Chapter one

Introduction

According to the general acceptance, art is the expression of communications of man’s deepest instincts and emotions reconciled and integrated with his social experience and cultural heritage. Ancient Indian and Sri Lankan literature speaks of sixty-four such arts. Of these, in fact, the art of painting occupies a very important place. Consequently, it is maintained in the Visnudharmottarapurana, an ancient Indian canon of painting that as Sumeru is the chief of the mountains, as Garuda is the chief of those born out of eggs, as the king is the chief of men, even so in this world is the practice of painting, the chief of all arts. In addition, it has been mentioned as the giver of all the deeds i.e. Dharma, pleasure, wealth and emancipation. It can lead to auspiciousness and prosperity too.

Besides such statements of ancient writers, which always arouse the emotional feelings of the reader, it is evident that wall paintings exist from early times not only in India and Sri Lanka but also in different countries of Asia i.e. Central Asia, Afghanistan, Nepal, Thailand, Burma, Laos etc. Although a large portion of these wall paintings has

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1 The number sixty-four happens to be recognised as very auspicious in the Indian way of thinking. Hence, besides sixty-four branches of fine arts, there were also sixty-four Mayas, sixty-four Yoginis, sixty-four Mudras, widely known in the heritage of ancient Indian culture. In fact, sixty-four happens to be a legendary arithmetical figure too in the Indian concept. For details of sixty-four arts please refer to Anil Baran Ganguly, Fine arts in India, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1979, chap.2, pp.15-21. For a discussion of the concept of sixty-four arts in ancient Sri Lankan literature please refer to M Somathilake, A study of the mural paintings of the Kandyan period, Unpublished graduation thesis, Department of History, University of Peradeniya, 1990, Chapter 1.


3 Ibid III, 45-48, I, 43;38.
been destroyed, mainly through the effect of nature, human vandalism and neglect, several of them are available which give a fair idea of what they must have been. It is interesting to note that though these paintings are in different countries of Asia, there are common factors, which bind them together. Primarily, most of them are influenced by the Buddhist theme and there seems to be a common approach in their execution of figures, lines and colour scheme. Another common factor seems to be the technique of execution of paintings. Thus, the mural painting tradition became a vital expression with a common Asiatic style, an art of line and paints specially made famous at Ajanta and Bagh in India and Sigiriya and Polonnaruva in Sri Lanka and in many other Asian countries.

In fact, this gigantic creative endeavour found its full flowering with the spread of Buddhism in many lands. It is evident that particularly India and Sri Lanka have a long history of paintings which started from prehistoric times and continued to the later periods and within this tradition there are various subdivisions such as wall paintings, canvas or scroll paintings (Tanka or Petikada), drawings on banners or flags, paintings or sketches on earthenware, manuscript paintings, paintings on manuscript covers, paintings of masks etc though some of these examples are currently not available. In this study, out of such painting traditions, the focus will be only on the mural tradition that was done on plaster on walls and rock surfaces. It is to be noted at this point that this

6 The word mural is derived from Latin murus (French mur) meaning wall and therefore paintings done on the walls are known as mural paintings.
whole tradition of mural painting may be classified into three major groups as fresco buon\footnote{The technique of fresco-buon or wet process was first perfected in Italy in about 1300 AD. It consists of painting with lime-resistant colours on damp-plaster, i.e. plaster which has not yet set. The plaster can only be painted on in this state; therefore, the painter divides his work into so-called day piece, each day piece being the area, which can be finished in one day or at a single stretch. When the plaster sets, the particles of colour automatically crystallised into the wall thus remain permanently fixed and fused with it. They cannot flake off. The fresco can only be damaged if the wall decays. For further details in this regard, please refer to chapter five of the thesis.} or wet process, fresco-secco\footnote{Wet process is done on fresh, moist plaster, whereas fresco secco (or lime painting) is done on a plaster, which is set. The surface in the latter case has to be thoroughly soaked and washed down several times with slaked lime to which some fine river-sand has to be added. The paint must be applied while the slaked lime is in viscous state. In this method of painting the ground should be prepared of polished lime-plaster and then lime-fast colours, prepared with limewater and diluted with slaked lime, should be applied. For further details, please refer to chapter five.} (and secco proper,\footnote{The number of colours can be increased in this kind of painting by adding casein or gum to the lime; this makes them more intense. If the amount of casein is still further increased, fresco-secco becomes lime casein painting or secco-proper. For further details please refer to chapter five of the thesis.} which is a slightly variant form of fresco secco) and tempera\footnote{Tempera is used to define a painting medium by which the colours are mixed and tempered with the help of glue, gum, resin or the yolk of the egg and for specification this may require specific terms like glue-tempera, gum tempera or egg tempera. See Rutherford J Gettens and George L Stout, Painting materials, New York, 1946, pp.69-70.} mainly based on their techniques which have been discussed in the fifth chapter in detail.

**The earliest wall painting tradition:**

Although the techniques are not similar in all the ancient periods, as in the case of the paintings or the sketches drawn on earthenware,\footnote{See. D.H. Gordon, "Early Indian painted pottery," Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Vol.XIII, 1945; Z.D. Ansari, "Evaluation of pottery forms and fabrics in India," Marq, Vol.XIV, No.3, 1961; Raguadasad Prasad Tiwari, Survey of drawing in ancient India, Indological Book House, Delhi, 1978, pp.4-5; OC Gangoly, "The glorious beginning," Panorama of Indian painting, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1968, pp.1-3; Pratapadiya Pal, Indian painting, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California, Vol.1, 1993, p.16.} the history of mural painting also may be traced to prehistoric times.\footnote{There are four principle centres in India where such paintings have been discovered; Mahadeo hills of Vindhyan range in Bundelkhand in Madhya Pradesh, Raigarh of Singhanpur and Kabar Pahar in Madhya Pradesh, Mirzapur.}
area in the Son valley of the Kaimur range in the area of Bagelkhand and Manikpur in Banda District in Uttar Pradesh. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that even a superficial study of these paintings shows that a large number of them cannot be attributed to the prehistoric epochs. For instance, horse riders armed with swords, spears and shields do not belong to a society of hunters and gatherers and can only have been painted with the domestication of the horse and the development of such weapons. Hence, these may be dated to the proto-historic or historic periods. Yet, there remain an astonishingly large number of paintings that contain technological and cultural traits that have a prehistoric origin. In these earliest wall paintings of India, at least twenty styles have been identified mainly based on their technique, pigments and subject matter and this form of art is described as X-ray style due to their method of displaying outer contour of the figures.

In Sri Lanka, the prehistoric paintings of the earliest human settlement are said to have been found in the Balangoda area. Nevertheless, this statement does not have universal acceptability, since some archaeologists argue that although paintings belonging to the prehistoric period have been found in various places in the world none has been found in the Balangoda region. Even in an underground cave at Walimada Stripura, such a painting has not been found. This view is supported by other archaeologists in the

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13 Vasudeva S Agrawala, Indian art: A history of Indian art from the earliest times upto the third century AD, Prithivi Prakashan, Varanasi, 1965, p.10; C. Sivaramamurti, Introduction to Indian art, Arnold-Heinemann, New Delhi, 1985, p.14. It is evident that the largest group of these paintings has been discovered in Madhyapradesh, but over the last few decades important centres have been found in other parts of the subcontinent as well. See Pratapaditya Pal, Indian painting, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California, VOlI, 1993, p.17.
14 Erwin Neumayer, Prehistoric Indian rock paintings, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983, p.8.
17 S U Deraniyagala, (Interviewed by DD Dais), Silumina, Lake House, Colombo, 26th October 1986, p.15.
Archaeological Department of Sri Lanka too. It is to be noted at this point that in fact, the chronology of these ancient Sri Lankan paintings has not yet been scientifically established or even attempted. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that the engravings at Doravakakanda may belong to prehistoric times as this cave yielded some evidence of being a prehistoric site. At other sites, these drawings are more likely to be the work of the modern Veddas.

Thus, it is obvious that though the fixation of a precise chronology is problematic the earliest paintings of the island are generally referred to as prehistoric art. A large number of these caves with paintings are found in the country and according to the way how these caves have been projected by nature they have not been confined to one region alone, but they are spread to almost all parts of Sri Lanka. It is to be realized at this point that during this period of both India and Sri Lanka unlike that of later periods, the varieties of surfaces available for the paintings were limited. The most accessible or readily available surface was the unpolished rough surface of walls of the caves or dwelling

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19 BD Nandadeva, “Rock art sites of Sri Lanka; A catalogue,” Ancient Ceylon, No.6, 1979, p.175.
20 For instance, in the beginning of the last century CG Seligman and BZ Seligman mention that the Vedda women whom they met had disclose to them that drawings done at Pihillegoda-galge in the Sitala Vanniya territory of the Amapara district, were done by themselves while they were waiting for their husbands to return from hunting. CG Seligmann and BZ Seligmann, The Veddas, Cambridge University Press, 1911, p.318. In addition, in the same period some of the Vaddas have told John Still that the drawings at Tantirimale are the work of their ancestors and that their contemporaries do not drew pictures in that way. John Still, “Tantirimale, some archaeological observations and deductions,” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, (Ceylon Branch), Vol.XXII, No.62, 1910, pp.87-88.
places and these were extensively used for drawings and paintings. Hence, these paintings of the earliest period of both India and Sri Lanka have been classified as “Rock paintings” or “Rock art.”

However, when one looks at these earliest paintings one notices that their themes reflect the life experience of the people of the time. Consequently, most of these depict humans, animals, fauna, flora and weapons used at the time and a modern eye would be struck by the simplicity and lack of variety among the paintings. Thus although the rock paintings is the only surviving source through which one can peep into the life of prehistoric people at least to a limited extent, almost all these rock paintings, after finalising the lines, are confined to unpainted figures. Hence, although almost all the critics who have discussed this tradition have used the term “painting,” the terms “drawing” or “sketches” are more meaningful. Thus, it is evident that these earliest paintings are poorer in artistic merit. Consequently, it is apparent that the compositions of the picture groups are unbalanced for the artists never took into consideration the proportional relation between the available space and the size of the figures. Very few of

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22 Nevertheless, in some cases we can find that the wall was even smoothed before drawing these paintings. See SK Pandey, Indian rock art, Aryan Books International, New Delhi, 1993, p.30.
24 Human beings and animals seem to be most popular subject in Sri Lankan rock art and it is conspicuous that the human figure in these rock drawings of the island does not differ remarkably from that seen in other parts of the world. However, one striking trait in Sri Lankan rock art is the depicting of the human figure as sexless. All humans appear depicted in the same manner without indicating their sex. See CG Seligmann and BZ Seligmann, The Veddas, Cambridge University Press, 1911, p.320.
25 After a careful survey of the painted sites it has been found that the majority of the paintings are as a rule in monochrome. The number of polychrome paintings is much lesser. SK Pandey, Indian rock art, Aryan Books International, New Delhi, 1993, p.30.
the paintings were done with care, nor did the artists use proper instruments. Most of the time they seem to have used only their fingers to apply colour.\(^{26}\)

In addition, as in the case of their chronology, we do not know with any degree of certainty why these ancient people painted the walls of their rock shelters. This question has produced a variety of answers as those belonging to religion, magic, shamanism, totems, sexual significance, fertility rites, communication, ceremonial symbols, calendrical devices, decoration and doodling etc.\(^{27}\) Of these it is generally held by anthropologists that the painted representation of animals in primitive art began as a magical ritual inspired by the belief that if one could seize the form of an animal in this way, its seizure in hunting would be assured.\(^{28}\)

As stated above, the rock painting tradition of India continued even during the historical periods\(^{29}\) and it was given up at the end of the first millennium AD\(^{30}\) or as late as fourteenth century AD or still later.\(^{31}\) This situation is directly pertinent to the rock art of Sri Lanka also, since the rock paintings of the island are identical to many of the paintings made by the Vedda people in Sri Lanka not too long ago.\(^{32}\) Accordingly, although it is said, “it is difficult to explain the rock art of the historic period in relation to historic urban

\(^{26}\) Erwin Neumayer, Prehistoric Indian rock paintings, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983, p.38.


\(^{30}\) Erwin Neumayer, Lines on stone: The prehistoric rock art of India, p.43. See also JC Naggall, Mural paintings in India, Gian Publishing House, Delhi, 1988, p.6; Earliest writers have discussed at length the chronology of these paintings. Their conclusions have placed these paintings between a long range from the Palaeolithic period to 10th century AD. See SK Pandey, Indian rock art, Aryan Books Internationals, New Delhi, 1993, p.162.

\(^{31}\) KK Chakravarti, Rock art of India, New Delhi, 1984, pp.44-85; 228-37; See also KD Bajpai, “Symbols in the Indian rock art,” Culture through the ages, BN Puri felicitation Volume, ed. Sarva Daman Singh, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1996, p.169.
applied arts," it is evident that there are two distinct traditions of paintings. This notion further establishes that the paintings of the historical period have not developed from the prehistoric painting tradition though early scholars have noticed some similarities between the rock paintings at Jhalai and the later murals at Ajanta. 34

Thus it is clear that though the techniques and the styles are different the art of ancient ‘mural painting tradition’ in India dates from the prehistoric paintings on cave or rock walls and continued to the later day hill school of paintings of 19th century in north India or 18th-19th century Maharatta paintings in the south, 35 covering a very long period of time. The situation is the same in the field of mural paintings of Sri Lanka also. 36 Of these mural traditions, which have followed different techniques and methods, in this study the focus will only be on the polychrome, well-developed paintings of the ancient period in India and Sri Lanka.

It has to be realized at this point that within this wall painting tradition itself, at least two sub-sections can also be identified relating to both the countries as the religious and the secular paintings. Of these, in the category of secular paintings, the most famous is the Mughal tradition of paintings that belongs to a later period of India and according to some critics the paintings of Sigiriya of Sri Lanka may also belong to the secular painting tradition. 37 There are some noticeable dissimilarities at least from a thematic point of view, between these two categories although they may have followed the same

32 Erwin Neumayer, Prehistoric Indian rock paintings, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983, p.44.
33 Erwin Neumayer, Lines on stone: The prehistoric rock art of India, p.19.
34 DH Gordon, Prehistoric background of Indian culture, Bhulabhai Memorial Institute, Bombay, 1958, p.108.
37 This has been discussed in the sixth chapter in detail.
methodology and sometimes they were even contemporary. For instance, the notions of various ‘rasas’ given by religious and secular miniature paintings of the various schools of Mughal tradition of mediaeval India can be cited as examples. Hence, of these, attention will only be focussed on the religious paintings. But it is to be noted that a distinction may be made in these religious wall paintings in the two countries, at least in India, based on various religious beliefs or institutions of the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains etc. Although these traditions of religious paintings sometimes would have used similar techniques, at least from the layout, themes, spiritual notions and the doctrinal teaching etc some dissimilarities are also noticeable. Therefore, out of such mural traditions, which belong to various religious institutions only the Buddhist wall painting tradition of India and Sri Lanka will be discussed in this study, since it is the only one common tradition between the two countries.

**Buddhist mural painting tradition:**

It is generally accepted that Sri Lanka has a long Buddhist mural painting tradition at least starting from the second century BC. According to some scholars, the earliest paintings survive at Karambagala, near Situlpauva in the southern province though

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precise chronological evidence is not available. Other scholars like Paranavitana and Bandaranayaka state that this tradition starts from the fifth century AD as evident from the remains at Sigiriya in Matale District in Central province. It is generally accepted that Sri Lankan painters at least up to the twelfth century AD have practised this "classical mural painting tradition" and these survive at a large number of sites.

Of these, it is particularly to be mentioned here that although the paintings at Sigiriya are likely to be a representation of a secular tradition of painting, at first glance

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43 Karambagal in southern province of the second century B.C; Sigiriya in central province of the fifth century A.D; Hindagala in Kandy in central province of the seventh century A.D; Anuradhapura (vestibules of few stupas) in North central province ascribed to the eighth century A.D; the relic chamber paintings of Mihintale near Anuradhapura in the same province belonging to the eighth century A.D; the painting remnants at Gonagolla near Ampara in Eastern province and the paintings of Puligoda cave near Dimbulagala in North Central province belonging to the eighth century; the relic chamber paintings of Mahiyangana stupa in Uva province belonging to the eleventh century; the cave paintings at Maravidiya at Dimbulagala in North central province of the twelfth century; the painting series at Northern temple or the Tivanka image house and the painting remnants found at Galviharaya and Lankatilaka temples of Polonnaruwa in North central province which belong to the twelfth century A.D; the relic chamber paintings of Dadigama in Kegalle district of the 12th century and other places of Kandala, near Sigiriya in Central province; Vessagiriya of Anuradhapura and Situlpahuwa in Southern province where the chronology of paintings are uncertain.

44 Some scholars believe that the theme of the Sigiriya paintings is secular as will be discussed in the sixth chapter in detail. The descriptions of Devendra, Rowland Silva, Siri Gunasinghe, Ravinda Pandya and Chutivongs are conspicuous in this respect. Of these Devendra says that all the extant paintings of note in the island are connected in some way with the Buddhist church. Nevertheless, the Sigiriya frescoes are entirely different from them in this respect. DT Devendra, Guide to Sigiriya, (no publication data), 1948, p.10; Rowland Silva observes that the fifth century paintings at Sigiriya are an exception since they have no religious significance and are (according to some) portraits of ladies of the royal court. Roland Silva and
when only considering their superficial appearance (Plate 1), some critics have believed that they belong to a Buddhist tradition of painting at least belonging to the Mahāyāna (Great Vehicle) sect of the island on the basis of their subject matter. In addition, among the opinions of other critics expressed on the themes of Sigiriya paintings, the most popular one that prevails at present is that they depict some goddesses from Tusita heaven as will be discussed in the sixth chapter in detail. The main reason for that view is the fact that clouds cover the lower parts of the female figures and it is clear that the concept of Tusita heaven also signifies Buddhist ideology to a great extent. Besides, the ceiling paintings at the Cobra-hood cave at Sigiriya proves that the cave was used as a Buddhist shrine and the Asana cave also at the site contains painted fragment of a scene of which one panel depicts a worshipping scene. At least two figures are discernible in the painting one being a male in the attitude of worship and the second a standing personage,

others, Cultural treasures of Sri Lanka, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1973, (no page numbers). See the section on paintings; Gunasinghe states that these however, are not examples of Buddhist paintings; the Sigiriya ladies are clearly of no religious significance; the flowers they carry are not offerings to the Buddha and they are not on their way to pay homage to Him. They are pre-eminent expressions of mundane beauty (physical as well as emotional) and exist in a realm quite distinct from any thing Buddhist. In any event, their non-Buddhist nature notwithstanding, the Sigiriya murals must be regarded as an example of a local tradition of painting a decorative medium which must have been popular enough to be followed in other spheres as well, one of which much necessarily have been the religious. Sri Gunasinghe, “Buddhist painting in Sri Lanka - An art of enduring simplicity,” Spolia Zeylanica, Vol.LXXXV, Nos, 1&2, 1980, p.479; Ravindra Pandya says that the Sigiriya frescoes are the only ancient paintings in Sri Lanka that do not have a religious significance. Ravindra Pandya, Cave paintings of Sri Lanka, Art Centre, Pragati Society, Ahmedabad, 1981, p.8; Chutivongs states that Sigiriya, unlike most of the other sites is predominantly a secular monument with paintings related to this field. The site itself had much natural potential for design and no doubt for this reason was hand picked for the modelling of a royal abode. Nandana Chutivongs and others, Paintings of Sri Lanka: Sigiriya, Archaeological Survey of Sri Lanka centenary publication, Central Cultural Fund, 1990, p.39.


apparently an attendant divinity, holding a flower and a flywhisk. These figures in the
cave strongly suggest that an image of the Buddha was placed on the existing throne. This
scene was evidently painted over an older layer of mural, which was part of a tree and
foliage of the earlier epoch. Accordingly, it is clear that at least a later series of paintings
in the Asana cave is, religious, apparently dating from the time when Sigiriya had again
become a monastic establishment after Kassapa's reign.\textsuperscript{48} In addition, it is conspicuous
that most of the critics have compared the Buddhist mural paintings of Ajanta with those
of Sigiriya since they display some similarities and both these traditions were
contemporary as discussed in the later part of the chapter. Therefore, it must be
emphasised here that in this study attention will be paid to the paintings of Sigiriya too.

Although these paintings of Sri Lanka belong to a long period which covers about
fourteen or seven centuries from second century BC or fifth century AD to the twelfth
century AD, it is reasonable to conclude that these form a part of one particular tradition or
style based on their special features and characteristics, as will be discussed in the fourth
chapter in detail. It is also evident that there is no essential difference in the techniques,
particularly in the sphere of methods and materials of the wall paintings even in the later
phase of the period concerned. Certainly, there is a continuity of similar technique from
the earliest times up to the 12\textsuperscript{th} or 13\textsuperscript{th} centuries AD and the only conspicuous difference in
this last phase is that in addition to the rock supports, there survive paintings on brick


\textsuperscript{48} Nandana Chutivongs and others, \textit{Paintings of Sri Lanka: Sigiriya}, Archaeological Survey of Sri Lanka centenary publication, Central Cultural Fund, 1990, pp.40-42. Although the chronology is uncertain, according to some scholars the worshipping scene thus painted on the ceiling of the Asana cave possibly dates to about the twelfth century AD, with the style comparable to the paintings at the Tivamka image house. See Ibid, p.43.
walls too. Hence, despite some differences in their surface appearance, the Polonnaruva paintings should be regarded as a continuation of the technique of the ancient tradition and aesthetic. Consequently, the paintings at Tivamka image house, though falling short of the best products of the classical art of India, afford evidence that the ideals and canons of classical art were still creative in Sri Lanka at a time when they had lost their vitality in India itself (Plate II). In addition, it is to be noted that the paintings of the Tivamka image house are the only surviving examples of a complete cycle of paintings of the early period of Sri Lanka though they are now in a bad state of preservation. Hence in this study it is essential to focus attention on the murals of the 12th century AD too.

At this juncture, it has to be realized that though the wall paintings of Sri Lanka continue after the twelfth century AD up to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries AD as mentioned above, these do not display such a complexity or similarity to the ancient tradition of paintings in both the countries. Though this tradition continues to be Buddhist and similar themes have been used, yet in the later period a rather simple, narrative style is present. Besides these superficial appearances, it is evident that this is an almost different tradition even from the technical point of view. Therefore, the period of study has been limited to between the second century BC and the twelfth century AD, which demarcates a particular 'classical painting tradition.'


When considering the paintings of ancient India, though Indian painting has a hoary antiquity of over 10,000 years when prehistoric man adorned his rock shelters with painting in the Narmada valley in central India, there are many gaps in our knowledge, especially during the early historic period. The few examples of Buddhist paintings belonging to this period are primarily at: Ajanta in Mahārāstra dated to the second century BC and fifth, sixth or seventh century AD which covers a long period of time; Aurangabad in the same state probably belonging to the end of seventh century AD; Ellora also in the same state where the chronology is uncertain; and Bagh caves in Madhya Pradesh belonging to the fifth, sixth or seventh century AD. Of these, unfortunately the murals of Aurangabad and Ellora caves have now entirely disappeared.

It should also not be forgotten that the above places would not have been isolated instances of contemporary paintings. When these caves were painted evidently there must have been many other artists decorating many other Buddhist sites but these have long perished. The caves of Pitalkhora can be cited as a good example. These belong to the first

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55 Dieter Schlingloff, *Studies in the Ajanta paintings: Identifications and interpretations*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1987, p.1. For further details of the chronology of these paintings please refer to the third chapter of this thesis.
century BC, and contain some minute remnants of paintings. It is obvious that in front of the main cave, there were eight pillars and twenty-four pillars were in the inner cell on which the figures of Buddha and Bodhisattvas were drawn. Unfortunately, although some local ruler damaged these figures while cleaning the site it is interesting to note that these remnants of paintings are similar to those of Ajanta. However, since the chronology of these remains is uncertain some scholars like Deshpande believe that these caves were embellished with the paintings in the fifth century AD while some other scholars suppose that these Buddhist wall paintings were executed in the eighth century AD.

In addition, remains of paintings in other Buddhist caves like Kanheri near Bombay, Karle, Nasik and Junnar are also available. Of these, Nasik caves belonging to the 1st and the 2nd centuries AD and it is noteworthy that an inscription at the site mentions even a donation made for painting. Besides, the pillars of the chaitya caves at Bhaja were also decorated with paintings of Buddha in various mudras during the

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62 It seems probable that the sidewalls of Karle cave were originally painted. There are obvious signs that there has been some sort of plaster and at the left side near the stupa is more than suspicious painting of rail pattern some 10 feet above the floor level. See RS Wauchop, Buddhist cave temples of India, The Calcutta General Printin co, Calcutta, 1933, pp.44-45.
63 Ibid, p.61.
65 Himanshu Prabha Ray, Monastery and guild: Commerce under the Satavahanas, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986, p.190.
Mahayana phase. Likewise, the painting remnants at the cave of Bedsa resemble the early Satavahana examples, but represent a late phase towards the end of the second century AD. Although the pillars of the caitya hall at Bedsa were thus originally painted, they were unfortunately whitewashed late in the nineteenth century AD. Consequently these paintings have become very faint, but their outlines are still very clear.

According to all these descriptions it is clear that all those fragments or indications of the murals are in too bad a state or too limited to compare to the paintings at Ajanta and the fragments at Bagh. It is also evident that the Buddhist mural painting tradition attained its highest excellence in or about the sixth and seventh centuries AD, after which we have few examples in India. It would seem that after the eighth century AD, the large-scale wall painting tradition declined in popularity and there was a preference for miniature paintings as seen in the Pala school of Bengal (ninth to twelfth century AD) in the east and in the Gujarat school of western India (eleventh to fifteenth century AD).

During this later period another Buddhist mural painting tradition has also survived in the Buddhist monasteries of the western Himalayan region in Arunachal Pradesh; in Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir and in the Tabo valley of Lahaul and Spiti in Himachal Pradesh, situated in the northern parts of India, belonging to the period of tenth

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67 RS Wauchop, Buddhist cave temples of India, The Calcutta General Printin co, Calcutta, 1933, pp.53-54.
69 Ananda Coomaraswamy, History of Indian and Indonesian art, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, (reprinted) 1972, p.40.
and thirteenth centuries AD. As in the case of the late medieval period murals of Sri Lanka they display many dissimilarities with the ‘classical Buddhist painting tradition.’ The main reason for this would be their close relationship with the painting traditions of Tibet, Nepal, Central Asia, China and Iran that are different from the classical Buddhist wall painting tradition of India and Sri Lanka. Although these paintings appear to be thematically Buddhist, they are mainly devoted to the “Tantric” form of Buddhism that flourished in the neighbouring countries during that period. Thus, I consider it less academically stimulating to study this painting tradition comparatively with the ancient ‘classical Buddhist wall painting traditions’ of the two countries.

Besides these Tantric forms of paintings, it is noteworthy that excavations done in 1974-82 at the famous Buddhist site of Nalanda of Patna District revealed the remains of a Buddhist temple along with the evidence of mural painting in eastern India for the first time. The continued work at the site has also yielded further evidence of paintings

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72 A.K. Singh, Trans-Himalayan wall paintings, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1985, p.137.
75 In addition, it is to be noted that though the lands of Ladakh, Spiti and Kinnaur are the northernmost frontier divisions of Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh today and belong to the Government of India, in the medieval period these formed a part of the western Tibetan empire. Ibid, p.137.
76 It is evident that unlike the classical Buddhist mural paintings of peninsular India and Sri Lanka, these paintings have used the themes of development of mental quiescence, the rules of monastic life, the symbolic themes like mandala and so on. Among these different types of paintings, certainly the symbolic representations are the most elaborate and difficult to understand. Charls Genoud and Thkao Inoue, Buddhist wall paintings of Ladakh, Japan, 1982, pp.39 and 49. In addition, it is believed that unlike the formal Buddhist teachings, Tantric teachings were never given to a large number of people. Each master would carefully select his disciples and examine them over a long period before finally giving them initiation. Ibid, p.20. Thus, apart from the aesthetic and religious reasons, the purpose of these painting may also have been considerably different from the formal Buddhist art. This dissimilarity can be further noticed even in the context of techniques, including methodology, style, lines used and mixture of colours etc. J.C. Nagpall, Mural paintings In India, Gain Publishing House, Delhi, 1988, pp.7-8.
depicting human and animal figures with flowers and geometrical designs on the stone pedestal and on the lower portions of the walls of the sanctum hall. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that the dating of Nalanda murals is a difficult task because the temple is of an earlier origin and the murals were added to it in subsequent periods. Based on the supportive evidence found at the site, it is believed that these fragments of paintings belong to tenth or eleventh centuries AD. From the technical point of view, unlike the mural paintings of Ajanta and Bagh, the paintings of Nalanda are executed on the stone base of the building though these have been termed as murals. It is apparent that stylistically also these are easily comparable with the miniature paintings of the Pala period rather than the other wall paintings in India. Due to all these reasons, in this study attention will not be focussed on the Nalanda paintings, which are now in a very fragmentary state.

In addition, at Satdhara also in the cliff over looking the Halali River, in a natural rock shelter, two paintings were encountered. Of these, in the first scene a figure of Buddha has been painted and in the second a stupa standing on a base. Of the two, the

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78 Ibid, pp.63-64.  
79 In addition, it is an accepted fact that the Nalanda painters were not as well versed in anatomy, artistic patterns, floral and geometrical designs, ornamentation and the use of different types of pigments, as were those of Ajanta and Bagh caves. Upendra Thakur, “An introduction to Nalanda painting,” Culture through the ages, BN Puri Felicitation Volume, ed. Sarva Daman Singh, Agam kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1996, p.184; Birendra Nath, Nalanda murals, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1983, p.41. As regards the themes of the paintings of Nalanda too, though these panels have been found on a huge pedestal of a deity like Padmapani Bodhisattava and Jambala along with male and female worshipers in different forms of adoration, (Upendra Thakur, “An introduction to Nalanda painting,” Culture through the ages, BN Puri Felicitation Volume, ed. Sarva Daman Singh, Agam kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1996, p.183) in fact their themes are uncertain due to bad state of preservation. Certainly, in these paintings the number of figures are also limited to almost about half a dozen (Birendra Nath, Nalanda murals, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1983, pp.54-57) and basically these are decorative rather than a representation of the narrative form of art. Apart from all these facts, though badly faded, these paintings imply a rich tradition known best from its descendants in Nepal and Tibet (Federick M Asher, “Forward,” Nalanda murals, Birendra Nath, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1983, See also Birendra Nath, Nalanda murals, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1983, p.63) tradition as in the case of the paintings of the Trans-Himalayan region.
painted Buddha figure of which the lower half is damaged is executed on a flat part of the rock by preparing the ground with a yellowish ochre substance. The *stupa* is painted on a raised base having mouldings with an illegible inscription on the lower recessed mouldings between the lower and upper portion of the *medhi*. On the upper moulded projecting portion is painted the drum and on the body of the drum another inscription is painted. This reads with the usual sutra of the Buddhist creed: *ye dhamma hetu prabhava*.

Since the letters are of Gupta style, palaeography of the inscription place it in the Gupta tradition of 4th or 5th century AD. Based on this fact it is believed that these paintings also belong to the same period. But, unfortunately since these two fragments are limited only to the faded outer contour of the figures, these cannot be used for any detailed analytical study. However, in contrast, all these remains of Buddhist mural paintings of India clearly show that in the early history of Buddhism, the relevant authority found the painting brush more effective in their mission of teaching the tenets of their creed to mankind.

It has been generally accepted that the Ajanta or the Andhra classical school of painting tradition influenced the classical Buddhist painting tradition of ancient Sri Lanka. It has also been a common assumption that particularly the Sigiriya and

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82 Shanti Swarup, The art and crafts of India and Pakistan, DB Taraporevala, Bombay, 1957, p.18.
Hindagala murals, the earliest datable paintings of the island are very closely related to, if not directly derived from, those of Ajanta. It is evident that in the last decade of the nineteenth century Bell, initiated this idea of a kinship between the two groups of paintings by stating that it was beyond question that artists trained in the same school possibly the very same hands executed both the Indian and Sri Lankan murals. Up to the middle part of the next decade this idea has been repeatedly expressed by Bell in his subsequent publications. But, some scholars questioned the Indian origin of the artists responsible for the paintings of Sigiriya at the time. Fernando, for instance raised the matter in discussion after Bell had reported to the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch) in 1897 and the controversy continued in letters to local journals. Consequently, it is evident that Bell did not repeat his assertion as to the Indian origin of the paintings in the 1905 Annual Report of the archaeological survey of Ceylon.

84 HCP Bell, Archaeological Survey of Ceylon Annual Reports, 1896, 10; 1897; p.14; 1905, p.17.
85 Bell states that no one who chooses to carefully compare the Sigiriya paintings with those found in the Ajanta caves will fail to be convinced that artists trained in the same school, if not the very same hands, must have executed both Indian and Ceylon frescoes. The evidence to be drawn from dress and ornament, no less than from the quaint tricks of pose and colouring common to both alike, for differentiating race and complexion and representing expression, is irresistible. HCP Bell, "Interim report on the operations of the archaeological survey at Sigiriya, 1897," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch), Vol.XV, No.48, 1897, pp.114-115; This has been repeatedly stated by him that careful comparison of the Sigiriya paintings with some of those found in the Ajanta caves proves beyond question that artists trained in the same school possibly the very same hands executed both the Indian and Sri Lankan frescoes. Dress and ornament, pose and colouring are common to both alike. HCP Bell, Archaeological Survey of Ceylon Annual Reports 1905, HM Richards Acting Government Printer, 1909, p.40. He further concludes that in one essential particular do the figures of the Sigiriya frescoes differ from the generality of those in the paintings at Ajanta; the latter are usually shown at full length from head to foot; the Ceylon figures are all cut off short at the waist by cloud effects, no doubt to economise space. HCP Bell, "Interim report on the operations of the archaeological survey at Sigiriya, 1897," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch), Vol.XV, No.48, 1897, p.116.
86 For further details please refer to Bethia N Bell and Heather M Bell, HCP Bell: Archaeologist of Ceylon and the Maldives, Archetype Publications, Wales, 1993, p.97.
87 Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that although later he has changed his mind in this connection, he has been observed some similarities between the paintings of Ajanta and Galviharaya of Polonnaruwa, which belong to the 12th century AD. He has stated that little as has survived of the frescoes that once covered the rock walls and roof of the Galviharaya depicting a scene which even these narrow strips explain with unmistakable clearness, enough is left to suggest that the painting in the cave shrine of the Galviharaya may well have approached in technique truth of form, distribution and gradation of colouring and harmonious
But this debate has continued among most of the subsequent scholars, who have argued for either the influence of Ajanta, Bagh and Amaravati on Sri Lankan paintings or the close similarities between these two mural traditions of the two countries, particularly when speaking of the paintings of Ajanta, Bagh, Sigiriya and Hindagala. These include in chronological order: Havell (1908), Binyan (1913), Mukul Dey (1925), Marshall (1927), Coomaraswamy (1927), Brown (1927), Smith (1930) Rowland (1937)

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and (1953), 96 Yazdani (1937)97 and (1955), 98 Leyden and Williams (1940), 99 Sana Ullah (1943), 100 Devendra (1948), 101 Raghavan (1948), 102 Ministry of Information and

has in comparison to the stuff from the more sophisticated looms of the city. Benjamin Rowland and Ananda Coomaraswamy, The wall paintings of India Central Asia and Ceylon: A comparative study, Boston, 1937, p.84.

96 In another instance, Rowland states that the resemblance of the figures of Sigiriya to the maidens of Amaravati reliefs suggests their derivation from a lost school of Andhra painting. If the boldness of the drawing and the brilliance of the colours are recognisable as typical Sinhalese, the actual physical types represented, with heavy-lidded eyes, sharp aquiline noses and full lips may be taken as direct reflections of actual Sinhalese types. Benjamin Rowland, The art and architecture-of India Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Penguin Books, Melbourne, 1953, p.217.

97 Yazdani says that the glories of this art shone forth in far distant lands, in the rugged mountains of Afghanistan, in the lonely deserts of Central Asia, and in the sea-girt lands of Ceylon, Java and Japan, but in the Deccan, the province of its own births, its light grew dim by the eighth century AD and we see the last flickering of it in the frescoes of Aurangabad and Ellora. G Yazdani, Indian art of the Buddhist period, Oxford University Press, 1937, p.14.

98 In another occasion Yazdani concludes that the votaries from Ceylon, Afghanistan, central Asia and China visited Ajanta and after learning the art practised there, adorned the walls of the shrines in their motherlands with similar paintings when they returned to their own countries. The frescoes of Sigiriya in Sri Lanka, Bamiyan in Afghanistan, Turfan in central Asia and Tun Huang in China show unmistakably the influence of the art of Ajanta. Some of these paintings are assigned to the fifth century AD so that their painters must have visited Ajanta in that century or even earlier. G. Yazdani, Ajanta: Monochrome reproductions of the Ajanta frescoes based on photography, Swati Publications, Delhi, Vol.IV, 1955, p.4.

Yazdani further states that in the 4th and the 5th centuries AD Ajanta, under the enlightened patronage of the Vakataka kings, became an important centre of Buddhist religion and art and votaries from distinct climes visited the place to be indicated into the religious order and also to acquire proficiency in the art of painting. The views is confirmed by the paintings of Sigirya in Ceylon, at Bamiyan in Afghanistan, at Turfan in central Asia and at some places in China, which also exhibit clear influence of the Buddhist art of Ajanta. G Yazdani, Ajanta: Monochrome reproductions of the Ajanta frescoes based on photography, Swati Publications, Delhi, part III, (reprinted) 1983, p.1

99 Leyden and Williams believe that the Sinhalese painting belongs to the orbit of Indian art. Sigiriy is contemporary with Ajanta (Caves 16 and 17) and the family likeness is clear. Nevertheless, the drawing is more crude and direct; the large hands, for example, have little of the expressive elegance ofAjanta; some connoisseurs will prefer that it be so. RV Leyden and HLM Williams (eds), Catalogue of the exhibition of Sarkis Katchadorian, Sinhalese frescoes from Sigiriy and Polonnaruva, Bombay art Society Salon, May 17-27, 1940, Introduction, p.1.

100 Sana Ullah observes that at Hindagala, the lower surface of the rock projecting beyond the roof of the existing shrine still bears remains of religious scenes, which have been executed, in the well-known Ajanta style belonging to 5-7th centuries. Mohammed Sana Ullah, Report on the treatment of the Sigiriya frescoes and suggestions for the preservation of paintings in the various shrines and old monuments in Ceylon, Ceylon Sessonal Paper, XXI, Ceylon Government Press, Colombo, 1943, p.4.

101 Devendra states that in technique, style and time they are believed to have a strong kinship with Ajanta. However, one may regard this view it is admitted by all that Sigirya frescoes belong to the highest period of the island’s achievement in the plastic arts. DT Devendra, Guide to Sigirya, (no publication data), 1948, p.10

102 Raghavan says that the most striking factor about the art of Sigiriy is its absolute isolation, nothing approaching it having been found within the island either earlier as foreshadowing it or letter as continuing its Indian traditions. It has thus been an interesting speculation of scholars to look for affinities on the Indian soil. MD Raghavan, “The Sigirya frescoes,” Spolia Zeylanica,” ed. PEP Deraniyagala, Government Press, Colombo, 1948, pp.71-72.
Broadcasting of Government of India (1951), Paranavitana (1955) and (1958) and Indian Museum (1956), Debala Mitra (1956), Dhanapala (1957), Mulk Raj (1958) and (1971), Bharatha Iyer (1958), Tresidder (1960), Shankar Gupta and

102 Not only did Ajanta painting attain the status of a national art in India, but also its influence spread to the neighbouring countries of central Asia, Burma, Ceylon, China and Japan. Indian art through the ages, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1951, p.7.

104 Paranavitana states that the paintings of Sri Lanka are the work of artists who had centuries of tradition behind them and who belonged to a school which in the days of its vigour, had ramifications all through the sub-continent of India and the maturity of which is represented by the famous painting in the caves of Ajanta and Bagh. By the twelfth century, the light of the tradition was flickering, if it had not been altogether extinguished, in India itself, but the paintings that we have here afford proof to the fact that the traditions of school were preserved in this island long after they had ceased to be creative in the lands of their origin. The painters of Polonnaruva were capable, though it may not be to the same degree as those of Ajanta, of balanced composition; their work possessed beauty of line and created forms majestic grace.


106 Amuradhapura, ancient capital of Ceylon is noteworthy for its monumental remains of Buddhist art and architecture derived from early Indian prototypes. The traditions of Indian paintings at Ajanta find a ready echo in the fresco painting at Sigirya and Polonnaruva. Buddha Jayanti exhibition of Buddhist art, Indian Museum, Calcutta, 1956, p.19

107 Debala Mitra states that the important of the murals of Ajanta lies in the being the sole representative. Except of course the scrappy fragments of Bagh, of an Indian school, which had once influenced deeply the art tradition of the Buddhist world out side India like Sigiriya in Sri Lanka and Tung Huang in Central Asia. Debala Mitra, Buddhist monuments, (first published 1956) Sahitya Samsad, Calcutta, (reprinted) 1971, p.178.

108 Dhanapala believes that these twenty-one three-quarter length figures of women bearing a close affinity, if not a resemblance, to the pictures at Ajanta display a full knowledge of the human and a sureness of line associated with master. DB.Dhanapala, The story of Sinhalese painting, Saman Press, Maharagama, 1957, p.4.

109 Mulk Raj states that in their style, the paintings at Sigiriya are reminiscent of the frescoes in the famous Ajanta caves of the Deccan, in central India. Mulk Raj Anand, India in colour, Themes and Hudson, London, 1958, p.86.

110 In another instance he states that after 800 years of major achievements, which is a record of sustained creativity of one part of the human race, the various elements of the Ajanta style spread in to different parts of India. At Bagh in Madhya Pradesh, in Sittannavasal, Badami and Sigiriya in the south, in Taparang of western Tibet, in Bamiyan in central Asia, Tun Huang in China, the illuminated monuments were apprehended from the glow of Ajanta walls. Mulk Raj Anand and RR Bharadwaj, Ajanta, Marg Publications, Bombay, 1971, p.59.

111 Bharatha Iyer believes that the Indian pictorial tradition, which reached its great height of achievement in Ajanta and at Bagh, spread later to Ceylon (Sigiriya), Khotan and Tunghuan in Central Asia and to far-away Japan (Nara and Horuyuji). K Bharatha Iyer, Indian art: A short introduction, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1958, p.66.

112 Tresidder states that the Sigiriya frescoes are contemporary with and superficially resemble those in Ajanta caves in India. Argus John Tresidder, Ceylon: An introduction to the resplendent land, D Van Nostrand co, Canada, 1960, P.201.

113 They believe that the paintings of Sigiriya are in a much better state of preservation than the Ajanta paintings to which they are closely related. Ramesh Shankar Gupta and BD Mahajan, Ajanta, Ellora and Aurangabad caves, Bombay, 1962, pp.43-44.
114 Wijesekara concludes that just as the classical art of the Gupta period seems to have found its way to Ceylon, its painting too would have influenced the schools of painting in the island. At least the Andhra School of painting with its centre at Amaravathi probably exercised the greatest influence on the schools in the island. Sigiriya is unique in this respect. The paintings of Sigiriya are closely related to the famous paintings of Ajanta and Bagh. Nevertheless, in the display of colour and delineation of the female form these are reminiscent of a lost tradition of Andhra paintings. Nandadeva Wijesekara, Ancient paintings and sculpture of Ceylon, Department of Cultural Affairs, 1962, pp.9-10.
115 Wijesekara further concludes that judge on the merits of each tradition according to its style, technique, draughtsmanship and spirit together with the dress, orientation and ornament, one must necessarily admit the closest relationship between the Sigiriya frescoes and those seen at Ajanta caves 16 and 17 which have been dated to the 5th century AD. The Sigiriya frescoes confirm to the Gupta ideals as much as Ajanta does in its heyday of development. Hence the close affinity of Sigiriya to Ajanta and Bagh, which rightly leads one to the conclusion, that Sigiriya frescoes show yet another phase of the Gupta School of painting. Nandadeva Wijesekara, "Dating of Sigiriya frescoes," Selected writings, Tisara Press, Dehivala, 1983. p.271. In addition, he states that religious art with the forceful appeal of Buddhism exercised an extraordinary fascination on the indigenous people's of territories like Ceylon, Cambodia, Siam and Java. In addition, it is to one of these movements that we in Ceylon owe our cultural heritage, artistic traditions, psychological make-up and religious faith. Other movements of a similar nature followed in the wake of the earlier movements thus maintaining a continuity of connected traditions between the Indian continent and Lanka. Nandadeva Wijesekara, "Sinhalese art with special reference to Sigiriya," Selected writings, Tisara Press, Dehivala, 1983, p.252.
116 Lindsay believes that the Sigiriya apsaras are generally liked with the Ajanta cave paintings in India, but there is no real connection except insofar as the Ajanta style influenced Buddhist painting all over the eastern world. Thus, the technique of modelling in pearly chiaroscuro comes from Ajanta. John Lindsay Opic, Island Ceylon, Thames and Hudson, London, 1970, p.131.
Sushila Pant concludes that the painting of Sri Lanka was probably due to the influence of the Ajanta and Ellora paintings. Sushila Pant, The art of Ceylon, 1970, p.20. But it has to be realized that at Ellora nothing has been remain any Buddhist mural painting though the caves are originally painted.
117 Thomas concludes that some of the cave monasteries of Ajanta in their day became famous through the Buddhist world, particularly for their superb frescoes and art traditions, which influenced painting in many parts of the eastern world like Sigiriya, Tuntuan and Miran. P Thomas, Festivals and history of India, DB Taraporevala, Bombay, 1971, p.72.
118 Nadun believes that the work is heroic even as the sculpture at Polonnaruva is heroic; it was a heroic period and the paintings belong to the same tradition as Ajanta. All the elements of the same canon that determined types of beauty on the wall paintings of India are recognisable; it is the rhythm that holds as permanent place in Asian art, not an imitation of nature. Nadun, "Mural painting," Viskam (Creativity), Souvenir publication on the occasion of the 5th Non-aligned summit conference held in Sri Lanka 1976, State Printing Corporation, Colombo, 1976, p.55.
120 According to Chaitanya the style of Sigiriya painting is closely related to that of Ajanta. Sigiriya is an interesting example of the way in which artistic traditions spread from land to land. A style, which developed originally in close association with religious motives, has crossed the seas along with religious doctrines and has been employed later in the representation of secular themes. Krishna Chaitanya, A history of Indian painting: The mural tradition, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1976, pp.50-51 and he further
states that "we cannot posit the Indian tradition as an active and immediate influence in Sinhalese painting even beyond the epoch of Sigiriya."...
This is not accepted by others who argue that there is no such close connection between the two painting traditions of India and Sri Lanka, though they do not explain the more obvious overall differences between the two traditions of artistic practice. According to them, the so-called influence of Andhra or Ajanta painting traditions on Sri Lankan painting is just a speculation. The main reason for this is not only that there are no remains of paintings from Amaravati or any other Andhra site with which the Sigiriya paintings can be compared, but there is also no discernible resemblance, as Benjamin Rowland sees, between the ladies of Sigiriya and those of Amaravati. For instance, it is obvious that the Amaravati figures have round faces, fleshy cheeks, wide open eyes and heavy lips as against the oval faces with less heavily delineated features of Sigiriya woman. Overall, the Amaravati female form is more robust and of ampler proportions compared to the Sigiriya paintings. Rowland also sees

127 According to De Silva, we can come to one conclusion from a short comparative look at the styles and techniques of painting at the two sites of Ajanta and Sigirya which are widely separated in distance and time for travel but which had the same religious background; the same as Bell’s that Ajanta and Sigiriya paintings were done by the artists of the same school. It requires further study to decide who influenced whom. RH de Silva, “Painting (early period 247 BC to 800 AD),” Centenary (1890-1990) commemoration series of the Archaeological Department of Sri Lanka, Volume five — painting, ed. Nandadeva Wijesekara, State Printing Corporation, Colombo, 1990, p.16. He further stated that the subject of the paintings of Hindagala was described as probably the visit of the god Sakra to the Buddha in the Indasala cave and was stylistically regarded as the closest in the island to the latest phase at Ajanta. Ibid, p.30.
128 Williams concludes that one of several characteristics that distinguish the Sigiriya paintings from contemporary Indian murals is the way they relate to the rough surface of the cliff, which retains its natural contour. He further stated that physically and in other ways, Sri Lankan painting cannot entirely be subsumed within a tradition originating on the Indian mainland. Joanna Williams, “The construction of gender in the paintings and graffiti of Sigiriya,” Representing the body: Gender issues in Indian art, ed. Vidya Dehejia, The Book Review Literary Trust, New Delhi, 1997, p.60.
an Indian origin of what he calls the technical tricks of representing the nose in profile on a three-quarter face and showing the nose in three-quarter view. Whether such details can be regarded, as clear evidence of artistic borrowing will remain a valid question. Certainly, what affinity there is between the Amaravati and Sigiriya figures follows from the collective sharing of the classic ideal of female beauty and not from formal or stylistic essentials.

Similarly, in addition to the conspicuous dissimilarities of the murals, particularly in the context of styles and techniques as will be discussed in the fourth and fifth chapters in detail, it is to be noted that as far as Sigiriya is concerned one is hard pressed to find any line of communication, direct or indirect, between it and Ajanta too. Certainly, there is no historical evidence of any political or cultural exchange between Sri Lanka and the Vakataka kingdom of the 5th century AD when Ajanta was an active centre of Buddhism. It is noteworthy that there is also no epigraphical or literary record in India or Sri Lanka that would point to any islanders Buddhist visiting the Mahayana establishment at Ajanta in particular or of anyone arriving at Sri Lanka from Ajanta.131 It is also important to remember that the history of mural painting in Sri Lanka can be said to go back much further than Sigiriya and Hindagala. For example, it is generally believed that the paintings of Karambagala belong to the second century BC as discussed in the third chapter in detail. Besides, though the relevant pictorial records are not available for examination, there is no reason to doubt the literary document's statements that the inner walls of the relic chamber of the Ruvanvali dagoba had Jataka stories, episodes from the

131 Ibid, pp.495-496.
life of the Buddha painted their in the second century BC, since some other relic chamber paintings also have been found from the stupas, which belong to the subsequent periods. Similarly, stretching as they do over a long period of time and an extensive geographical area, the fragments of ancient mural paintings of the island provide evidence of a popular artistic tradition that furnishes a context, both historical and technical, for the murals of Sigiriya and Hindagala, a context that is local and not Indian Andhra or Ajanta tradition.

It is interesting to note at this point that besides this debatable concept of so-called 'common Indo-Sri Lankan painting tradition,' some scholars have remarked on similarities between the painting traditions of India and other eastern and western countries too. For instance, some scholars have noticed a close similarity between the paintings of Ajanta and those of such widely divided schools like early Italian and Chinese. But, it is obvious that it is useless to compare Ajanta murals with the art of Italy for fundamentally it does not permit of such a comparison. Certainly, to a great many people the paintings of Ajanta are on a far higher plane of aesthetic achievement than anything ever done in Europe and hence such comparisons are as futile as they are meaningless.

133 For further details, please refer to the third chapter.
134 Please refer to chapter 3 for further details.
137 Karl Khandalavala, Indian sculpture and painting: An introductory study, DB Taraporevala and sons, Bombay, (n. d), p.54; See also Percy Brown, Indian painting, Heritage of India Series, YMCA Publishing House, 1927, p.7.
Nevertheless, it is to be noted that when writing of the murals at Ajanta, and particularly of a painting supposedly depicting the arrival of an embassy from a Sassanian king of Persia in the seventh century AD, some scholars have wrongly concluded that the picture, in addition to its interest as a contemporary record of unusual political relations between India and Persia, is one of the highest value as a landmark in the history of art. Under this impression, it has been mistakenly concluded that it not only fixes the date of some of the most important paintings at Ajanta and so establishes a standard by which the date of others can be judged, but also suggests the possibility that the Ajanta school of pictorial art may have been derived from Persia and ultimately from Greece.\textsuperscript{138} Similarly some other scholars like Fabri concluded that some of the paintings at Ajanta show Hellenistic influence that could easily be at the end of the first century AD.\textsuperscript{139} But, Binyan, while writing the introduction of the first volume of Yazdani’s monumental publication on Ajanta, has reasonably pointed out that it is not impossible that the Indian artists knew the Hellenistic paintings, but we do not know what those were like.\textsuperscript{140} Indian historians reacted sharply to such statements and attempts were made to prove either that India had not derived any part of its culture from Greece or else that the culture of India was a close parallel to that of Greece, manifesting all the qualities, which were present in the latter.\textsuperscript{141} As one of such scholar pointed out, it has to be realized that every civilisation has its own miracle and this has not yet been recognised either by European or by Indian

\textsuperscript{138} Vincent A Smith, Early history of India, fourth edition, Oxford, 1924, p.442.
\textsuperscript{141} Romila Thapar, A history of India, Penguin Books, New Delhi, Vol.I, (reprinted) 1990, p.18. This condition can easily be understood when considering the fact that Greece and India indeed the two opposite poles in the development of the Aryan culture. Max Muller, A history of ancient Sanskrit literature, 1859, p.8.
The idea of assessing a civilisation on its own merits was to come at a later stage.  

Besides these so-called western similarities, it is noteworthy that some critics have observed even Chinese and Japanese features also in the paintings of Ajanta. In fact, this was an accepted fact during the first part of the last century though Smith states that a few late paintings at Ajanta, resemble the Chinese manner to a certain extent, but the majority belong to a phase of art which one can call nothing except Indian, for it is found nowhere else. Interestingly enough, some recent writers also observe that the avaricious Brahmin of the Vessantara Jataka painted on the left wall of cave no 17 at Ajanta recalls the calligraphic line of Chinese and Japanese traditions and the monk painted in cave 6 can easily be mistaken for a detail from a Chinese painting. Thus it is evident that time was when the Ajanta paintings were frequently compared with other paintings - Chinese, early Renaissance and so on, according to individual training and inclination - to establish their superiority or indicate their deficiency and were even dismissed as hardly to be classed among the fine arts, because they were more decorative than pictorial.

Nevertheless, it is remarkable that some scholars have expressed their views contrary to these beliefs. Zimmer, for instance, believes that during the period of the prime of this art, Chinese Buddhist pilgrims were visiting India to study their religion at its source and they journeyed through the land for centuries, visiting the sacred sites. When they returned home, laden with manuscripts, sacred images and drawings they brought to

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China a knowledge also of the sculpture and paintings of the Indian shrines and monasteries. Under this impression, he strongly believes that the Buddhist art of the Chinese T'ang dynasty (618-906) was influenced directly by the mural paintings of Ajanta and the other sanctuaries of the period. Similarly, some other critics believe that the paintings of Ajanta influenced Japanese paintings also. Thus, although it is evident that to assume that the cradle and origin of Asiatic style belonged to any one country of the continent in particular would be a supposition, an unprofitable starting-point for inquiry, it might be natural, for lack of evidence, to suppose that India, which gave to Asia the kindling ideals and imagery of Buddhism was that land to which we should turn for the noblest creation of art.

Nonetheless, it has to be realized that as Singer has reasonably concluded that if we are dealing with cultural performances in different cultures, we have to experience them in their own terms, but if we try to understand them in terms of the language and concepts from our own culture, we have a problem in intercultural communication. In this context, it is to be noted that the Asian paintings though belonging to the same broad ‘tradition of Asiatic style,’ they also display some conspicuous dissimilarities in many respects. For instance, though the Sri Lankan Buddhist mural paintings also belong to the same broad traditions of Asian art, as the various continental schools of the time, it is evident that the specific character and historical continuity of the Sri Lankan tradition give

it its own distinctive place in the art of the region. Hence, in this work more emphasis has been laid on the comparative study of the ancient Buddhist mural paintings of peninsular India and Sri Lanka to comprehend this perspective more accurately.

**Survey of literature:**

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a few critics focussed their attention on comparative studies of fine arts of India and Sri Lanka during the ancient period, covering the entire traditions of artistic activities in both countries. Among these, the studies of A.K. Coomaraswamy, V.A. Smith and K de B Codrington, J. Ph. Vogel, and Rean Richardson can be cited as important examples. In the 1930s, on the other hand, Rowland and Coomaraswamy did a comparative study not only of the paintings of India and Sri Lanka, but also those of Central Asia. This does not, however, cover the whole Buddhist tradition of mural paintings of Sri Lanka and India during the ancient period. The book is in two volumes, though its second volume contains only the plates of the paintings. The first volume is divided into two major sections out of which the first part written by A.K. Coomaraswamy on "The nature of Buddhist art" does not deal with the painting traditions of India or Sri Lanka at all, but mainly focuses on Buddhist

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iconography. The second section of the book is an explanatory text written by Benjamin Rowland covering introductory remarks, paintings of Ajanta and Bagh caves, murals of Sri Lanka, the impact of Indian art on the paintings of the Far East etc. Therefore it is obvious that although the book is titled *The wall paintings of India Central Asia and Ceylon: A comparative study*, in reality, it does not provide a comprehensive comparative study of the two wall painting traditions of India and Sri Lanka during the ancient period.

A survey of the secondary literature shows that a majority of the researches on paintings of both countries have either discussed India or Sri Lanka. At least from the beginning of 1820s, some critics did pay attention to some individual sites of the two countries where the paintings of the ancient period were available. Out of such essays, the books and articles written on the cave paintings of Ajanta occupy foremost place in the table of precedence. From the beginning up to now, more than a hundred essays including books and articles have been published on the paintings of Ajanta.

At this juncture it has to be realized that of the above mentioned four important Buddhist mural painting sites of Ajanta, Bagh, Aurangabad and Ellora in India, the paintings of the last three sites are now almost lost. Hence, certainly no publications are available on either the Buddhist mural paintings at Aurangabad or Ellora caves. The situation is the same concerning the paintings of Bagh caves except a few brief essays like those by John Marshall\(^{155}\) and Fyzee Rahamin.\(^{156}\) Hence, even in this comparative study the main attention has to be given to the painting series of Ajanta caves and

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\(^{156}\) S. Fyzee Rahamin, "The cave paintings of Bagh," *The Indian art of drawing pictures in the caves of Bagh*, The Indian Daily Mail, Bombay, 1928.
accordingly, it is reasonable to start this survey of literature from the essays on Ajanta itself.

In this context, the only reference to the caves of Ajanta in ancient literary sources is that by the Chinese pilgrim Yuan Chwang who stayed in India for more than twelve years in the middle of the seventh century AD. Although it is believed that Yuan Chwang did not visit the caves of Ajanta, his brief description on the caves is important. After more than thousand years of oblivion or neglect, some British officers of the Madras Army discovered the caves of Ajanta in 1819. In fact, it is obvious that the written and visual creation of Ajanta’s paintings begin with this rediscovery. Accordingly, though it is short and far from satisfactory, the first publication on the caves of Ajanta appeared in 1829 written by Lieutenant James Alexander, who had visited the caves in 1824. Since this publication, Ajanta caves have understandably aroused considerable interest among scholars and a great deal has been written on them. At this initial stage, among those who studied the paintings of Ajanta, Ralph and Captain Gresley attempted a description of the paintings. They visited the place in 1828 and made a report that endeavoured to describe most of the paintings remaining at the caves. But, according to the details presented by them, it is clear that this only contains a descriptive account rather than comprehensive analytical details.

157 For further details please refer to third chapter of this thesis where the chronology of Ajanta is discussed.
Hence, the first ‘scholarly work’ on Ajanta was by James Ferguson, in a paper read at the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1843 and published in 1846. Although the description is short he has given details of architectural and chronological perspectives of Ajanta caves and rightly observed the prolonged time range of their excavations. Subsequently, Bird’s description on Ajanta was published in 1847 in which the erroneousness of the author’s opinions on Buddhism is only matched by the inaccuracies of the drawings that illustrate it. Thereafter, James Burgess of the Archaeological Survey of India made the first detailed systematic report. In this treatise, architectural and sculptural details of the caves as well as their inscriptions were recorded, presenting valuable information for their chronology and political affiliations. But, in the joint effort of Ferguson and Burgess a more general description of the paintings is interspersed with the account of the architectural features and this contains references to all that has been previously written on the subject. In another report made by Burgess further details are given with many illustrations of sculpture and architecture of the site.

Meanwhile Ferguson identified a scene of cave no 1 at Ajanta as an ambassador of the Persian king Khusrau II presenting himself to the court of Pulakesin of the

163 J Bird, Historical researches on the origin and principles of the Buddha and Jaina religions, Bombay, 1847, pp.16-18.
164 J Burgess, Notes on the Buddha rock temple of Ajanta, their paintings and sculptures and on the paintings of the Bagh caves, Bombay, 1879.
Chalukya dynasty,\textsuperscript{167} though the identification of the scene was shown to be wrong subsequently.\textsuperscript{168} But, it is noteworthy that based on this misidentification some scholars have wrongly concluded that the Ajanta school of painting may have been derived from Persia and ultimately from Greece, as already noted above\textsuperscript{169} though now it is realised that Ajanta art was born and nurtured on the indigenous soil and inspired by an indigenous religion\textsuperscript{170}

Based on Burgess's interpretations and identifications of the Ajanta mural paintings, Oldenburg was also able to identify a few other Jātaka stories.\textsuperscript{171} Subsequently, with the help of painted inscriptions at the site, Lüders has identified two additional Jātaka stories as given in the Jātakamālā of Āryasūra, confirming that some texts other than the traditional Pali Jātakas had been utilised in the finalising of the paintings of Ajanta.\textsuperscript{172} In addition, Foucher's study succeeded in recognising a large number not only of the sculptural figures but also of painted scenes.\textsuperscript{173} Recently, Schlingloff\textsuperscript{174} also did his research on the identification of the paintings of Ajanta by examining the thematic linkage with Mahayana Buddhist texts. As he stated his aim was to continue the work Foucher began earlier in the first part of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{175}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item A. Ghosh, “Introduction,” \textit{Ajanta murals: An album of eighty-five reproductions in colour}, ed. A Ghosh, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1967, p.4. This has been discussed in the sixth chapter in detail.
\item \textit{Ibid}, pp.ix-xii.
\end{thebibliography}
this exhaustive work, he has critically examined the identifications of Ajanta paintings of the early researchers. Hence, his work exemplifies the assumption made by scholars up to now that detailed analysis will continue to reveal new information regarding the content and the meaning of the paintings.

Besides these identifications of the murals, over the years, a substantial literature has been published on the evaluation of Ajanta caves. Solomon, Mukul Dey, Goloubew, Vakil, Coomaraswamy and Debala Mitra made early evaluation of the paintings. Of these, the small booklet of Debala Mitra is an useful treatise on Ajanta, although it does not seem to use extensive literature. Particularly, the statement that the caves are numbered not chronologically, but as a matter of convenience, starting with the one at the outermost extremity implies that the author was perhaps not concerned with their chronology. Nevertheless, it is conspicuous that later researchers like Spink, Begley and Weiner mainly devoted their attention to either the problem of

177 Mukul Dey, My pilgrimage to Ajanta and Bagh, New York, 1925.
179 K.H. Vakil, At Ajanta, Bombay, 1929.
181 Debala Mitra, Ajanta, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1996.
chronology of Ajanta murals or the gradual architectural development of the caves. Besides, the studies of Kramrisch, Goetz, Auboyer and Fabri etc are mainly on the aesthetic or technical aspects of the paintings of Ajanta and are useful to understand its style. Of these, it is noteworthy that Kramrisch coined the phrase “The Ajantaeque type of human figure,” a concept that has itself becomes an icon of Indian art. Meanwhile, the work of Ghosh provides a representative collection of images emphasising the best-preserved paintings.

Besides these early writings, among the recent publications of Ajanta, the book titled The Art of Ajanta: New Perspectives is a collection of research papers of a seminar on various aspects of the caves at the site and hence is one of the important treatises on the subject. In this book of two volumes, forty articles have been presented on various aspects of Ajanta, out of which at least more than two third have discussed its paintings. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that among the other recent publications on the subject, the book published by Sharma is not a research oriented one and is suitable only for beginners in the field. The very short descriptions of paintings, given under a large number of subtitles clearly show the actual status of the book.

Apart from these treatises, members of the Royal Asiatic Society were at once impressed by the importance of the discovery of the paintings of Ajanta and they

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186 Stella Kramrisch, A survey of painting in the Deccan, Hyderabad, 1937.
190 Stella Kramrisch, A survey of painting in the Deccan, Hyderabad, 1937, p.89.
addressed the directors of the East India Company with a plea for the preservation of the caves and the execution of copies of the frescoes. Consequently, Major Robert Gill of the Madras army was appointed to make facsimile copies of all the pictures at the site.  

Tragically these were lost in the 1860s “Crystal Palace Company fire,” at Sydenham, London. Thereafter, Griffith's copies of Ajanta made near the end of the nineteenth century (between 1872 and 1885) were also lost in a fire at Victoria and Albert Museum in 1885, but copies of the copies were preserved and published in his two volume monumental work. At the beginning of the twentieth century Goloubew also began recording all figures sequentially with cave no but unfortunately his death curtailed that admirable effort.

Besides, the later portfolios of reproductions of Lady Herringham, Pratinidi, Katchadorian, Lalit Kala Academy, and UNESCO are also important, but the

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196 The Government of India having sanctioned an expenditure of Rs.50000 for this purpose, Griffiths and a party of students went to Ajanta and it is satisfactory to learn that the entire ceiling worth copying and four pieces of the wall painting of caves has been successfully copied. J. Burgess, “Ajanta caves,” The Indian Antiquary, ed. J. Burgess, Vol.II, 1873, p.158; Copies were made from 10th December 1872 until 17th May 1873. J. Burgess, “The Ajanta frescoes,” The Indian Antiquary, ed. J. Burgess, Vol.III, January 1874, p.25; See also Pioneer, “Ajanta frescoes,” The Indian Antiquary, No.1, 1872, p.354. See also WE Goldstone Solomon, Mural paintings of the Bombay school, The Times of India Press, 1930, Introduction, p.11.
200 Lady Herringham, Ajanta frescoes: Being reproductions in colour and monochrome of frescoes in some of the caves at Ajanta after copies taken in the years 1909-1911, Oxford, 1915.
202 S. Katchadorian, Indian fresco paintings: Ajanta, Badami, Bagh, Sittanavasal, Kumatgi, Bombay, 1939.
203 Lalit Kala Academy, Ajanta paintings, New Delhi, 1956.
selection has been haphazard, all the paintings reproduced being post-fifth century AD. Of these, it is noteworthy that the plates of the Lalit Kala Academy have been reproduced from the same colour photographs that were used for the UNESCO publication on Ajanta paintings. That means that, unfortunately, the selection is equally limited and the reproductions in this publication look insipid compared with the reproductions in the UNESCO volume.\textsuperscript{205} But, it is conspicuous that the selection is ampler and more representative in Madanjeet Singh's album.\textsuperscript{206} The descriptive text that he has presented is also equally important.

Other excellent presentations are the album of the Archaeological Survey of India and Yazdani's\textsuperscript{207} work, by virtue of their documentation and the fully representative illustrations. In addition, the descriptions given by Yazdani are more extensive and elaborate than the descriptions of other scholars who have discussed these briefly in their various albums and portfolios. In the textual parts of his massive four volumes Yazdani has conspicuously discussed almost all the fragments of paintings, which were neglected by previous scholars and exclusively described their cultural and historical interest as well. But it is evident that his textual volumes are filled with various elementary interpretational mistakes, and it is particularly unfortunate that he did not consider previous studies and thus wrongly explained numerous subjects that had long been correctly interpreted as in the case of the so-called 'Persian embassy' scene.

\textsuperscript{205} For a short review of these reproductions please refer to R. V. L. (complete name has not been given), "Ajanta paintings, Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi, 1956," Lalit Kala, ed. Karl Khandalavala and Moti Chandra, No.3-4, 1956-1957, pp.138-139.
\textsuperscript{207} G.Yazdani, Ajanta: Monochrome reproductions of the Ajanta frescoes based on photography, Swati Publications, Delhi, London, 1930-55, 4 Vols.
Recently, Andre Bareau and Amina Okada have also made a good reproduction on Ajanta. Though the presentation of plates are of a high quality since they have used more modern techniques of printing methods, unfortunately these reproductions are limited only to cave nos. 1, 2 and 17.208 The reproduction of Benoy K Behl is another work of the same quality209 though the selection of plates is again limited only to the paintings of cave nos. 1, 2, 16 and 17 at Ajanta.

In contrast, although the above mentioned studies indicate various aspects of paintings of the site what is discussed in detail in these publications is the sculptural and architectural developments of the caves, historical settings of the paintings or the beauty of the paintings etc. In this context, it is evident that some scholars, instead of giving adequate explanation of the paintings, have dwelt only on the description of plates and the paintings. The above-mentioned reproductions and albums are good examples in this respect.

In addition to these publications on Ajanta, as already mentioned above, a majority of the researches on Buddhist mural paintings of the two countries have either discussed peninsular India or Sri Lanka individually. Of such researches on Indian paintings, the earliest scholarly research was Percy Brown’s study.210 This small book, which is about 125 pages, is merely a description of the different traditions of paintings of India and another problematic issue is the periodisation of the paintings. His classification of Indian paintings into a few categories such as ancient or medieval is certainly a reflection of a categorisation based only on political history, which is unsuited for the field of art history.

208 Andre Bareau and Amina Olada, Ajanta, Brijbasi Printers Private ltd, 1996.
In addition, some of the important aspects of murals that have not been discussed include themes, painters and their views reflected by the paintings and so on. The author himself acknowledging this observes: “as this little book owing to its size is limited to the outlines.” But it is noteworthy that as a pioneer in the field without any previous model, a valuable description has been given in this booklet. It is evident that of the overall paintings of India, not more than 25 pages have been devoted to the Buddhist tradition of paintings based entirely on the murals at Ajanta caves.

Philip Rawson’s research is another study on the subject and he describes the paintings of India from prehistoric times up to the seventh century AD. In this short book which contains more or less 70 pages, the second chapter titled “The Wall Paintings: First century AD to Seventh century AD,” describes the paintings of Ajanta. Since the author has presented many plates interrupting the continuity of the very short text, the usefulness of the book is limited. Besides, the work of Douglas Barrett and Basil Gray is also another brief study on the subject. Although the main intention of the authors is to present details of the Mughal miniature painting tradition, the first part of the study is devoted to a description of paintings of India from second century BC to sixteenth century AD. Since this is only a brief introductory note to the paintings of the early period of India, it is not a useful treatise on the Buddhist mural paintings of peninsular India.

In addition, eminent art critic Sivaramamurti has also studied Indian painting covering the period from the earliest times to the nineteenth century AD. The focus of this small book, which contains more than twenty five chapters is on paintings, art galleries,

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the painter, tools and materials, canon of art criticism, prehistory etc. From the contents, it may be inferred that it has not discussed most of the important aspects of the paintings at length and the whole book, which contains no more than hundred pages shows that the author's venture is only a description of the different traditions of paintings which flourished in the different periods in India. But evidently, his periodisation of the paintings is problematic, as it is mainly based on dynastic history.

Moti Chandra's study\(^{215}\) is another research work in the field of Indian painting. The main theme of the book is the "transformation of the Gupta Vakataka tradition" and "the development of the mediaeval idiom" as also "the Western Indian style in the fifteenth century and the emergence of new traditions." Thus, it is evident that the book presents an overview of the paintings of India from ancient times up to the modern period, which continued to be based on contemporary kingdoms or dynasties that ruled during that particular time. Another drawback of the book is that it does not cover adequately the materials in the field of Buddhist mural paintings of peninsular India. But it is noteworthy that Karl Khandavala's\(^{216}\) study, although small containing about fifty pages, covers the wall painting tradition of India through the ages and adopts a new approach as evident from the title itself. This book contains two major parts titled "From earliest times till Ajanta" and the "Aftermath of Ajanta," which clearly shows that the author has given a prominent place only to the paintings at Ajanta caves in this study.


The next work relating to this field is Krishna Chaithanya’s study and its second chapter provides information on the inspiration of Siddhartha at Ajanta, Bagh etc. Hence, it is useful for this study, as it discusses the Buddhist mural painting tradition of India, although, the author has mainly focused his attention on the remaining paintings at Ajanta caves alone. Subsequently, Sivaramamurti’s study suggests a different approach to the paintings of India and most of his descriptions are apparently based on Sanskrit literature that he has quoted at length. Thus, although this work presents descriptions relating to ancient paintings and painters of India, mainly based on descriptions found in Sanskrit literature, almost all the descriptions relate only to the Hindu tradition. Besides these, another study on Indian mural paintings is that by Nagpall. Certainly, the most important part of the book is its long introduction which runs into thirty five pages and has mainly focused on the geographical distribution of the murals and the influence of historical factors; techniques; survey and evolution; conservation problems and methods etc. Consequently, the book provides useful information, particularly relating to the techniques of the mural painting traditions of India throughout the ages. Nevertheless, other essential aspects of the wall paintings like themes and the painters of the period have not been discussed by the author.

So far, we have discussed books written on Indian paintings, but the situation is the same when dealing with the Buddhist mural painting traditions of Sri Lanka too. The book of Paranavitana and Archer may be mentioned at this point. Although the preface

of the book has been written by Archer and the introduction compiled by Paranavitana, the main aim of the two authors while giving some introductory notes on Sri Lankan paintings has been to present illustrations of some of these examples. However, the comparison of the paintings of Sigiriya with those of Ajanta has been accorded prime importance. Another contribution of the book is the chronology of paintings extant at various sites and dated to the ancient period of Sri Lanka. It is conspicuous that most of the art critics have accurately adhered to the chronology given by Paranavitana to this day. But, in this study, since the tradition of wall paintings in Sri Lanka from the earliest times up to the nineteenth century has been discussed without considering any reasonable demarcation, this might mislead the reader to believe that all these paintings of Sri Lanka belong to one particular tradition. Another drawback is that the authors of the book have used a periodisation, which relies only on the political history of the country. It is clear that this approach is not suitable in the sphere of paintings or any other artistic works though they were the pioneers in the field. In addition, since they have mainly discussed the themes and the nature of the paintings now remaining at Sigiriya fortress of the fifth century AD, the available information relating to other sites of Buddhist wall paintings of Sri Lanka has been dealt with at a very sketchy level.

Subsequently, D.B. Dhanapala has also compiled a booklet on Sri Lankan paintings.221 As this book describes the paintings of Sri Lanka from the earliest times up to the nineteenth century AD, the descriptions have been given in an abridged form, which is not very useful for critical research work on the paintings of Sri Lanka. Certainly, this short book, which contains around 40 pages, provides only introductory

notes to the paintings of Sri Lanka throughout the ages. Similarly, the other examination that has also been done by Dhanapala presents the painting tradition of Sri Lanka from the earliest times up to the nineteenth century AD without making any suitable categorisation. As it is also a small booklet containing not more than 20 pages, the author has given only short descriptive notes on the paintings of Sri Lanka rather than presenting substantial analytical details. Hence, the usefulness of this book for research work in the field is unquestionably limited.

In contrast to the above, Wijesekara’s study includes comprehensive research on the paintings of Sri Lanka. But it is unfortunate that instead of providing the relevant information in chronological order or in any other suitable way, the author has given it in alphabetical order. This in essence devalues the importance of the book. In addition, it should be noted that the second chapter of the book contains details of the background of Sri Lankan relations with neighbouring countries, which does not directly deal with the painting traditions of Sri Lanka or any other country. In contrast, this book, which contains more or less hundred pages, clearly shows that it is only a short description of paintings of Sri Lanka during the ancient times. Nevertheless, the descriptions of the subject matter; social background of the paintings; techniques; materials; style and the authors of the murals are important aspects. Of such discussions, particularly the very short description, which compares Sri Lankan painting tradition with that of contemporary neighbouring India, occupies an important place and it indicates the need for further studies of wall painting traditions between the two countries.

The study by Senaka Bandaranayake is another recent publication on Sri Lankan wall painting traditions. In this treatise he has given some important details on these paintings from prehistoric times to the nineteenth century AD. Although at first glance, the book appears to be a comprehensive text giving details on these murals, in reality it has not provided such a treatment on the subject. However, the second chapter of the book, which describes paintings of the early-middle historical period of Sri Lanka, takes foremost place among all the other chapters of the book. This is so because it has provided some important information relating to the paintings found at the rock fortress of Sigirya, its boulder garden paintings, cave shrines of Anurādhapura, relic chamber paintings at Mahiyanganaya and Mihintalé, Polonnaruva murals etc. all belonging to the ancient painting tradition of the island.

Another significant publication on the subject is the fifth volume of the Centenary Commemoration Series of the Archaeological Department of Sri Lanka. This book contains five major chapters compiled by various writers and the first and the second chapters are relevant to this study, since they have particularly focused on the mural paintings of the ancient period of Sri Lanka. Of these, the first chapter written by Raja de Silva has mainly focussed on the various aspects of the Sigirya paintings. But, the analytical details given by him on techniques of painting of the other sites of the island are more important, since they are primarily based on laboratory researches. The second chapter of the book is written by N Wickramasinghe on mural paintings of Sri Lanka.

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during the period of 800 AD – 1200 AD and particularly discusses the paintings of Mahiyangana stupa, Tivamka image house, Galviharaya and Dimbulagala.

Apart from the above-mentioned studies, it is noteworthy that as in the case of Ajanta, most of the scholars who have paid attention to Sri Lankan paintings have written mainly on the paintings found at Sigiriya. The essays of C.A. Murray, H.C.P. Bell, A.K Coomaraswamy, V.A. Smith, G.A. Joseph, A.H. Longhurst, S. Paranavitana, M.D Raghavan, P.E.P. Deraniyagala, Marcus Fernando, R.H. de Silva and N. Chutiwongs are examples. It is interesting that as in the case of Ajanta, a British military officer, Jonathan Forbes supplied the first reference of the paintings of Sigiriya in 1830s. He reported the existence of plaster laid on the rock above the gallery and noticed that the plaster was painted over in bright colours but did not describe the paintings.

226 C.A. Murray, “The rock paintings of Sigiriya,” Ceylon Literary Register, 1891.
228 A.K Coomaraswamy, Mediaeval Sinhalese art, Broad Campden, 1909.
229 V.A. Smith, History of fine arts in India and Ceylon, Oxford, 1911.
235 W.B. Marcus Fernando, Sigiriy, Archaeological Department, Colombo, 1967.
236 R.H. de Silva, Sigiriy, Department of Archaeology, Colombo, 1976.
238 Forbes, Eleven years in Ceylon, London, second edition, Richard Bentley, London, second edition, 1841, Vol.II, 1840, p.10. It is evident that the earliest recorded visit paid to Sigiriy in modern times was by Major Forbes who rode in search of the fortress in 1831 and revisited the rock in 1833. Ibid, p.1
Subsequently, in 1870s, Blakesley and Rhys Davids examined these paintings through the telescope since it is difficult to reach the place where the paintings were executed. Of them, Rhys Davids mentioned that there were ornamental patterns to be seen on a terrace higher up the rock and surmised that a large number of them must have been erased by the passage of time. It is certain that it was Blakesley, who reported for the first time on the subject of the extant paintings. He recognised them to be groups of female figures represented repeatedly, the upper parts of the body being depicted richly ornamented with jewellery.

In 1851 an anonymous writer published an account of his visit to Sigiriya describing the walled gallery and the rock which faced it as being plastered and covered all over with fresco painting chiefly of lions, which is said to have given it the name of Sigiri. Although his descriptions, particularly the subject matter of the murals at the site are extremely doubtful, it is noteworthy that about 1875 AD Blakesley also recorded the rock bearing frescoes of lions. However, it is evident that in 1889 at the request of Sir William Gregory, a former Governor of colonial Sri Lanka, Murray of the public works department succeeded in climbing into the fresco pocket and taking tracing of thirteen

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figures therein.\textsuperscript{245} Hence, he seems to have been the first to reproduce the paintings at Sigiriya.

In contrast, the first scholarly study of the paintings at the site begins with the commencement of archaeological operations of Bell from 1890s.\textsuperscript{246} Bell with his intimate knowledge, close and continuous observations described the paintings at length and in detail. Hence, his reports will always remain useful. In Bell's interesting paper read before the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch, at the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century he correctly suggested that the paintings were in tempera and that the pigments were mixed with some liquid medium and laid on a dry surface.\textsuperscript{247} But it is conspicuous that in another publication he has wrongly concluded that a comparison with those of Ajanta proves beyond question that artists trained in the same school - possibly the very same hands - executed both the Sri Lanka and Indian paintings since dress and ornaments, pose and colouring are common to both alike.\textsuperscript{248} Coomaraswamy also concludes that the figures in Sigiriya differ in character and technique from all modern paintings but resemble those of Ajanta and Bagh.\textsuperscript{249}

It is noteworthy that Smith notes the absence of blues that are conspicuous at Ajanta and Bagh.\textsuperscript{250} The views of Percy Brown may also be interesting at this point. He concludes that on the whole, while these examples do not exhibit quite the skill of the best

\textsuperscript{245} CA Murray, "The rock paintings of Sigiri," \textit{Ceylon Literary Register}, Vol.VI, No, 11, 1891, pp.85-86. In fact this was a very difficult effort. See Bethia N Bell and Heather M Bell, \textit{HCP Bell: Archaeologist of Ceylon and the Maldives}, Archetype Publications, Wales, 1993, p.87.
\textsuperscript{247} H.C.P. Bell, "Interim report on the operations of the archaeological survey at Sigiriya," \textit{Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch)}, 1897, pp.93-117.
\textsuperscript{248} H.C.P. Bell, \textit{Archaeological Survey of Ceylon Annual Report}, 1905, p.16.
\textsuperscript{249} AK Coomaraswamy, \textit{Mediaeval Sinhalese art}, Broad Campden, 1909, pp.177-178.
work of Ajanta they are nevertheless very charming works of art. Particularly, the same careful treatment as at Ajanta prevails here. Consequently, the hands are most gracefully rendered, the actual being considered in each case. The long tapering fingers are beautifully drawn and designed. In addition, the boldness of handling the modelling of the figures and brushwork that is spontaneous proclaims the paintings to be the work of an artist of strong individuality. In draughtsmanship generally the Sigiriya painting is freer and looser than the Ajanta work, but denotes the same masterly knowledge. The line is also equally expressive and a confident sweep of the brush has been applied with an abandon that is startling in its impulsiveness.\(^\text{251}\)

Nevertheless, according to Havell’s opinion also the paintings of Sigiriya are apparently derived from Ajanta and drawn by court painters of Kasyapa. He further concludes that masters and pupils have done the work.\(^\text{252}\) But, Benjamin Rowland on the other hand, suggests a possible new sphere of Indian influence - so far unsuspected in the Sri Lankan painting tradition - from an original school in southeast India where that is now a lost tradition - the Andhra school.\(^\text{253}\) He further states in this regard that the apsaras have a rich healthy flavour that by contrast almost makes the masterpieces of Indian art sallow and effete in over refinement.\(^\text{254}\) Nevertheless, it is to be noted that unlike the essays of previous scholars, Paranavitana’s observations of Sigiriya paintings are mainly based on the inscriptions engraved on the famous mirror wall.\(^\text{255}\) It is noteworthy that according to the palaeographic and chronological evidence, these inscriptions can be dated from the


\(^{252}\)  E.B. Havell, *Indian sculpture and painting*, London, 1926, pp. 73, 175.


\(^{254}\) Ibid, p.83.

dated from the sixth to the eleventh century, with a concentration during the eighth. Nevertheless, those that refer to the paintings cannot be definitely dated before the eighth century perhaps some may be even earlier. Apart from these opinions of various scholars, it must be emphasised here that a special seminar series was also held on the various aspects of Sigiriya, as in the case of Ajanta. 256

Thus, according to this survey, it is obvious that in the Sri Lankan context, most of the critics have focussed their attention mainly on the murals of Sigiriya. 257 Consequently, it is apparent that there has been insufficient data on paintings of the other sites of Sri Lanka, which belong to the period concerned. Hence, the few essays of HCP Bell, 258 GA Joseph, 259 CE Godakumbure 260 and William Ward, 261 which are mainly based on other Buddhist painting sites of the island, are very important.

The scope of the research:

Thus, it is clear that while some scholars have focused on the paintings of individual sites, most of the scholars have discussed either the painting traditions of India

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256 It was held 15th October 1983 organised by the Central Cultural Fund and the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute. Although there are a few collections of mimeographs available, they have not yet been published. 257 But it is to be noted that unfortunately on mid October 1967 AD, vandals had hacked away major parts of two of those paintings at the site and daubed paint on a total of fourteen figures, which included the hacked panels. RH de Silva, Sigiriya, Department of Archaeology, Colombo, 1976, p.17. Nevertheless, another writer states that this has been happened in mid September of the same year. Abeyratna Banda Abeyesinghe, An archaeological guide to Sigiri frescoes, Gunasena, Colombo, 1995, p.16. See also John Lindsay, Island Ceylon, Themes and Hudson, London, 970, p.131. For the restoration works of Italian chemist Maranzi please refer to L Maranzi, Ceylon: Preservation of mural paintings. Feb-May 1972, UNESCO, Paris, July 1972, pp.6-7; See also GD Weerasinghe, "Maranzi and the murals," The Ceylon Daily News, Wednesday, February 9, 1972.


260 CE Godakumbure, Murals at Tivanka pilgrimage, Archaeological Department of Sri Lanka, 1969.

261 William E. Ward, "Recently discovered Mahiyangana paintings", Artibus Asiae, Vol. XV.
or Sri Lanka over a very long period. In contrast, no attempt has been made to evolve a suitable or acceptable periodisation or classification and this continues to be based on dynastic history and political demarcations. Although this dynastic appellation is retained by some scholars as a convenient denomination, it is to be noted that there is now visible a shift from classification based on dynasty to one based on region. For instance, although Ajanta in its later phase is referred to as a Vakataka or Vakataka Gupta site, these terms certainly tend to confuse rather than clarify the historical and religious position of Ajanta vis-à-vis the development of Buddhism in India. This issue can easily be understood when considering the fact that the Vakataka kings were not Buddhists as discussed in the seventh chapter in detail. Besides, the limitations of dynastic appellations to art styles are also apparent and there is an increasing realisation that the rulers influenced not so much the form as the extent of the art styles. This is further evident by the fact that the few stylistic variations at Ajanta, particularly of the later period, cannot be categorised according to the periodisation of political history of the region, since it is evident that the Vakataka traditions at Ajanta are derived from the earlier Satavahana traditions. No doubt this approach, which hunts for dynastic location, reflects the historian’s mind and definitely not the art historian’s mind.

Unquestionably, this applies equally to the ancient Buddhist mural paintings of Sri Lanka too. For example, although the murals at various sites of Anuradhapura region and

264 C Sivaramamurti, Sources of history illustrated by literature, Kanak Publications, New Delhi, 1979, pp.140-141.
Polonnaruva area were apparently executed during two distinct periods according to the political history of the country, from their appearance, composition, techniques and other aspects they belong to one particular tradition or a style of painting rather than separate traditions. But it is noteworthy that most of the critics have based their discussions on periodisation of political history or dynastic history and have categorised them as belonging to two distinct styles as those of Anuradhapura era or Polonnaruwa periods. Hence, as discussed earlier, the periodisation of the painting traditions of Sri Lanka and India should not be limited only to changes of the administrative centre or changes of the royal dynasty, but attention should also be paid to the different styles, techniques, dissimilarities of the traditions of lines, differences in use and the mixture of colours, variety of themes and other visible differences of the paintings. This clearly shows that the painting traditions of any country will run beyond the ancient and modern political demarcations of that particular country too.

Since one of the neglected fields of research is the narrative style or narrative mode of paintings of both countries, initially it is necessary to examine these styles of Buddhist mural paintings of the two countries in detail with emphasis on their special characteristics. In this analysis, similarities and dissimilarities of the narrative modes of the paintings, the division of space, the method of displaying objects or the sketches of the paintings, the main and conspicuous features or the qualities of the paintings i.e. chiaroscuro (light and shade effects in nature: treatment of the light and dark parts in the


266 In fact, this condition is applicable not only to the artistic works but to the other aspects of the history as well. For instance, though scholars tend to divide Sri Lankan history into specific periods according to the destinies of royalty, yet it is difficult to trace the history of the Buddhist order within such a limited scope.
painting), three dimensional appearances and perspective (the art of drawing solid objects on a flat surface so as to give the right impression of their relative position, size, solidity: the apparent relationship between visible objects as to position, distance) etc have been considered.

In this context, the technique of painting is also an important aspect. In contrast, the technique of Buddhist mural paintings of peninsular India and Sri Lanka has been studied separately both by scientific examinations of specimens of wall paintings and a consideration of literary evidence available in the Śilpa texts. According to all these essays, it is evident that in most cases different and contradictory opinions have been expressed on the techniques of these mural paintings of both countries. For instance, although there is very little information on the cannons of paintings of the Buddhist mural painters of India and Sri Lanka during the ancient period, some critics have wrongly concluded that the most famous Sadanga rules given in the Commentary of


Yasodhara on *Kāmasūtra*\(^{269}\) and the other rules given in the subsequent cannons, which were all not Buddhist texts have been used by both the painters of Ajanta and Sri Lanka.\(^{270}\) Accordingly in this study, it is necessary to focus attention on available non-Buddhist ancient Indian cannons of paintings and to compare this with accessible information on the ancient period of Sri Lanka on the subject.

Besides these, according to the results of the laboratory researches, it is noteworthy that Paramasivan claims to have found two distinct techniques of Indian paintings, as northern and southern techniques, out of which the former was exemplified by Ajanta and Bagh.\(^{271}\) It is interesting to note at this point that it has been found that Indian and Sri Lankan wall paintings, dating from the earliest times till about 14\(^{th}\) century A.D are similar as regards the technique of laying the ground and the pigments employed.\(^{272}\) Another factor in common is the use of a tempera technique in both countries.\(^{273}\) Thus, although a close relationship between the techniques of the Buddhist mural painting traditions of the two countries can be noted, it is evident that almost all the critics have paid attention to only the techniques of paintings of individual countries, instead of making comparative studies. Therefore, one of the main objectives of this

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study is a comparative examination of the techniques of paintings of both countries during the ancient period to comprehend the then existing relationship and interaction between the two mural traditions.

Themes are also one of the most important aspects of the paintings. Although some scholars have briefly discussed these themes of murals of India and Sri Lanka during the ancient period separately, none of them have focused attention on a comparative study and on the usefulness of documenting these themes. In this context, it is to be noted that although Sri Lanka has a long history of Buddhist mural painting tradition, the series of Jātaka paintings or life stories of the Buddha are no longer extant, except those found at Tivamka image house at Polonnaruva belonging to the twelfth century A.D. But, it is apparent that in Ajanta, the main themes of the painters were the Jātaka stories in addition to the major events of the life story of the Buddha. Hence, although a time gap is noticeable between these two sites, for a comparative study, it is necessary to include the paintings of these two places in order to understand the development and changes of the themes used in the context of the Buddhist artistic tradition. In contrast, it is evident that some of the Jātaka stories are common and have been used in both the places though the percentage of the commonality is very low. Besides, it is noteworthy that in cave no 17 and Cave no 1 at Ajanta the Jātaka stories of Mahākapi and Mahājanaka were painted twice respectively, while the Chaddanta Jātaka has been painted in cave nos 10 and 16 at the site. Accordingly, it is obvious that these paintings of the Jātaka stories raise a few questions: Why have these Jātaka stories been selected out of almost 550 Jātaka collections for the paintings? Who made the choice and

\[^{273}\text{Ibid, p.103.}\]
the selection of the themes? Why have the same Jātaka stories been repeatedly chosen for the same place or even sometime for the same cave 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? etc. In these inquiries, it is necessary to focus attention on the Buddhist literary texts that the ancient painters may have used.

According to all these observations, it is clear that the social context of the paintings is an equally important aspect, which would be investigated in an attempt to present an inter-disciplinary study combining art history and social history. In this context, first, it is to be realised that art activity is a social process in which the artist, the work of art and the art public are interfacing elements. Of such artistic works, when considering only the Buddhist mural paintings, it is evident that they are the co-operative effort of a large number of people, painters, monks, kings, elite and the laity who patronised the Buddhist monasteries and helped execute the paintings. It is to be noted at this point that in general, 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. In this context, the important aspect is the concept of “patronage” of the paintings of the period. It is noteworthy that the historical and structural complexity of patronage in India generates more questions than answers. Perhaps the first and the most fundamental question that guides the inquiry is

the nature of bonds between patrons and their artistic clients. Undoubtedly this statement is directly pertinent to the nature of patronage of Sri Lankan paintings too. Hence, other issues that would receive attention in this study include: 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 he represented these 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' gift for such patrons? etc. Although it is difficult to find answers to all these questions, it may be possible to suggest some alternatives based on evidence relating to the painting tradition of the medieval period of Sri Lanka.

Apart from the above-mentioned concerns on "painting in society," another important aspect is "society in paintings." Evidently, the ancient artists have presented their creations mainly based on impressions they have derived from the society. Consequently, the art of every country is the unconscious record of its history. Therefore, deep and probing analysis of such artistic creations can reflect the personal impressions of the relevant artist and sometimes the information about the background in which the artists lived. Although this does not mean that one can write a chronologically coherent and detailed history of any country with the help of painting traditions alone, one can gather a lot of information by carefully observing such paintings, not only about the aesthetic feelings of the ancient people, but also their costumes,

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manners, ornaments, household life, home utensils, mode of transport, technical knowledge and much other information. For instance, prince Siddhārtha is shown among the scenes of the life story of the Buddha at Ajanta: Being the son of a Raja he wears a rich crown set with jewels and also other ornaments worthy of the son of a king. He has no upper garment and it may be observed that in the paintings of Ajanta the Rajas are generally shown naked down to their waist, although the courtiers and attendants are fully dressed, some of them wearing a kind of long coat with tight sleeves, like the ‘angrakha’ of medieval times. The ladies of high birth have been shown wearing tight bodices of a thin gossamer-like material, almost transparent, while women of middle class are clad in ‘chōlis’ of thicker material. 278

In this context, it is to be noted 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 then accepted tradition. Consequently, although these paintings of the ancient period were predominantly Buddhist, a good number of mundane matters have also indirectly entered into this tradition according to the contents of the story. The basic aim of the art of Ajanta and elsewhere of the two countries however, was to edify Buddhism. It is also obvious that there is nothing spiritual particularly in the stories depicting the previous lives of the Buddha. The characters are essentially human, untroubled by the mysteries of life and metaphysical speculations. Certainly, the social conditions depicted in these Jātaka stories could be true to any period of Indian or Sri Lankan history and therefore the artists of Ajanta and elsewhere of the two countries while pursuing the plots of the stories did not hesitate to change the necessary details to

278 G. Yazdani, The wall paintings of Ajanta (Address delivered on the 7th of March 1941), (reprinted from
suite contemporary social conditions, thus imparting a social significance to their work in which man is the centre of interest and not the gods. This condition applies directly to home utensils, carriages, costumes, ornaments and such other descriptive features also.

Thus, in contrast, the aspects, which have not received much attention of previous scholars, include styles, techniques, the themes of the paintings, perspectives of the painters, viewer response, society in paintings and painting in society. These will be discussed in the following chapters in detail. Of these, particularly in the second chapter, attention has been given to the cultural and religious interaction between India and Sri Lanka during the ancient period to comprehend the actual relationship between the mural painting traditions of the two countries. The third chapter focuses on the historical settings of the paintings comprising the following themes: origin of the Buddhist mural painting traditions of the two countries, purpose of the paintings, locations of the extant paintings, the historicity of the sites and the chronology of the paintings with the information of present status of preservation of the paintings etc.

In the fourth chapter, attention has been given to the narrative styles and the special characteristics of the paintings, similarities and dissimilarities of the narrative modes, the method of displaying objects or the sketches of the paintings, the methodology of the lining and its conspicuous characteristics etc. The fifth chapter focuses on the techniques of the paintings and includes an inquiry about the cannons of paintings, different methods of the preparation of backgrounds or the preparation of the surface for the execution of paintings, i.e. fresco (on fresh or wet ground), fresco secco

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(process of painting on dry plaster) and tempera (painting with pigments mixed with chalk or clay and diluted with weak glue or size) etc and the raw materials used for the preparation of the backgrounds, the pigments, preparation of paints, the brushes of the artists and the methods of preparation, the palettes of the painters and other minor instruments of the artists.

The sixth chapter discusses the themes of the paintings. This analysis includes: the problem of identification of the themes; identified main Buddhist themes; the method of selection of themes from various subjects; the favourite themes of the contemporary artists; the differences and the similarities of the themes of paintings from place to place and time to time; the selecting authority or the authorities of the themes and the message conveyed by the themes of the paintings if any. The seventh chapter of the thesis deals with the sociological background of the paintings. In this chapter, the painters and their social position, the concept of patronage and patrons of the Buddhist paintings, their participation in the painters’ works, active involvement of the Buddhist monks and their influences on the painters, the independence and the limitations of the painters, social perspectives of the painters and material culture as reflected by these murals and consequently painting as a source of history of ancient period of the two countries have been discussed.

In contrast, though it had been a common assumption among the art critics that the Buddhist mural paintings of Sri Lanka during the ancient period are very closely related to, if not directly derived from those of peninsular India, this comparative study of the two painting traditions, particularly in the context of style, technique, thematic, social context and material culture etc will clearly show that these two are distinct or separate
traditions to a large extent, despite some minute similarities. Nevertheless, although these belong to two distinct traditions it has to be admitted that both these traditions not only offer some of the most important masterpieces of Indian and Sri Lankan art of the ancient period, but also give a comprehensive picture of both countries' rich history. Hence, the authentic value of these mural paintings rests not only in the beauty and the attractiveness of the Buddhist themes, but also as a historical record or as an important archaeological source, which cannot be reproduced according to modern conditions. According to all these reasons, a deep and detailed comparative study of the Buddhist mural painting tradition of the two countries would necessarily be useful to any student or researcher into the field of history and art history of the South Asian region.