seems to have contributed towards the cause of the path of the lord.\textsuperscript{148} Though precise data is not available this is equally applicable to the Buddhist artistic works of ancient Sri Lankan society too. But, unlike the Indian practice, it is to be noted that in ancient Sri Lankan society, from the beginning of its introduction, Buddhism was a 'state religion.'\textsuperscript{149}

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\textsuperscript{144} Ibid, p.148.
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Consequently, almost all the indigenous kings were essentially Buddhists and have generously provided patronage for various kinds of activities at the Buddhist sites.

When attention is focussed on royal patronage of various religious monuments of the island it is evident that apart from pride in his achievement as builder of a monument, the patron-monarch's prime concern was to ensure that the religious merit of construction accrued to him alone, unlike the general ambitions of the donors at Ajanta. This was particularly practised under the concept of 'Barapanarīma' (giving appropriate wages for labour). According to this customary practice, it was believed that if the expenses were not borne by the donor himself alone there did not accrue any proper merit to him. In the absence of such a procedure, the notion that existed was that the doer of that meritorious act would be deprived of a certain portion of that meritorious deed. The most important evidence regarding this sentiment is contained in the Mahavamsa, in its account of the construction of the Mahathupa or the Ruvanvalisaya in the second century BC by the monarch Duttagamini. In this account it is stated that a monk who expected to share in the meritorious act of constructing the stupa, made a brick himself and deceiving the king's work-people, he gave it to a workman, and once it was laid in place it was impossible to recognise it from the others. Consequently, the monarch Duttagamini commanded that generous payment be made to the monk in the form of a thousand pieces of money, a costly red coverlet, fragrant oil, sandals, sugar and other necessities, in order to ensure that the entire merit of construction was retained by him alone.

Thus, it is obvious that literary, artistic and historical evidence of individual royal patronage is prominent in the ancient Sri Lankan context. However, it is clear that the answer to the exclusively royal patronage that we find particularly in the Buddhist artistic works of ancient Sri Lanka and also to some extent in ancient India lies in the dual ambition of the monarchs, both to acquire worldly prestige that would enable them to arrogate to themselves the title of great builder of monuments and to amass religious merit that would be their mainstay in a future birth.152

**Perspectives of the donors, painters and the monks:**

According to religious thought, construction of a Buddhist temple was regarded as a means of attaining salvation153 and gift to a Buddhist monastery was always made for the accumulation of high merit that would serve the donor, not in this life alone but in the next birth too.154 In addition, the merit can also be dedicated either to parents, relatives or to other beings according to the desire of the donor. The last column of the above table clearly proves this fact. According to these beliefs one dedicatory inscription at Ajanta mentions that a man continues to enjoy himself in paradise as long as his memory is green in the world. One should therefore set up a memorial on the mountains that will endure for as long as the moon and the sun continue.155 Besides, the donor of cave no 16

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recorded that he has realised that life, youth, wealth and happiness are transitory [ayurva (yovi) tasakhani(ni)],\(^{156}\) while another two of the records at the site mention that making of the Buddha image is a meritorious deed. These two inscriptions of cave nos 10 and 22 particularly recorded that those who cause to be made an image of the Buddha become endowed with good looks, good luck and (good) qualities, acquire resplendent brightness in right conclusion (guna) and insight and become pleasing to the eyes.\(^{157}\) According to this belief it is interesting to note that there are seven inscriptions at Ajanta,\(^{158}\) which record the donations of Buddha image as a condition for the attainment of supreme knowledge.\(^{158}\)

Thus from the inscriptions of the caves of Ajanta alone, it is observable that the donors expected great spiritual benefits to accrue from their generosity. Under these sentiments some of the donors believed that “even the gift of a flower is the cause of the fruit called heaven and final beatitude.”\(^{159}\) According to such impressions, it is impossible to even imagine how much more merit could be won by offering a magnificent cave such as nos. 1, 2, 16 and 17 at Ajanta. Interestingly enough, the donors some of whom were involved with two and possibly more projects, as in the case of


\(^{159}\) The inscription of cave no 26 of Ajanta. See James Burgess, Buddhist cave temples and their inscriptions, Archaeological Survey of Western India, No. IV, 1881 Indological Book House, Varanasi, (reprinted) 1964, pp.124-136; B Ch. Chhabra, “The incised inscriptions,” Ajanta: Monochrome reproductions of the Ajanta
works of Achitya, the minister of a feudatory of Harisena, point with pride to the splendour of their benefactions as well as to their cost, 'which the poor cannot even imagine.'

Besides these offerings of the rich donors, as we have already noted, furthering the idea of combined roles, monks were also ardent patrons at Ajanta. Although monks' gifts at Ajanta often consisted of painted and or carved Buddha images, it is conspicuous that one monk, by the name of Buddhabhadra, was the donor of cave no 26 and his inscription offers a rationale for his patronage. He could see no reason why a Bodhisattva, born of noble family and desirous of the world's happiness as well as his own liberation, might not make a gift remembered by the world, thereby permitting him a place in paradise. In addition, it is significant that Buddhabhadra refers to his royal connections by dedicating the cave to Bhavviraja, a minister of the king Asmaka, stressing close ties with his ministerial friend throughout successive births.

According to some other beliefs of the Buddhists, unlike the earliest and the most vigorous phase of the Vakatakas, in the latest phase of Ajanta many small figures of the Buddha were painted in little compartments on pillars and walls. It is probable that these pictures reflect the growth of the characteristic medieval idea that the mere act of

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multiplying images of the Buddha accumulates more merits for the person who has them made. The term ‘Buddha sahasa’ occurs in the inscription of Sakya devotee, a lay worshipper, of cave no 2 at Ajanta, mentioned in the sixth chapter, proves this fact. Hence, it is obvious that besides ‘economic condition’ or the ‘ability of contribution’ of the donor, some religious concepts also paved the way for a tendency towards the patronage of Ajanta.

Although it has not been mentioned in these inscriptive or literary evidences, since the act of patronage is initially an exchange and also since it has multiple meanings and intentions, it has to be realized that apart from these religious beliefs, there may have been some other expectations in the minds of the donors too. For instance, according to the information available on the artists and their patrons of the late medieval period of Sri Lanka, though it can be supposed that the patrons provided genuine patronage for the sake of religion and art, on the other hand, it is evident that the motive of the elite in providing patronage would have been a cunning device of getting artists to execute their works as the elite desired. The selected themes and the incidents of the stories and also the manner of demonstration of the figures in which the status of kings and elites were exalted clearly proves this fact. Hence, the patronage given either to religious institutions or to the artists took a form of mental bribes or suborns to a large extent and consequently it is impossible to say with any certainty that the artists, monks

or who ever the selecting authorities of the themes was did not anticipate further patronage and various other privileges from the king and the elite and also that they did not perform their ‘duties’ as the patron’s desired, as will be discussed later in detail.

It has to be realized that an artist is supposed to be free when his actions are not controlled by any necessity or by an authority and are purely an expression of his own comprehended will. Certainly, this is applicable to the artists of any given period of history. In many instances the folk artists were able to perform their artistic works independently since they did not received patronage from the kings and the elite. Consequently, when folk arts like comic dances for instance or the folk plays of Sokari and Nadagam of Sri Lanka were displayed, particularly during the late medieval period, not only the high officials of the state but also the kings and the elite were satirically victimised. Nevertheless, though the precise evidence is not available according to the discussion so far it would be possible to suggest that most of the Buddhist mural painters have enjoyed the patronage extended to them by the royalty and the elite, including the monks and the incumbents of the temples, for the meritorious acts done at the religious institutions, sometimes as wages for their labour, as distinct from the social status of the folk artists. Consequently, it seems that the enthusiasm shown by the artists mainly

167 Thus, in some instances, it seems that the painters did not consider these works so much as the meritorious deeds, but they considered these as the ‘state duty’ entrusted to them by the high officials of the state, sometimes by the king himself.
depended on the importance of the kings and the elite who entrusted these works to them.

In this context, it has to be noticed that the themes selected for the murals, discussed in the previous chapter in detail also indicate that the artists or the selecting authority of the themes have chosen those that depict the elite in a praiseworthy manner. For instance, besides the life story of the Buddha, which is often associated with royalty, particular attention had been given to such Jataka stories like Vessantara, Kshantivadi, Mahajanaka, Vidhurapandita, Mahaummagga and Sutasoma in which the people of high-birth, particularly the royalty had been eulogised. This is further evident from the fact that the majority of these stories treat the human form rather than the animal incarnations of the Bodhisattva. 168

In this context, it has to be realized that though the selected themes are purely Buddhist, especially the paintings of the Jātaka stories raise a few questions. Of these, the most pertinent questions are: Why have these few Jātaka stories been selected out of the almost 550 Jātaka collection for the paintings? Why have the same Jātaka stories been repeatedly chosen for the same place, even during the same period instead of using another Jātaka story? Was the choice intended to convey a message to the visiting monastics and laity to the site? Were the Jātaka stories linked to an unitary theme? Who made the choice and the selection of the themes? etc. The probable answer to some of these questions is that it seems to be that the selecting authority has shown a tendency to the Jātaka stories, which extol the virtues of the kings and the elite. A statement made by Fabri particularly in relation to the Buddhist mural paintings of India is important at this stage, since he has suggested that it seems obvious that the monks and devotees of

Buddhist faith had every reason to try and please the ruling king, precisely because he was not too generous to them (since he was not a Buddhist). Certainly, priests and religious leaders of minority communities, in all countries and in all ages, are most punctilious in paying respect to authority and protesting their loyalty-unless it is violently hostile to them.169

As suggested by another contemporary writer too, the apparent reason why the artists abandoned the wider field of the Jatakas which allowed full opportunity for the display of their powerful imaginations and superior technical skill, was that the ruling class and their officials professed a different religion and had therefore no interest in themes which reflected the glory of Buddhism: while such subjects as gods or kings seated on richly bedecked thrones and accompanied by princely attendants suited the idea of the majesty and grandeur of their own faith.170 This condition can easily be observed at least among the paintings of Ajanta. As Dehejia also pointed out, the patron’s and incumbent’s desire for glory was a significant motivation for the magnificent picture galleries at Ajanta that were mostly dedications from the aristocracy including the high born priests. As a result, in most cases, the decision to decorate a cave with stories focussing on royalty, cave no 1 for instance171 may have had more to do with the patrons’ prestige and their desire for reflected glory than with consideration for either visiting pilgrims or the monks’ use and the monastic community’s dormitory needs.172

171 Although the general connotation of the statement of Dehejia is acceptable the selected example of cave no 1 is debatable since there is no inscriptional evidence to show who the patron of the cave was, as already discussed.
Consequently, it can be noted that very often, the chief character of the story was a person of nobility and to draw his figure a special effort had been made. That figure was always bigger than the rest of the figures. In addition, these figures have also been embedded with various ornamental ideas. Particularly, they had paid special attention to the costumes and the garments of these nobles and as a result even the small designs of the costumes have been executed in a subtle manner. Similarly, the painters of both countries have increasingly used ornaments for these figures and in the case of a royal or elite lady the ornaments of the head have been particularly and elaborately painted. It is also evident that the artists have attended always to demonstrate all the limbs of their body conspicuously. In this context, the very subtle manner, in which the lines have been drawn in these figures, should be contrasted with the lines of the rest of the figures to get a clear idea of this fact.

According to this mentality of the painters, it is obvious that in the application of colours also they have adhered to a special mode. Consequently, the painters have applied fair, bright and shining colours to the figures of royalty and aristocrats in order to show their speciality, nobility and high birth. This condition is particularly noticeable among the Buddhist mural paintings of Sri Lanka rather than those of India since several ‘black princesses’ have been represented at Ajanta. Similarly, when colouring the figures of people of ‘lower status’ such as servants and the other lower beings including the devils, it is evident that the artists have painted them with an apparent dark colour. For instance, below the life of wheel, painted on the outer wall of cave no 17 at Ajanta, is the

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173 For the description of colour symbolism in Indian context see Karel Werner, Symbols in art and religion: The Indian and the comparative perspectives, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1991, p.17.
fragmentary figure, in dark green, of the yaksha Manibhadra whose name is also recorded. The demons in the Maitribala Jataka painted at Tivamka image house also display similar application of colours.

Similarly, when painting the figures of the gods the artists used the same paint of either yellow or an akin bright colour, which they used for the figures of kings or aristocrats. For instance, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, among the figures of gods painted at Tivamka image house and Pulligoda cave most have yellowish bright coloured bodies. But, it is noteworthy that amidst these are figures of gods having a bluish green colour too. In addition, among the Sigiriya paintings also there are figures of apsaras with both yellowish and dark coloured bodies. No doubt, as there are fair and dark coloured persons among human beings (among the kings too), it was the belief of painter that there are similar coloured beings even among the gods. According to all these observations, it is clear that the artists conveyed by these paintings a very subtle political message to the devotees in order to convince them that kings and the gods are of equal social status and the servants, people of the lower rank and the devils are of a low but similar status.174

When attention is thus focussed on the painter’s perspectives, it is to be noted that the painters of Ajanta used woman as their best decorative asset with brilliant zest and extraordinary knowledge. Certainly, woman is the finest achievement of their art and obviously its most admired theme. They cannot apparently have too much of her and introduce her on every possible occasion, whether relevant to the story or otherwise, in

every possible way, but under one aspect only that of beauty. But, it is conspicuous that at Ajanta while men are engaged in more emphatic actions such as riding, giving audience, preaching or otherwise, we find women involved in activities less poignant and yet invitingly eye-catching, expressing surprise, sorrow or some emotional output. Certainly, she is mostly in the background of a complex scene though glorifying it. For instance, as evident from the murals of the Jatakas as well as the life story of the Buddha painted in cave nos 1, 2 and 16 woman’s place is generally inside the house, where she is shown to be quite freely with her consort, but in court scenes she is represented in a bashful mood. In most cases they painted them at the toilet, in repose, gossiping, sitting, standing, always with a sort of wonder akin to awe. Besides, these reveal that she is always most devoted to her husband and accompanies him even in exile as in the case of the Vessantara Jataka story painted in cave no 17 though her moral dignity is always maintained. Although the reason for this is not clear undoubtedly, these reflect the painters’ view upon the ladies. It has to be realized at this point that unlike the other early Buddhist sites of India, no donations made by ladies are found at Ajanta. Hence,

180 For instance, an analysis of donative records of Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda affords an idea of the involvement of different classes of men and women of means, including Buddhist monks and nuns in the erection of various types of buildings etc. At Nagarjunakonda, the ladies of the royal family are found to be making gifts and donations to Buddhist establishments. Santi sri, sister of Santamula, the founder of the Ikshvaku kingdom, sets up a few ayaka pillars and other royal ladies, Bapi Sirini, another sister of Santamula, Adavi Chatisiri, a daughter of Santamua, Mahadevi Rudradhara Bhattacharika who happens to be the daughter of the Maharaja of Ujjain for instance pay money either for the erection of pillars or for the renovation of the Mahachetiya. Similarly, the daughter-in-law of Vasatiputra Santamula establishes a
besides the social status or the social background of the ladies, which existed at the time, perhaps the notions of 'generosity' and 'donation' may also have paved the way for this specific mentality of the artists.

A statement that occurs in the Attasalini that was quoted in the third chapter is also important at this stage since it describes that a mental concept (citta-sanna) arises in the mind of the painter, that such and such a shape must be made in such and such a way. It further mentions that all the various arts are produced in the mind of the artist.¹⁸¹ No doubt, this account clearly shows at least the mental freedom of the artists. This condition further confirms by the fact that the statement that occurs in the Butsarana, a Sinhalese Buddhist prose work by an author who was probably a contemporary of the artists who painted the murals of the Tivamka shrine. This particular simile refers to form in a painting, which becomes beautiful by means of the rasa, which exists in the mind of the painter.¹⁸² Thus, it is certain that in view of the taste of the Buddhists, at least of the twelfth century AD, the aesthetic quality of a painting depended on the state of the rasa, in the mind of the painter. This suggestion fits well with the modern concept that the painter's own likeness comes out in the picture.¹⁸³

Although relevant data is not available, the selection of themes for the murals is also an important aspect. As mentioned above, Dehejia has suggested that the painted


vihara for the acharyas of the Bahursrutiy sect in the second regional year of King Vasatiputra Ehuvula Santamula II. The daughter of king Virapurushadatta who happens to be the wife of the Maharaja of Vanavasa also establishes another vihara for the monks of the Mahisasaka sect. Ladies of means, who were not in any way connected with the royalty, were also equally involved in enriching the Buddhist establishments by their gifts and donations. See J P Vogel, "Prakrit inscription from a Buddhist site in Nagarjunakonda," Epigraphia Indica, Vol.XX, 1929-30, pp.18-23; S Dutt, Buddhist monks and monasteries of India, London, 1962, pp.130-131. At Nagarjunakonda, almost ninety percent of the donors are women, in this case of noble birth and relationship, except ladies like Upasika Bodhisri lay lady disciples like Kusumalata. Amita Ray, Life and art of early Andhradesa, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1983, p.164.
stories at Ajanta signify the taste of the donors who were the selectors of the themes. This corroborates well with the aforementioned descriptions of the enthusiasm shown by the painters, which mainly depended on the importance of the kings and the elite who entrusted these works to them. This was mainly due to the fact that painting as a vehicle of communication was closely connected with some traditional concepts as well as the protection and patronage given to it. Spink also arrives at the same conclusion, but for different reasons. According to him, particularly in the last phase of Ajanta, the walls of the previously unfinished interior hall (except for the unfinished and less important—because less visible—front wall) were literally covered with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of different shapes and sizes. Apparently, their placement is quite random, suggesting a reflection of the interests of various separate donors rather than of one controlling patron working with a master planner.

As we have already noted, since most of these latest murals at the site were painted under the patronage of Buddhist monks, it is obvious that apart from the aristocratic

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184 Vidya Dehejia, Discourse in early Buddhist art: Visual narratives of India, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1997, pp.12, 34. According to Dehejia, in most cases, the decision to decorate a cave with stories focussing on royalty, cave no 1 for instance may have had more to do with the patrons’ prestige and their desire for reflected glory than with consideration for either visiting pilgrims or the monks’ use and the dormitory needs of the monastic community. Ibid, p.34.
187 It has to be realized at this point that not only at Ajanta but also at any other Buddhist site, patronage of monks was no less important for the cause of art, since it is obvious that the religious establishments remained under their charge. Unmistakably it may have been to their advantage to advertise the temples by attracting hosts of visitors and devotees. Naturally, the visitor brought with him precious offerings to the temple. There was also a regular income accruing to the temple by this means. Hence, bearing expenses for executing paintings of a temple is unquestionably a very good investment for the future at least to earning the necessary expenses of the relevant temple. Besides, in another way, according to their utility, paintings enhanced the reputation since nothing impressed the devotees more than a visual observation of the stories the devotee had once heard and learnt as discussed in the first part of the third chapter in detail. See Nandadeva Wijesekara, Early Sinhalese painting, Saman Press Maharagama, 1959, p.55. Hence, without
and rich donors among the lay worshippers, residential and outside patrons, especially Buddhist monks would also have intervened in the selection of themes for the paintings though their hierarchy is not possible. It is to be noted at this point that there can hardly be any doubt that artists were concerned primarily with the narrative content. They were tutored and guided insofar as the stories and events were concerned by the members of the Buddhist clergy. Otherwise, the general accuracy and meticulousness of details that one sees in these narratives could not have been possible. This is further evident from the fact that certain legends were more popular than others and were repeated at least more than once, in fact, several times as evident by the Jataka stories of Ajanta. One can also detect that those narratives that had a dramatic quality in them were given preference over others. Due to all these facts one may responsibly presume that these could not have been possible without a conscious process of selection by the society of local monks.

In this context, it has to be realized that Buddhist monks of the temples, after completion of artistic works in their respective temples were particular to get the ceremony of fixing (colouring) the eyes of the main Buddha statues declared open by the king or the wealthy, powerful, chief patron. According to their ultimate aspiration, it
can be assumed that these Buddhist monks were willing to receive some ‘gifts’ and ‘status’ on these occasions at least for the sake of the temples, as is the case in modern Buddhist societies. Hence, most probably Buddhist monks would also have selected suitably praiseworthy themes for the paintings mostly centred around either royalty or the elite to suit the mentality of the chief patrons of their temples. According to the contents of the Jataka stories, which have been painted in these ancient shrines, it is obvious that the selecting authorities of the themes seems to have mostly concentrated on eulogising the generosity and the high qualities of the rulers and the elite, which is evident by the fact that their themes have been the Jataka stories of Vessantara, Sasa etc which will be discussed later in detail.

On the other hand, besides these interventions of monks and donors, Dehejia’s interpretation shows that even the artists had significant freedom to execute the paintings according to their own vision, at least in the context of narrative modes. She has suggested that the allocation of space for each story and the arrangement of the legends along the walls was, probably decided by the chief artist who planned the murals in consultation with the patron.190 In this regard, she further concludes that the choice of narrative modes is likely to have been left to individual painters and would have been largely dependent on workshop traditions while the space allotted to artists would also have influenced their choice. In addition, some of the Jataka stories have apparently been selected for the murals in order to demonstrate the world’s iniquities and the tyrannous or the dictatorial nature of the kings and aristocrats. In some of the portrayals of the Jataka

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stories, this type of emotional feelings, sometimes including the views of the relevant artists, seem to have been given full vent which will be discussed later in detail. Therefore, the themes can also be considered as artists' own choice. If not, they may have been the selections of respective incumbents of the temples or the main devotees of the religious institutions other than the donors who belonged to the category of elite.  

As mentioned in the fifth chapter, it is generally believed that the rock cut viharas at Ajanta as elsewhere were intended as residential quarters only, since they consisted of an astylar hall surrounded by a series of cells, small square or rectangular chambers cut further into the rock though some have concluded that these sites were the places of almost absolute seclusion, where hidden away in their rock-cut retreat this community of priests produced their paintings oblivious of the tide of political conditions which ebbed and flowed in the country around them. As we have already noted, some other scholars have contrary to these, but more convincingly suggested that particularly Ajanta was an academic centre. In addition, as discussed in the third chapter, it is obvious that the murals at these caves were for reading not only by monks, but also by pilgrims or patrons of lay worshippers since it is evident that the walls thus painted were the sort of picture books, which contain doctrinal and religious teachings used for instructing the lay worshipers as well as the novices of the Buddhist order. Hence, no doubt, both monastic and lay worshippers may have visited these sites and the murals were opened to the entire

191 If these themes have chosen by the artists themselves most probably, they had to deliberate primarily with the inspirations of the chief priests of the respective temples and also with the whims and fancies of the patrons or the donors of the paintings, since it is obvious that they have 'invest' their money not only for the beneficial of next births but also for this birth.
devotees of the faith. Besides all the other evidence, monks’ and the lay worshippers’
inscriptions at Ajanta confirm this fact unmistakably.

In this context, when concentrating on viewer response to the themes represented
in these murals, it is obvious that unlike the other mural sites of the two countries Sigiriya
is unique particularly since more than 680 graffiti are located on a wall at the site as
mentioned in the third chapter in detail. Although these subsequent poems have the
paintings as their principal subject, they treat the figures as actual people or as expressions
of feminine beauty, mixing poetic feeling and emotion with the projection of similar
sentiments. Consequently, though these are helpful to understand the viewer response to
the paintings at the site to some extent, as evident from these graffiti themselves, the
writers exercised their poetic licence to interpret the murals in subjective and imaginative
ways, which is not very helpful to understand the many aspects of the paintings today, as
already discussed in the previous chapter in detail. Hence it is not anticipating to discuss
these in detail in this chapter again.

However, it is obvious that all these paintings of the two countries while arousing
the religious feelings of the devotees’ teach more importantly some ethics as discussed in
the third and sixth chapters in detail. But, according to the above mentioned discussions, it
is not unreasonable to think that hidden in the religious sentiments found in these
paintings there is a certain political agenda or message which has been cloaked in a subtle
manner.193 Certainly, this is directly connected to the symbolism of art. 194 Thus, it is

193 M. Somathilake, A historical study of mural paintings in Buddhist temples during the 18th and 19th
"Artists and politics during the Kandyan period," Sambhasha, The Journal of the Department of Piyivena
Education of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education of Sri Lanka, ed. Vijitha Welagedara,
evident that apart from the basic religious sentiments of the themes of the Buddhist murals some form of criticism is also levelled against the kings or the elite by means of symbolic and sometimes comical representations, according to the content of the story, particularly with reference to the Jataka stories. For instance, in the Sutasoma Jataka, which has been repeatedly painted at Ajanta, the weaknesses of some kings is clearly highlighted. According to the story, Pörisāda who had been a cannibal enjoyed royal comfort. In this case, the motive of the artists was to show that whenever necessity demanded even kings used to feed on the flesh of the humans or the citizens just as Pörisāda did. This story also indicates the fact that even a king who was used to enjoying royal food could find it difficult to keep away from anti social habits as it had been a custom among them for a very long period.

Similarly, the story of Vessantara Jataka, the most popular theme among the painters and carvers of the entire Buddhist world also signifies the same sentiments.‡ According to the story, prince Vessantara presented the white elephant, which had been the national property of the people of the entire Sivi country, to another state as a gift as if it was a personal possession of his. Because of this action, prince Vessantara as well as his father, the king of Sivi country had to face severe opposition emanating from the inhabitants of the city.† Thus, the painters who realised the value of public opinion have exhibited this in the murals in an excellent manner. Similarly, the painted Jataka stories of Sama, Chaddanta, Mahajanaka, Ruru, Mahakapi and so on

‡ For detail discussion on symbolism of art please refer to Margaret H Bulley, Art and understanding, BT Bats Ford ltd, London, 1937, p.72.
† The Vessantara Jataka story has been painted at the ancient Buddhist mural sites of Ajanta, Tivanka image house and Maravidiya of Dimbulagala.
stealthily display malevolent aspects of the royalty.\textsuperscript{197} Thus, it seems that some artists of the ancient period who found it difficult to criticise the royalty directly could do it indirectly through the medium of painting and religion thereby giving the general public a special message.

On the other hand, it has to be realized that the themes of Buddhist mural paintings though mainly supporting religious sentiments, may be connected in multiple ways with the viewer, patrons and Buddhist monks. For instance, the frequent portrayal of the Vessantara Jataka, with its emphasis on generous gift giving and the negative portrayal of Brahmins may be considered in this context. If solicited by a wealthy donor, as in Ajanta cave no 17 and Tivamka image house it may have been the donor’s intention to set up a parallel between his own gift giving and that of the great prince Vessantara. Probably, the monastic institutions also supported these views since such kinds of narratives were possibly intended to present typical examples to wealthy pilgrims, hoping thereby to induce them to make donations to the monastery.\textsuperscript{198} It is apparent that the painted Jataka stories of Sibi, Champeyya, Hamsa, and Nigrodhamiga etc noticeably demonstrate similar feelings.\textsuperscript{199}

As mentioned in the fourth chapter, the painted labels of Ajanta (and sometimes at Bagh) were inserted for the purpose of identification of the scenes. Hence one may perhaps surmise that the painted labels like ‘\textit{Sibi raja}’ placed along a king’s seat or ‘\textit{Indrah},’ beside a figure of that god were added to serve as prompts for the literate

\textsuperscript{197} For the summaries of these stories see previous chapter of the thesis.
\textsuperscript{199} For the summaries of these stories, please refer to previous chapter of the thesis.
monk, or for the lay worshipper. It seems unlikely that any monk or a lay devotee would have translated and interpreted the painted Sanskrit verses at Ajanta for ordinary worshipers while guiding them through the accompanying visual narratives. Thus, it was perhaps monks of the monasteries or lay devotees of the temples may have been explained these paintings to the worshippers as modern guides of Ajanta explicate these to the connoisseur. A statement made by Dehejia particularly in relation to the murals of Ajanta, is important at this stage since she has also assumed that it is possible that the viewer was inducted into the experience of understanding these extended narratives by a monk who held aloft oil lamps and guided the viewer through the course of narratives. Certainly, it seems near impossible for a viewer to manage without such direction since these narratives are so complicated as discussed in the fourth chapter in detail.

It is to be noted at this point that being daily observers of the paintings around them the Buddhist monks must naturally be expected to cultivate an attitude of appreciation and understanding since the very buildings in which they lived. Possibly, these monks studied the paintings in detail as they, at times, were expected to explain at least certain points, which eluded the understanding of the ordinary lay visitors. It is significant that this tradition still prevails among both the rural and urban Buddhist devotees of modern Sri Lanka at least on special occasions like full moon poya days. Hence, it is possible that the explainers or the interpreters of the paintings of a temple could also interpret these subject matters to the viewers according to their personal

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201 Ibid, p.34.
visions, sometimes, even including the above-mentioned political phenomena, as this exercise by the modern guides of Ajanta.

**Society in painting: Painting as a source:**

Apart from the above-mentioned concerns on “painting in society,” another important aspect is “society in paintings,” especially since art, throughout its history, has reflected contemporary life. As in the case of overall art, this applies equally to the ancient mural painting traditions also, since in most cases the painters have presented their creations based on impressions they have derived from the society, though some instances these may have painted according to the conventional acceptance or in a imaginary way. The main reason for this is that unlike the present times, instead of a tendency to an “idealistic” or “creative” art, the artists of the ancient period executed their paintings according to the tradition in which the social association is conspicuous rather than hypothetical or psychological. Consequently, deep and probing analysis of such artistic creations can reflect even the personal impressions of the relevant artist and sometimes information about the background in which the artists lived. Thus, it is obvious that paintings are one of the most pleasing of historical sources, combining in themselves as

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they do bright colour and form, in addition to aesthetic quality, along with import, in a manner that attract attention to themselves more than any other art expression.\textsuperscript{206}

However, the above observation is mainly valid in so far as secular themes are concerned,\textsuperscript{207} but when it comes to religious subjects, there may be a little doubt that customs, traditions and conventions governed them since the themes of the paintings are almost exclusively Buddhist religious lore as mentioned in the previous chapter in detail. For instance, it is evident that though the scenes depicted on the walls of Ajanta are fundamentally religious,\textsuperscript{208} there are intimate glimpses of the buoyant, throbbing and colourful everyday life of the period, which has been painted invariably with unflinching fidelity to truth.\textsuperscript{209} Thus, no doubt, the paintings of Ajanta constitute an illustrative commentary on life in ancient India in all its kaleidoscopic variety\textsuperscript{210} and as a result just like the sculpture of the Buddhist stupa rails this is also a vast social document.\textsuperscript{211} Certainly, this is applicable not only to the murals of Ajanta alone, but to the other mural sites of the two countries also. When compared to Bagh, while Ajanta paintings are more religious in theme, depicting incidents from the previous lives of the Buddha with their human associations, the Bagh paintings are still more human, depicting

\textsuperscript{206} C Sivaramamurti, Sources of history illuminated by literature, Kanak Publications, New Delhi, 1979, p.135.
\textsuperscript{208} EB Havell, The Ideals of Indian art, Indological Book House, Delhi, 1972, p.133.
\textsuperscript{209} Shanti Swarup, The arts and crafts of India and Pakistan, DB Taraporevala and sons, Bombay, 1957, p.18.
\textsuperscript{211} Karl Khandalavala, Indian sculpture and painting: An introductory study, DB Taraporevala and sons, Bombay, (n.d.), p.52.
the life of the time with its religious associations. The situation is the same even at the other painting sites of Sigiriya and Tivamka shrine etc.

One can even wrongly conclude that these paintings of the two countries are not predominantly religious since these traditions, which had a religious propensity had at the same time a secular bias. For example, some scenes at Ajanta take in an almost secular character, although all may be justified as being part of a Jataka or other Buddhist context. For instance, a woman on a swing in cave no 2 belongs to a depiction of the Vidhurapandita Jataka and may be identified as Irandati, the naga princess central to the story. Here, the narrow waists, full breasts and hips of the women in the composition display the same feminine ideal and beauty that is found throughout most periods and styles of the Indic erotic arts.

212 John Marshall, The Bagh caves in the Gwalior state, India Society London and Department of Archaeology, Gwalior, Delhi Printers, Delhi, 1927, p.73.
214 World art treasures, ed. Geoffrey Hindley, Octopus Books, London, 1979, p.63. It has to be realized at this point that these painters were not recluses like the monks who inhabited the monasteries and they availed themselves freely of every opportunity of the life of their times in their accustomed manner. Consequently, the Bodhisattva, which they have painted, is a benign prince, his consort a princess. In addition, palace maidens, dancers and musicians, are not unfamiliar sight to the artists. Thus, soldiers, hunters, Brahmins, parasolled processionists, jesters, beggars, horsemen, elephant riders, bathing and toilet scenes, architecture and city gateways are all derived from the contemporary scenes. Karl Khandalavala, The development of style in Indian painting, Macmillan, Madras, 1974, pp.21-22.
215 Susan L Huntington, The art of Ancient India Buddhist Hindu Jain, Weatherhill, New York, 1985, p.259. Particularly, the pictures of the nude and semi-nude ladies painted in the most famous events of toilet scene, ritual of lustration, the palace scenes, love scenes etc at Ajanta clearly display the artist's thought. Apart from Ajanta, when considering the paintings of Sri Lanka too, it is evident that at least among the paintings at Tivamka image house, some themes arouse similar sensual feelings though those also belong to the same religious category, which provide a sensation of tranquillity and serenity. For instance, as it was mentioned in the previous chapter, in one of the panels of the paintings considered to be part of the Asanka Jataka, a man and a woman both naked are lying on the ground in an embracing posture. Besides, it is noteworthy that the artist, who did the paintings at Tivamka image house, has depicted the female figures, to be full of sex appeal and beauty in such a way as to arouse sensual feelings in the viewers. (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.66). Indeed, this condition equally applies to the ladies of Sigiriya paintings too. But, it should not be forgotten that though these scenes representing as a part of the general theme, the artists handled do not over-emphasize the sex nor do they show coital postures. Certainly, these scenes are not a par with Hindu erotic sculptures in which the depiction of Kama or the pleasure of sex as one of the main objects of life,
Accordingly, it is obvious that though these paintings of both peninsular India and Sri Lanka are purely Buddhist in respect of their themes, on the one hand these provide rich material for the inventive imagination of the painters, who were more readily inspired by worldly than by depicting renunciation of the world. This is particularly evident at Ajanta, since most of the paintings are still survive at the site in a better condition than any other mural sites of the two countries. Hence, in this analysis only the murals of Ajanta are primarily taken into consideration.

Nevertheless, though incidentally the pictures thus give an intimate relation of Indian or Sri Lankan life of the period, it would be a mistake to suppose that the painters intentionally recorded current events as history, as in the suggestion of the so-called ‘Persian embassy’ or ‘Asoka receiving foreign emissary’ mentioned in the previous chapter in detail. For instance, it is evident that the painter of Ajanta has been equally at

along with artha (material prosperity), dharma (social duty) and moksha (salvation). P Thomas, Incredible India, DB Taraporevala and sons, Bombay, 1966, p.130; See also Lal Kanwar, Sex and salvation: A study of Konarak's erotic sculpture, Kayenkey Agencies, Delhi, 1977, chap 3, pp.19-29. Indeed, in these paintings, the combination of beauty with the spiritual is the prime characteristic of the Indian and Sri Lankan conception of reality. Hugo Munsterberg, Art of India and Southeast Asia: Panorama of world art, Harry N Abrams Inc, New York, 1970, p.72.

217 EB Havell, The art heritage of India comprising Indian sculpture and painting and ideals of Indian art, DB Taraporevala and sons, Bombay, 1964, p.69.
218 In addition, it should also not be forgotten that these mundane matters were not demonstrated in a straightforward manner. Particularly, in the portrayals of Jataka stories, the artists have shown an extraordinary taste to concentrate more on worldly affairs wherever possible, certainly in an indirect way. Obviously, these are also included in the Jataka stories themselves, but only the environment of the events is mainly based on the contemporary society in which the artists lived. This indicates that the artists of Ajanta and elsewhere while pursuing the plots of the stories did not hesitate to change the necessary details to suit contemporary social conditions, harmonious with the contents of stories, thus imparting a social significance to their work in which man is the centre of interest and not the gods. Moti Chandra, Studies in early Indian painting, Asia Publishing House, London, 1970, pp.12-13. Consequently, the painters of Ajanta or any other site unroll before us a grand human drama in which the participants are not gods but princes, sages, men and women belonging to different lifestyles. Thus, it is clear that whilst treating a religious theme, these displayed a very rich cross-section of the contemporary life, (Romila Thaper, A history of India, Penguin Books, New Delhi, Vol.I, 1990, p.190) though some have wrongly concluded that these murals are built up upon minute observation of life. K de B Codrington, “The culture of medieval India as illustrated by the Ajanta frescoes,” The Indian Antiquary, ed. Richard Carnac Temple and others, Vol. LIX, 1930, Swati Publication, Delhi, (reprinted) 1986, p.159. Thus, it is clear that though these paintings were
home in ably representing the dazzling magnificence of the royal court, the simplicity of natural life and the hermit’s tranquil life amidst sylvan surroundings. Consequently, the Vessantara Jataka in the cave no 17 illustrates the prince as the very picture of magnificence, as also the simplicity of the hermit and the poor Brahman as an inexorable beggar. Similarly, the scene of prince Vessantara with his consort, driving on the main road, depicting different merchants in pursuit of their trade, is a beautiful picture of economic life in ancient India. Likewise, the landing of Simhala in the portrayal of Simhalavadana in the same cave is a splendid representation of royal glories. The interior of the palace giving a glimpse of the king and the queen in the harem or in the garden predominantly Buddhist, a good number of mundane matters have also indirectly entered into these traditions. One can hence conclude that though the basic aim of the paintings is to edify Buddhism, there is nothing spiritual particularly in the stories depicting the previous lives of the Buddhas, since the characters are essentially human, untroubled by the mysteries of life and metaphysical speculations. It is also obvious that the painter brought to bear on the subject of his rich imagination and a sense of beauty and imbued these tales with a sort of subtle realism by transporting modes and manners from contemporary life. 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. The paintings therefore assume great interest as giving a vivid picture of the social and cultural life of ancient India and Sri Lanka. Hence, no doubt these wall paintings not only offer some of the most important masterpieces of Indian and Sri Lankan art, but also give a comprehensive picture of both countries’ rich history. For instance see Jawaharlal Nehru, “Forward,” India: Paintings from Ajanta caves, ed. Madanjeet Singh, UNESCO world art series, New York Graphic Society, 1954, p.5; Mulk Raj Anand and RP Bharadwaj, Ajanta, Marg Publications, Bombay, 1971, p.9. Accordingly, these Buddhist murals can immensely use for obtaining such information particularly for the reconstruction of the past, certainly as a reliable primary source of history of the period concerned since these paintings represent a whole picture of the life of those days by depicting several types of characters taken from relevant societies according to the content of the story. Ragunadan Prasad Tiwari, Survey of drawings in ancient India (Upto 600 AD), Indological Book House, Delhi, 1978, p.40. Although this does not mean that one can write chronologically, coherent and detailed history or at least the social history of any country with the help of painting traditions alone, unambiguously one can gather lot of information by carefully observing such paintings, not only about the social life of various people, their costumes, textiles, manners, ornaments, houses, household life, home utensils, but also concerning the mode of transport, arms and armours and much other information, in addition to the religious and aesthetic feelings of the ancient people and the technical knowledge of the painters. But it should also not be forgotten that the study of paintings as a source for history presupposes certain methodological problems. This is because the historians trained to read records as narratives of the past mainly focus on the changes in the economic base and its corresponding political superstructure. When using paintings as a source, they are confronted with certain constant elements in its structure like lines, colours etc, which do not always respond to the changes in the economic base of its production. It is these autonomous moves in the artistic logic, which pose certain problems for the historians. Ratnaabali Chattopadhiay, “Mughal painting as a source of history: A study of certain methodological problems,” Historical archaeology of India: A dialogue between
reveals that nothing was hidden from the gaze of the court painter. The toilet of the princess and lustration scene of a king painted in cave nos 17 and 1 are best examples for clear understanding of this situation.\textsuperscript{219}

Due to these observations of the painters of Ajanta, in most cases within the palace, we see the king on his throne, gracious or angry, relaxing with his consort or attending to matters of state. During concerts held for the diversion of the royal household we meet musicians who play on various kinds of instruments; flute players, drummers and conch-blowers with puffed cheeks and bulging eyes\textsuperscript{220} as in the case of the Mahajanaka Jataka story painted in cave no 1. Thus, the familiarity of the Ajanta artists with court life is amply illustrated at least in the cave nos 1, 2, 16 and 17. In these caves, the royal pavilions containing richly decorated thrones and curtains and awnings with pearl tassels, the princes and princesses wearing gorgeous jewels and draped in expensive silks or gold and silver brocades of exquisite designs, the musical entertainments, the animal fights, the hunting excursions, the stately cavalcades, comprising elephant-riders and horsemen as well as infantry and the march of armies and the violence and turmoil of the battlefield, are all depicted by the hand of one who has observed these scene at close quarters.\textsuperscript{221} Accordingly, it is clear that the material culture that is depicted in the paintings of Ajanta is helpful in building up a picture of court life in ancient India. Of these,  

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\textsuperscript{221} G. Yazdani, \textit{Ajanta: Monochrome reproductions of the Ajanta frescoes based on photography}, Swati Publications, Delhi, Vol.IV, 1946, p.5.
\end{flushright}
particularly the scenes depicted in the latest murals at the site clearly mirror the rich and sensuous life at the Vakataka court and of Gupta India in general.\textsuperscript{222}

Certainly this applies not only to royal glories but to other aspects of the society too. Of these, costumes occupy a significant place (Plate XIX), since India has been famous for its textiles, more particularly for cotton fabrics, in the ancient past not only at home but beyond its frontiers as well. But our knowledge regarding these ancient textiles is far from satisfactory. This is due to, in the main, to the fact that no actual specimens have survived because of the climatic conditions. But fortunately the murals of Ajanta represent a bewildering variety of these textile patterns although it is difficult to identify different types of fabrics such as cotton, silk etc.\textsuperscript{223} Even so, the wall paintings of Ajanta are a veritable mine of information particularly in relation to costumes,\textsuperscript{224} since these are the only surviving examples which show the colour, pattern, designs etc of the textiles of the period concerned though these have not been adequately discussed by the scholars. However, of these, in the earliest period it is obvious that the palace scene painted in cave no 10 though it occupies only a small part, is important to the present study. It depicts the queen, the king and their retinue. Their garments, coiffure, headdresses and jewellery are all in keeping with the style, which was in vogue in the centuries around the beginning of

\textsuperscript{224} It has to be admitted at this point that even the very early scholars who worked on the paintings of Ajanta, end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century AD have recognized this important aspect of the murals, since they have discussed these even though briefly. As one scholar observed, a narrow parallelogram of cloth wound round the waist and passed between the legs, is secured in a fashion hard to describe in words, but perfectly convenient in practice. Prince, princesses, courtiers, monks, soldiers, waiting maids and worshipers, all wear the dhotis. With the exception of the figures in the older paintings in cave nos 9 and 10, no turbans are shown. Princes and nobles wear jewelled headdress and women a profusion of flowers and ornaments; soldiers and monks are mainly bareheaded; while foreigners, servants and mendicants wear a variety of made caps and hoods. John Griffiths, \textit{The paintings in the Buddhist cave temples of Ajanta – Khandesh}, 1896, Caxton Publishers, Delhi, (reprinted) 1983, Vol.1, pp.15-16.
the Christian era. In fact, they are almost identical with those depicted in the contemporary Sanchi reliefs and are not much different from those in the Bharhut carvings. Accordingly, it appears that kings in the early period wore a short dhoti reaching the knees. The front pleats of the dhoti were taken at the back and tucked in rather tightly. A long waistband, \textit{(Kamarband)} was also tied round the waist in a looped knot and one of its ends was left loose, dangling between the thighs.

Interestingly enough there was a striking change in the manner in which the dhoti was worn in the earlier and the later period murals. Another noteworthy feature of the later period is that the Ajanta kings and princes usually wear an \textit{ardhoruka} and an \textit{uttariya} in striking contrast to the dress of the contemporary Gupta kings. In contrast, it is significant that in the paintings of both the periods of Ajanta the kings are generally naked down to the waist, although the courtiers and attendants are fully dressed, some of them wearing a kind of long coat with tight sleeves, like the \textit{angrakha} of the medieval times. Similarly, it is apparent that in the earlier period men wore an \textit{ardhoruka} as the lower garment while as upper garment; they sometimes wore a loose, half-sleeved tunic reaching below the waist. It had a \textit{'V'} shaped neck and there seems to have been an

\textsuperscript{225} Mario Bussagli and C Sivaramamurti, \textit{5000 years of the art of India}, Harry N Abrams Incorporated Publisher, New York, (n.d.), p.113.


\textsuperscript{227} BM Barua, \textit{Bharhut}, Calcutta, 1954, See plate no LXIX, p. 83.


\textsuperscript{229} As in the case of the costumes, the social events of the contemporary life, which included in these later period paintings are also considerably different from those of the earliest murals. For further details please refer to MK Dhavalikar, "Ajanta: The perception of the past," \textit{Perceptions of South Asia's visual past}, ed. Catherine B Asher and Thomas R Metcalf, American Institute of Indian Studies, Oxford and IBH Publishing Co, New Delhi, 1994, pp.127-132.
opening in front as evident from the paintings of cave nos 10 and 9. In the later period it seems that the commonest lower garment was an *ardhoruka* wound in rounds and the raging fashion of the day was to leave long, flowing tufts. Besides, the waistcloth was also the chief costume of the men, although hunters and other forest people wear the small loincloth. A long sleeved tunic down to the knee was the dress of soldiers and horsemen.\textsuperscript{231} The upper garment that is frequently represented in the later period is an *uttariya*, which consists only of a long narrow piece of cloth.\textsuperscript{232} Another type of jacket ended above the waist and had short sleeves. These were embroidered at the wrist, upper arm and neck and sometimes down the front.\textsuperscript{233}

In contrast, it is obvious that a majority of the people are shown wearing garments of white cloth preference for which was obviously conditioned by the climate of the country. Sometimes this may have been applied for easy observations of the murals since the interior of the caves were always dark. However, plain coloured cloths are to be found more in the paintings in cave no 16 than in any other cave of the later group. As this is one of the earliest in point of time among the later group of caves as discussed in the third chapter, the only inference that can be drawn is that the striped variety became common sometimes about the end of the fifth century AD and hence its frequent representations in the paintings of the later group wherein a majority of the people are shown wearing striped...


garments. These stripes are either horizontal or vertical and these were used by rich and poor alike, sometimes by the members of the royalty too.234

Comparatively, there is not much variety in the costumes of children as their representations are quite few. The children of royal families wore a half sleeved bodice, probably with an opening at the front. The bodice was fringed with either pearls or beads along the margin and the ‘V’ shaped neck was decorated with some indeterminate embroidered patterns.235 The lower garment of the princes is either a dhoti or a waistcloth, generally of a striped design, in which a blue colour is prominent.236

However, it is evident that there is more variety in the apparel of the female members of the royalty than those of kings and princess represented in Ajanta murals. In the early period they wore something like a modern janghia as a lower garment. A long piece of cloth was tied around the waist and its tufts were left loosely hanging between the legs.237 It appears that in the later period the commonest lower garment of queens was an ardhoruka, usually striped. It was tied in rounds and sometimes-long tufts were left hanging. Besides, another variety of their lower garments was a skirt, either short or long, reaching the ankles. In addition, these queens and princess also wore long tight-fitting trousers.238 Apart from these, certain court ladies at Ajanta, particularly on the occasion of the coronations, wore fine muslin waistcloths239

235 Ibid, p.35.
238 MK Dhavalikar, Ajanta: A cultural study, University of Poona, 1973, p.27.
When attention is focussed on their upper part garments, it is evident that the ladies of high birth have been shown wearing tight bodice of a thin gossamer-like material, almost transparent, while women of lower rank are clad in ‘chōlis’ of thicker material. The female members of the royalty usually wore an uttariya, which was sometimes quite long. But a shorter variety is also to be noticed. For instance, it is worn by the queen mother in the Mahajanaka Jataka of cave no 1 and might possibly have been tied at the back. Meanwhile an extremely interesting upper part garment is worn by prince Yasodara as painted in cave no 17. It looks like an apron and is probably made of the ‘stavaraka’ type of cloth as it is interwoven with pearls. In contrast, there is a large variety in the designs of upper part garments, ranging from a strip (brassiere) to the tight-fitting half sleeved bodice (choli) and the full-sleeved shirts with slits (or cuts) on back and sides showing the beauty of form to advantage as well as to ensure freedom of movement.

Besides these costumes of the royal ladies, when attention is focussed on the garments of the ordinary women it is apparent that the few fragments of paintings of the earlier period that have survived do not depict much variety in their costumes. But in the later period there is an interesting variety of costumes of women at Ajanta. In this period they commonly put on an ardhoruka just as the men did as already mentioned above. It was simple and wound in rounds, sometimes rather tightly possibly to accentuate the graceful curves and was usually secured on the waist by a jewelled mekhala. Many

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women preferred to wear it in such a fashion as to leave a long flowing tuft, which was sometimes held in the left hand. Another type of lower garment was a skirt, though it is not very common. At least two varieties of skirt are noticed. One is short, reaching to the knees. A palace maid depicted in the Mahajanaka Jataka of cave no 1 wears it. This has vertical stripes and the central band in front is embellished with dainty floral and scroll designs probably embroidered. In the same panel a maid is shown wearing a long skirt reaching the ankle.

It is obvious that some women are shown wearing a bodice (kurpasaka) with mega-sleeves which are probably dotted with pearls or beads as in the case of the palace scene of the Mahajanaka Jataka in cave no 1. Three pearl or bead necklaces are also seen stitched around the neck. Another interesting variety is a half-sleeved bodice worn by a maid as evident from the Sutasoma Jataka painted in cave no 17. It is rather long covering the abdomen and rests over the hips. Some women are seen wearing a plastron (udaramsuka), which is either sleeveless or half sleeved.

Besides these costumes of the royalty and the ordinary citizens, it appears from the paintings that some sort of uniform was prescribed for the army personnel, though it is difficult to distinguish between the rankings of soldier from their costumes. This is particularly evident from the story of Simhalavadana painted in cave no 17 and also from the scene depicting the descent from the heaven of the thirty-three gods also in the same cave, where the various groups of warriors and attendants are all in uniform. It is to be

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243 Ibid, p.32.
244 Ibid, p.32.
245 Ibid, p.33.
noted that in the earlier group of murals soldiers wearing only a short dhoti (ardhoruka) or a skirt (chandataka) appear as ordinary foot soldiers. 247 But, in many painted stories of the later period we notice ordinary soldiers wearing half-sleeved kurpasaka with its sleeves, round neck and the lower margin embroidered, in addition to the ardhoruka, i.e. the lower garment. 248 According to these murals, it appears that the high officers wore-long, full sleeved coats (varabana) and tight-fitting trousers (svasthana). Besides, they also donned robes either short or long ones. The robe worn by an army officer in the Mahajanaka Jataka in cave no 1 is rather short and it is fastened at the neck by means of a round clasp. Another high army official in the Vidhura Pandita Jataka of cave no 2 is seen wearing a long robe, reaching the ankles. 249 Thus, it would be clear that the paintings of Ajanta are a veritable encyclopaedia of the costumes of ancient India.

In addition, it is to be noted that some persons of foreign origin are also represented in these murals. Their dress and facial features bespeak of their different nationality, which however is difficult to identify precisely. 250 Of these, the foreigners in the so-called ‘Persian embassy’ episode of cave no 1, which we have discussed in the previous chapter in detail wear long full-sleeved coats, tight-fitting trousers and tall conical caps. In another panel on the ceiling of the same cave representing a ‘Bacchanalian scene’ a foreign chief is depicted with his consort in a sitting posture. Two maids are seen serving them wine and two male attendants are shown sitting at their feet. The chief wears a long full-sleeved coat of pale blue cloth. Its collar, armbands and cuffs

247 Pradip Shaligram Meshram, Early caves of Maharastra: A cultural study, Sundeep Prakashan, Delhi, 1991, p.36.
248 MK Dhavalikar, Ajanta: A cultural study, University of Poona, 1973, p.34.
249 Ibid, pp.34-35.
are of lighter colour and are embroidered. He also wears a fur-brimmed domical cap. His consort is clad in a long, full-sleeved gown, which is embroidered. The maids also wear a similar gown and a long flowing skirt. The dress of the male attendants is similar to that of their master. Whatever may be the themes, these pictures indirectly show that the crowd of foreign pilgrims and traders dressed in the characteristic garments of their countries, which must have influenced the costumes of India at least to a certain degree. Thus, it is obvious that the paintings of Ajanta make a treasure house even for the study of the costumes of the people of neighbouring countries too.

Besides these garments, a few representations of footwear have also survived in these paintings. These can be grouped into three major varieties as slippers (Chappals), Sandals and Boots. Of these, a king and a hunter, in the earliest paintings of cave no 10 are shown wearing slippers, which are of identical patterns. Similarly, a hunter in the Chaddanta Jataka of cave no 17 wears sandals, which are similar to slippers, but in addition, these have ankle-strips for fastening them to the foot. Another variety of this type has straps crossing each other and it is also provided with ankle straps as represented in the mural of Samsara chakra in cave no 17. In addition, a soldier in the Mahaummagga Jataka painted in cave no 16 wears shoes resembling modern slippers. It is interesting to note that these representations of footwear at Ajanta demonstrate that women did not wear shoes at all and that men also used these rarely. Similarly, kings wore these when

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252 Moti Chandra, Costumes textiles cosmetics and coiffure in ancient and medieval India, Moti Chandra felicitation volume, ed. SP Gupta, Oriental Publishers, Delhi, 1973, p.76.
necessary, such as in the forests. Hence, it can be suggested that shoes had only utilitarian
value only for specific occasions and hence they were not common.255

It has often been said of the murals of Bagh, that these are more human in nature
depicting contemporary life with its religious affiliations, while the Ajanta murals are
more religious in their theme, depicting incidents from the previous lives of the Buddha
with his human associations.256 This is partly true and it is noteworthy that in the caves of
Bagh, costumes do not show a great variety unlike in Ajanta, since the remains are very
limited. However, it appears that men and women wear striped dhotis. Women wear, in
addition, blue or yellow bodices or loose long sleeved tunics.257

As compared to these, the female figures of Sigiriya are shown as cut off below the
hips by representations of clouds and are depicted either as fair skinned or of dark
complexion. Although some clear differences can be noted between these two coloured
ladies in respect of their upper garments it is apparent that the waistcloth is generally
worn similarly in a majority of cases.258 This waistcloth is in a variety of beautifully
coloured patterns259 (Plates XIII and XX) and rests an inch or two below the navel in a
manner suggesting firm attachment to the body. A single piece of checked or striped
cloth seems first tied around the waist in front while the rest of the cloth is draped, the last
bit being passed between the legs so as to be tucked behind. A few folds appear in front.

255 Ibid, p.44.
256 Sudhakar Nath Mishra, Gupta art and architecture, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1992, p.203.
257 Krishna Chaitanya, A history of Indian painting: The mural tradition, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi,
1976, p.44.
258 It is to be noted that some scholars have believed that whatever be the subject of the paintings, the court
ladies, their costumes and ornaments etc provided models for the Sigiriya artists. S Paranavitana,
“Sinhalese art and sculpture,” Souvenir catalogue of international exhibition of paintings, Colombo
exhibition, February 1952, p.19; Senaka Bandaranayake, The rock and wall paintings of Sri Lanka, Lake
House Bookshop, Colombo, 1986, p.29.
The most pleasing aspect lies in the fan-like wing of the terminal strip at the back that rests stiffly owing to the fine muslin material.\textsuperscript{260}

Interestingly enough, only three of the figures apparently wear upper garments and these consist of breast bands in two cases and a short bodice in the other. All three ladies function as attendants, since their body colour differs from the golden hue of the rest. The knot of the band is tied behind at the back while the bodice is short with a bordered hem. The nudeness above the waist of the remaining figures seems only apparent and in no way real, since closer examination reveals the diaphanous treatment of the blouse which almost eludes detection owing to the fineness of material.\textsuperscript{261} It is evident that the painter has occasionally contended himself by indicating it only by a line of deeper colour.\textsuperscript{262}

However, compared to the costumes depicted at Ajanta and Bagh, no doubt the breast band at Sigiriya is a local form almost different from the Indian tradition although some minute similarities can be noted between the waistcloths of some of the ladies at Ajanta and Sigiriya, particularly in relation to the manner in which they were worn. This clearly indicates that there is hardly any proof to support the view that Ajanta murals are the model for Sigiriya murals, even in the context of their superficial appearance. As compared to the murals of Sigiriya, the garments depicted in the paintings of the other sites of the island are not at all clear due to their bad state of preservation. Hence, the garments depicted in these murals cannot compare with those of Ajanta and Bagh. In the

\textsuperscript{260} Ibid, pp.42, 119; HCP Bell, "Interim report on the operations of the archaeological survey at Sigiriya 1897," \textit{Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch)}, Vol.XV, No.48, 1897, p.118.


\textsuperscript{262} HCP Bell, \textit{Archaeological Survey of Ceylon Annual Reports 1897}, JA Skeen, Government Printer, 1904, p.14.
paintings of Tivamka image house, the lower parts of the bodies are covered with a garment that extends down to their ankles. There is a cloth belt round their waists. It is tied in front with the two ends spreading sideways. It is conspicuous that the elderly figures were bare bodied above the waist. However, apart from these garments, when attention is focussed on the ornament represented in the murals, it is apparent that women of Ajanta paid greater attention to their coiffure and a variety of exquisite styles (Plates XVI, XVII, XVIII and XXI). In addition, some of these paintings show wreaths of flowers in the hair of women and frequently these ladies wore garlands round their neck and bracelets of flowers round their arms. Apart from these, it is conspicuous that the nose-ring does not appear and there are no toe-rings either, but earrings, necklaces, armlets, bracelets anklets and finger rings adorn both men and women, nor is there any end to their variety of design. As in the case of the murals of Ajanta, even at Bagh earrings, necklaces, bracelets for the upper arms and bangles for the waist are the usual jewellery. Some of the women wear necklaces of pearls interspersed with large beads of lapis lazuli.

As in the case of the murals of Ajanta and Bagh, at Sigiriya too every female figure is heavily laden with ornaments and jewellery of diverse forms and shapes, no distinction

265 MS Randhawa, Beautifying India, Rajkamal Publications, Delhi, 1950, pp.128-129.
being shown between attendant and lady (Plates XIII and XX). Particularly, their ears, necks, arms and waists are loaded with a plethora of heaviest ornaments. Floral crowns or tiaras on the heads, earrings, throat-lets, necklaces and pendants, floral garlands, a profusion of jewelled armlets, bracelets and bangles make up the list of their body ornaments. Of these, it is apparent that a number of circular bangles are worn on the lower arms. These are set with gems. The armlets are made of a number of bands or a single band. A flower band is also worn on the arm to match the flower garland around the neck.268

At least four types of neck ornaments have been observed i.e. neckband, necklace, pendant and garland. Of these, the neckband is a simple one stringed ornament with a few gems at the throat. The necklaces are generally single chains hanging loose in front of the neck. There are varieties of patterns with gems set at the front. A more elaborate type is a loose chain with a circular pendant hung in front, the pendant being set with gems.269 Another peculiar body ornament is a two-piece chain fastened with a clasp between the breasts and running down the thigh on either side. In addition, the garlands of white flowers probably jasmines are also noticeable. Besides, two modes of wearing ear ornaments have been portrayed. One is the insertion of a rounded scroll or a band within the distended opening of the lobe. The other is the suspension of a small ornament from the lower part of the lobe.270 Another noticeable point is that only one of the women

267 Krishna Chaitanya, A history of Indian painting: The mural tradition, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1976, p.44.
wears a ring. Though some of the headgears of Sigiriya murals are simple they are the most elaborate and beautiful adornment worn by these ladies. A variety of forms can be discerned. Crown like in appearance they are studded with gems and covered with flowers and leaves. No doubt, these add a majestic charm to the beautiful faces and this has been further illuminated by a tilaka or a dot painted on the forehead. These elaborate headdresses of Sigiriya and those of Ajanta betray some similar elements only in their conical towering shapes, intricate detail and rich floral combination.

In contrast, it is obvious that apart from a few minute similarities, the garments and ornaments represented in the paintings of Ajanta are almost different from those depicted in the Sigiriya murals. This equally applies to the other painting sites of the island though these have not been preserved well. This unmistakably infers that the social context and the material culture reflected in these murals of Sri Lanka are different from that of India. This clearly indicates that two distinct traditions flourished independently from one another, though it had been a common assumption among the scholars to suggest that the murals of Sri Lanka of the ancient period are very closely related to, if not directly derived from those of India, particularly from Ajanta and Bagh.

However, it has to be realized at this point that at least individual scenes of the murals thus painted at various sites of the two countries are useful archaeological sources. For instance although there is only one representation of a house in the earliest paintings at Ajanta, it shows that it was built on the chatuhsala principle, i.e. with a

central court surrounded by rooms. It is apparent that this is a single storied structure with vaulted roof. The woodwork of the roof is very distinct. But, it is obvious that the dwellings of the later period differ considerably from the earlier ones. In a residential locality depicted in the Sutasoma Jataka of cave no 17 for example, the houses are seen nestling with each other without leaving space in between. They are single storied structures in sharp contrast to the multi-storied ones in the market area. In addition, it is obvious that in this later period, the artists of Ajanta have depicted a variety of architectural details, which include almost everything from a humble hut to a sumptuous palace. Of all these architectural illustrations, the most striking and numerous are those of royal palaces, that is the different buildings which formed the palace complex (Plate XVI). Thus, it is clear that these pictures unmistakably reveal the architectural elements of the relevant period.

It is to be noted at this point that the locale of most of the selected Jataka stories is the big cities of north India and therefore, a majority of the painted panels depict only city life. Consequently, there are few illustrations of bazaar streets with shops. A scene from the Vessantara Jataka painted in cave no 17 at Ajanta for instance shows a bazaar with an entrance gateway. It is apparent that the buildings in this bazaar are two or three storied structures, with shops on the ground floor. The upper floors in all possibility served as residential quarters. Of the four shops thus depicted, the first two are not seen clearly; but the third possibly an oilman's shop is obvious from the shopkeeper seen measuring some

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276 Ibid, pp.6-7.
liquid. The next is a grocer’s shop as suggested by the weighing-scale in it. Similarly, the remarkable array of varieties of temples, palaces, pavilions, city gates, ramparts, huts, stupas and monasteries etc certainly form a precious mine of information to the student of architecture.

Besides these architectural structures, it is to be noted that some other valuable details can also be obtained from these murals. For instance, at least four types of ships are to be seen at Ajanta. The simplest of these appears in cave no 17. It is canoe-like and has two masts, one topped by a trident emblem. In the same cave, the army of the Simhalavadana story is shown in the process of transportation of horses in one boat, and elephants in two others. These boats are wide in the beam and ride low in the water; their grotesque makara figureheads are the most notable features. The boat in the story of Kalyanakarin painted in cave no 1 is altogether a large affair. It is symmetrically built with high-pitched, finely cut bow and stern, on both of which oculi are painted. Its fore and aft planking is plainly shown. It is interesting to note that the passengers sit at their ease under a square awning, while the motive power seems to be confined to the efforts of a single sailor in the bows and of his mate, who works a long paddle on the starboard side from a most precarious perch on a ladder set vertically in the stern sheets. Besides, the merchant ship in distress of the Purnavadana in cave no 2 has a full set of sails, aided by two paddles.

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279 It is to be noted at this point that as HP Ray pointed out an area in which Buddhist approach is unlike that of other contemporary religions is that of sea voyages. Himanshu Prabha Ray, The winds of change: Buddhism and the maritime links of early South Asia, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, p.153. For the illustrations of ships painted at Ajanta please refer to Moti Chandra, Trade and trade routes in ancient India, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1977, pp229-230.
fitted with rowlocks amidship (Plate XXVII). The cargo of jars is stored under an awning aft, the three masts with their square sails being well forward. A jib is fitted in a peculiarly complicated manner and flies a small triangular sail without visible means of support. Without doubt, in terms of cultural history of India, these paintings of ships are particularly significant, as they constitute valuable pictorial records, apart from a few rather unclear stone reliefs and coins of ancient Indian sailing vessels.

The same lack of weapons of war, either offensive or defensive, represented in the other archaeological evidence is also to be noticed at this point. Hence, swords, straight and crooked, long and short, spears of various kinds, clubs, bows and arrows, a weapon resembling a bayonet reversed, the *chakra*, a missile like a quoit with cross bars in the centre and shields of different forms are all depicted in the murals at Ajanta. Among these paintings a small number of domestic utensils are remarkable (Plate XXVI); the common *chātti* and *lotā*, a drinking cup and other dishes, a tray, an elegantly-shaped sort of jug having an oval body and long thin neck with lip and handle together with a stone and roller for grinding condiments, are all that are observable.

In addition, the paintings of Ajanta throw indirect light on the history of other arts, such as dancing and music of ancient India as well. In the same way, the murals of Bagh

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also reveal some important information on the subject though these are now in a very bad state of preservation. For instance, an unidentified remaining scene presents a mirthful hallisalasāya, a folk dance\(^{285}\) with the dancer in ring, keeping time with little wooden sticks. It is conspicuous that two in the group of damsels play the hand-drum and the third plays the small sized cymbals. The coiffure and colourful dress of these damsels and particularly of the two dancers wearing long sleeved shirts with flowers worked on them are most interesting for a study of the costumes of dancers in the context of cultural life of the age.\(^{286}\)

Besides, in these murals, it is evident that the charms of natural scenery and animal life have also made an equally deep impression on the mind of the artist and inspired him to these exquisite drawings of geese, peacocks, antelopes, bulls and elephants in varied scenes of marvellous beauty, among wood and groves\(^{287}\) (Plate XXIV). Some minute observations of nature have also been inserted into these murals. For instance, there is a tree heavy with blossoms in the paintings of Chaddanta Jataka represented in cave no 17 of Ajanta. A creeper has entwined itself round the tree in a friendly embrace and its single blossom appears among the clustered inflorescence. It is interesting to note that a train of

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\(^{285}\) Agraval suggests that this is *Hallisaka* dance. See Vasudeva S Agravala, *Gupta art (A story of Indian art in the Gupta period 300-600 AD)*, Prithivi Prakashan, Varanasi, 1977, p.95.


ants is also going up the tree to gather honey\textsuperscript{288}(Plate XXIV). No doubt, all these scenes are the result of the artists' observations.

According to the discussion so far, it would be clear to any observer that these paintings are the mirrors of contemporary life in palace, court, town, village, hamlet and hermitage etc. Hence, it is obvious that in these religious paintings apart from the figures of Buddha, his disciples and devotees, there are many representations of streets, processions, battles, interiors of houses with the inmates pursuing their daily occupations, domestic scenes of love and marriage; there are hunts, men on horseback spearing the wild buffalo; animals, from the huge elephant to the diminutive quail; exhibition of cobra dicapello, ships, fish and so on. Thus, as artists have painted many such scenes of the period and the society, which they have noticed, one can obtain both direct and indirect information regarding various aspects of the ancient societies of the two countries. Accordingly, the value of these paintings rests not only on the beauty of the pictures and the attractiveness of the religious sentiments of the themes, but also as a historical record. Hence, without any hesitation, most of these paintings can be considered as a mirror through which one could visualise the social position that existed during the period concerned.\textsuperscript{289}

\textsuperscript{288} See Benoy K Behl, The Ajanta caves: Ancient paintings of Buddhist India, Thames and Hudson, 1998, plate on p.181. It is to be noted that behind this vision was the intuition of the beauty of creation, close-knit like a family, gathered together in a fertilising interdependence in the plant and animal worlds, where the insect receives the honey from the flower and helps in its fertilisation, thereby promising the advent of renewed life when the beauty of the petals has perished. Krishna Chaitanya, A history of Indian painting: The mural tradition, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1976, pp.41-42.

\textsuperscript{289} Thus, since it is obvious that there are many such scenes among these Buddhist mural paintings of both the countries depicting some important information on the ancient societies, these can be considered as very valuable archaeological sources not only for the historians but also for the other researchers into the parallel subjects.