

INDIAN ART

FROM INDUS VALLEY TO INDIA TODAY

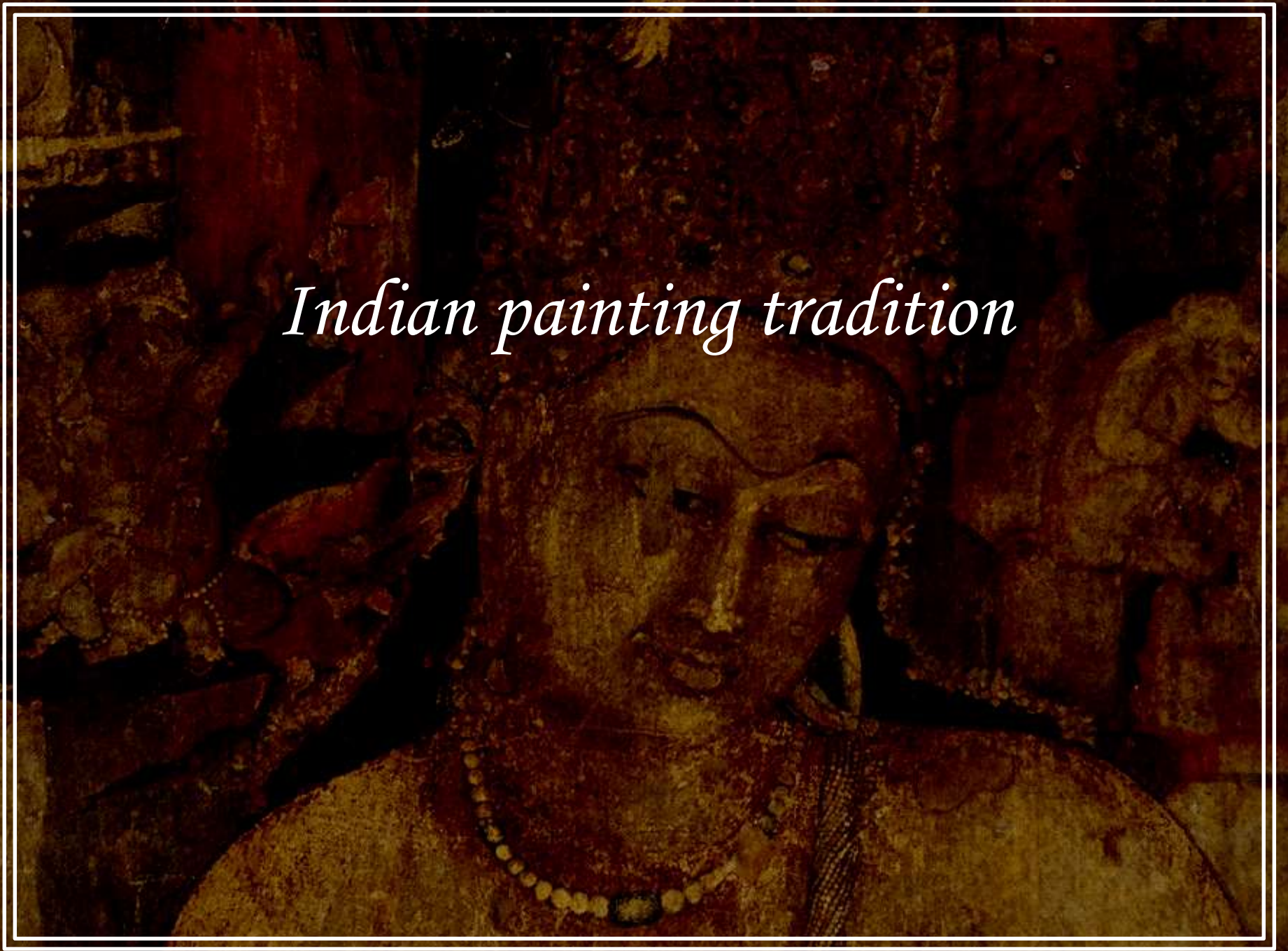
Talk 6

Indian painting tradition



G Chandrasekaran
S Swaminathan

Indian painting tradition





Indian tradition

Like any other culture,
paintings have been indispensable part
of life in India from the beginning.
The innocent, but expressive paintings
by the cave-dwellers can be met with
all over the world,
like our Bimbetka (MP) and
closer home Sethavarai.



Unique unity in diversity

Unity in diversity, fairly explains
all that is called India, and
Indian painting is no exception.

Diverse geographical and cultural regions
with their mutual influences
contributed to a multi-faceted richness
on Indian art,
while sharing certain common values,
concepts and techniques.



Unique unity in diversity

This unity in diversity is remarkable for
in the absence of any nodal agency,
dedicated, but humble,
anonymous artisans
keeping inherited tradition alive
by painting exquisite themes
inspired by life around them
illuminated by current religious ethos
using simple tools,
with home-made vibrant colours,
in indigenous styles.

We can take all these as sheer celebration of life!



Indian tradition

All our ancient paintings, as we would see,
are not court paintings,
which come much later,
but depiction of life
as the artists felt or imagined.

This can be seen in the absence
of portraiture and in physical likeness.



Indian tradition

Though these can be called religious paintings,
actually these are much more than that.
Even here, though religious,
these are not sectarian, and
cannot be called strictly
Hindu, Buddhist or Jaina.



Indian tradition

For example,
images of Vishnu or of the Buddha
of the same period
are stylistically the same,
religion having little to do
with the mode of artistic expression.



Indian tradition

Further, all shared a common pool
of symbols and metaphors

Chakra (symbolising the cyclical rhythm
of all existence)

Padma (embodying creation)

Ananta (symbolising water)

Swastika (representing four-fold aspects
of creation, motion and a sense of stability)

Purnakalasha (symbolising prosperity)

Similarly there was a common set of *mudra*-s



Indian tradition

Hence, we are not far from truth
if we call them Indian paintings.

To appreciate this we may skim through
a very important text on this subject,
the Vishnu-dharmottara



*Indian treatise on painting
Vishnu-dharmottara*

Ancient Indian treatises



Treatises on art and architecture
must have been numerous in the past,
but only very few have survived.



Ancient Indian treatises

Among the survivals are the following
that contain precious information on painting:

- Brihat Samhita
- Vishnu-dharmottara,
- Kama-sutra
- Silpa-sastra,
- Manasollasa,
- Silpa-ratna,
- Narada-shilpa-sastra,
- Kashyapa-silpa and
- Samrangana-sutra-dhara



Chitra-sutra of Vishnu-dharmottara

We are very fortunate in having Chitra-sutra,
part of Vishnu-dharmottara,
a treatise that articulates
the artistic expression of the period.
This is the earliest exhaustive account
of the theory of painting.



Chitra-sutra of Vishnu-dharmottara

Chitra-sutra , of unknown authorship, deals with theories, methods, practices and ideals of Indian painting, and opens up a world of joy and delights that only the colors, forms and representation of things, seen and unseen, can bring forth.



Chitra-sutra of Vishnu-dharmottara

It is a fine example for
what ancient treatises looked like.
It is complete, detailed and specific and,
nowhere does it lose its focus.
The text refers this as a compilation only,
of collective wisdom of the past.



Chitra-sutra of Vishnu-dharmottara

It was inspired and guided by
the Ajanta experience,
if written later than Ajanta.

If earlier, the Ajanta artists and
the later ones were guided by this treatise.



Chitra-sutra of Vishnu-dharmottara

The work is presented
through a question-answer session
between the Sage Markandeya and
an eager disciple-king, Vajra.

We shall sample the extraordinary work



Representing the Formless

*‘Though the Supreme Being is
without form and emotion,
the common people must have it endowed
with form to meditate upon it.*

*‘However the best worship of the supreme is
contemplation of the formless
with eyes closed in meditation.’*



An image is not god, but a reflection

‘Prathima is only a reflection of god.

*‘The reflection of the distant moon
in a tranquil pool is only*

a suggestion (prathima) of the moon.

*‘In other words, it is one’s mental image of god,
translated to a form in lines, color, stone,
metal or wood,
but it is not the god itself.’*



*‘When we view a great work of art,
we experience beauty (ananda)
as we let dissolve our identities and
attachments, and
become one with the object of beauty (divinity).
It is a moment that bestows on us the grace
that underlies the whole creation.
‘Art is a liberating experience.’*



Knowledge of music & dance

Knowledge of music and dance

is necessary for a painter in order
to bring fluidity and grace.

The imagination, observation and
the expressive force of rhythm are
the essential features of painting.



Knowledge of music & dance

A painting or a sculpture is the frozen versions of the gestures and poses of dance (*chaari-s* and *karana-s*).



Knowledge of music & dance

Both, like *natya*, are based on a system of medians (*sutra-s*), measures (*maana-s*), postures of symmetry (*bhanga-s*) and asymmetry (*abhanga*, *dvibhanga* and *tribhanga*); and on the *sthaana-s* (positions of standing, sitting, and reclining).



Approaching human body for delineation

Indian art developed a remarkable approach to the structure of the human body and delineated the relation between its central point (navel), the verticals and horizontals.

It then coordinated them, first with the positions and movements of the principal joints of neck, pelvis, knees and ankles, and then with the emotive states, the expressions.



To be a good artist

A good painter should be able
to paint waves, flames, smoke and
streamers fluttering in the air,
according to the movement of the wind,
to show the difference between
a sleeping and a dead man,
to portray the visual gradations of
a highland and a low land
etc



To look beyond the physical world

The artist should try to look
beyond the tangible world and
the beauty of form that meets the eye,
and not just “photographic reproduction”.

These instances prove that the artist draws
from his memory when visualizing a portrait.



Six limbs of painting

There are six limbs (*anga*) of painting as:

rupa-bheda (variety of form)

pramaana (proportion)

bhaava (infusion of emotions)

laavanya-yojanam (creation of luster)

saadreya (portrayal of likeness)

vaarnika-bhanga (color mixing and brushwork to produce the desired effect)



Elements of painting

Preparing the walls

Making of colors and paints

Drawing outlines that are free flowing lines
for delineating beautiful figures and
their delicate inner feelings

Appropriate choice of colors
both contrasting and matching
to create magical effects

Different ways of shading
to produce three-dimensional effect



Elements of painting

Proportions and ratios to be maintained while painting different kinds of male and female figures, according to their position and standing in the social strata and occupations, symbolism through plants, birds and animals and gestures and so on



Preparation of wall

The base preparation was elaborate.

On the bare rock surface was a thick coat of mud, mixed with rock-grit, vegetable fibers, grass and other materials.

On this was another coat of almost same materials, of different proportions, providing a smooth surface for the lime wash on which the paintings were made.



Preparation of wall

Buffalo skin was boiled in water until it became soft.

Sticks were then made of the paste and dried in the sunshine.

When colour was mixed with this, it made it fast, and if white mud was mixed with it, it served as a perfect medium for coating walls.



Pigments

Minerals of various hues available in the vicinity were blended cleverly to provide the numerous colors and subtle hues.

It was soot for black, which happens to be only organic material used.

Perhaps, lapis lazuli was brought from outside to produce blue.



Pigments

The soundness of these techniques can be appreciated for the paintings stood the test of time.



Art appreciation

A painting executed with care and with great intelligence and ingenuity is not only beautiful and charming and pleasing to the eye, but is also satisfying refined taste and yields great joy and delight.



Art appreciation

The masters praise the delineation and articulation of form.

The connoisseurs praise the display of light and shade.

The richness of colors appeals to common folks.

The artists, therefore, should take great care to ensure that the painting is appreciated by everyone.

Composition



Thus we have composition, as we know today,
is articulated

Legacy of Vishnu-dharmottara



One can see continuous march from the time of Ajanta, perfecting techniques and reorienting the themes, commensurate with changes in the taste and requirements.



The painting of the Bagh caves in MP,
of a period that follows Ajanta,
are more tightly modelled, and
are stronger in outline, and
more earthly and human than those at Ajanta.

The fragments of paintings found in the caves in Badami,
the modelling is even more sensitive
in texture and expression and
the outline soft and elastic.



The Kanchi Kailasantha paintings, though very little remains, show even greater firmness in strokes.

Instead of weak and crude plaster in Ajanta, the Sittannavasal painters made use of more delicate and thinner base, and far better sheen or gloss.

But one may see some decline in artistic quality from then on, with the Brihadisvara Temple paintings, though elaborate, lack in modelling and composition.

But these had compensations.

We shall have more on this later.

The background of the slide is a dark, textured image of the Ajanta cave paintings. It shows several large, seated Buddha figures in a meditative posture, with their faces and hands clearly visible. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of the figures against the dark rock.

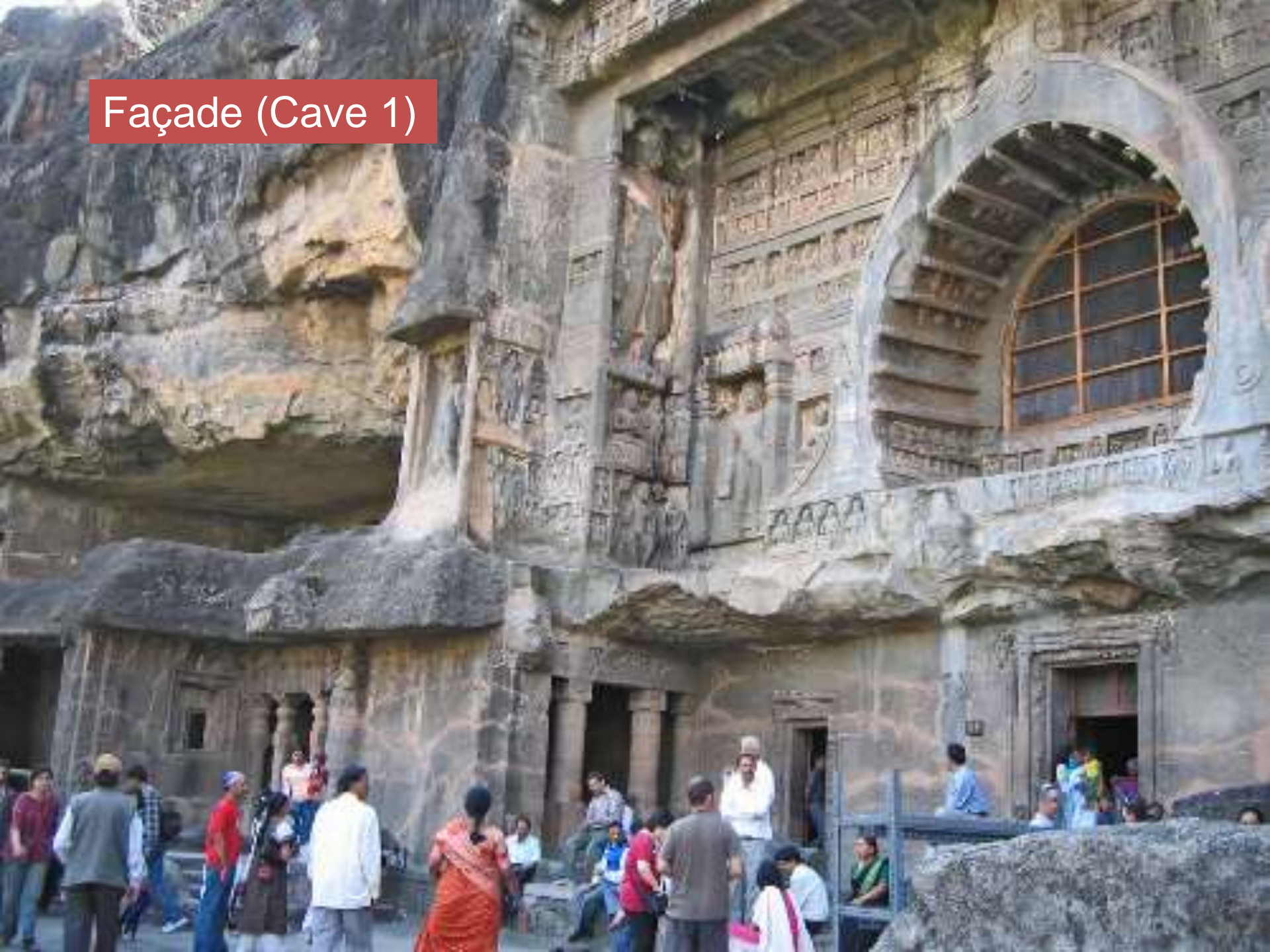
Ajanta
An art treasure

Ajanta

A quick glance



Façade (Cave 1)



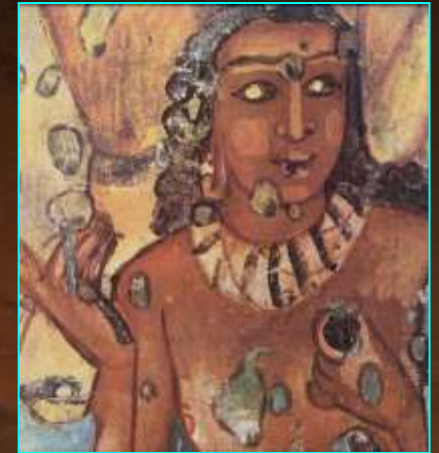
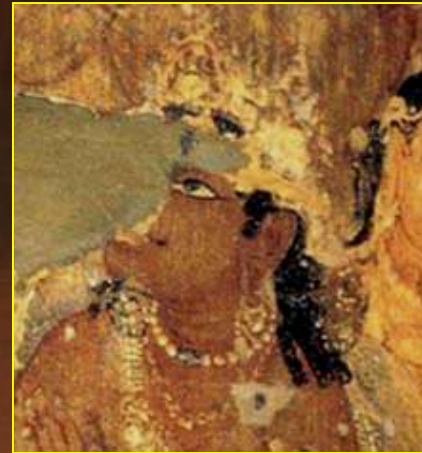


Interior (Cave 17)



Murals (Cave 1)

Period and phases of Ajanta art




Pre-Classical Period (2nd -1st century BCE)

Classical Period (4th -5th century CE)

Baroque Period (Later 5th – Mid 6th century CE)

Period of Decline (End-6th century CE)

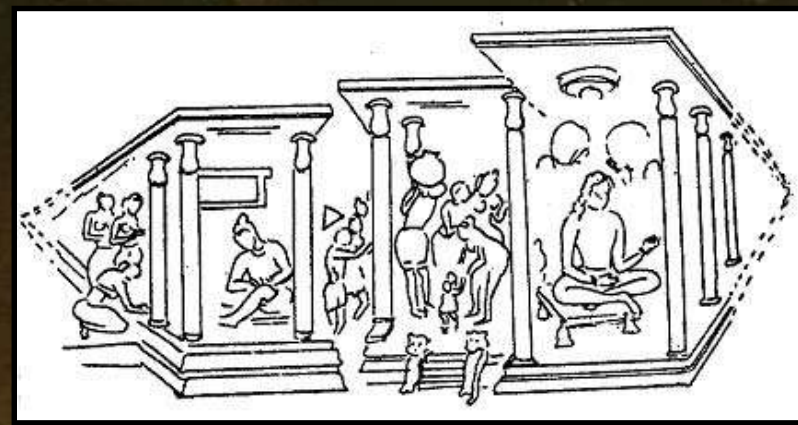
The background of the slide is a photograph of a cave painting from the Ajanta complex. It depicts two figures, likely a man and a woman, in a close embrace. The man is on the left, and the woman is on the right. They are rendered in a reddish-brown pigment against a darker, textured rock surface. The man has a beard and is wearing a patterned garment. The woman has her hair styled in a bun and is also wearing a patterned garment. The overall scene is intimate and serene.

Ajanta – Its art

Normal perspective



Multiple vision



Illusion of a third dimension – Vartana

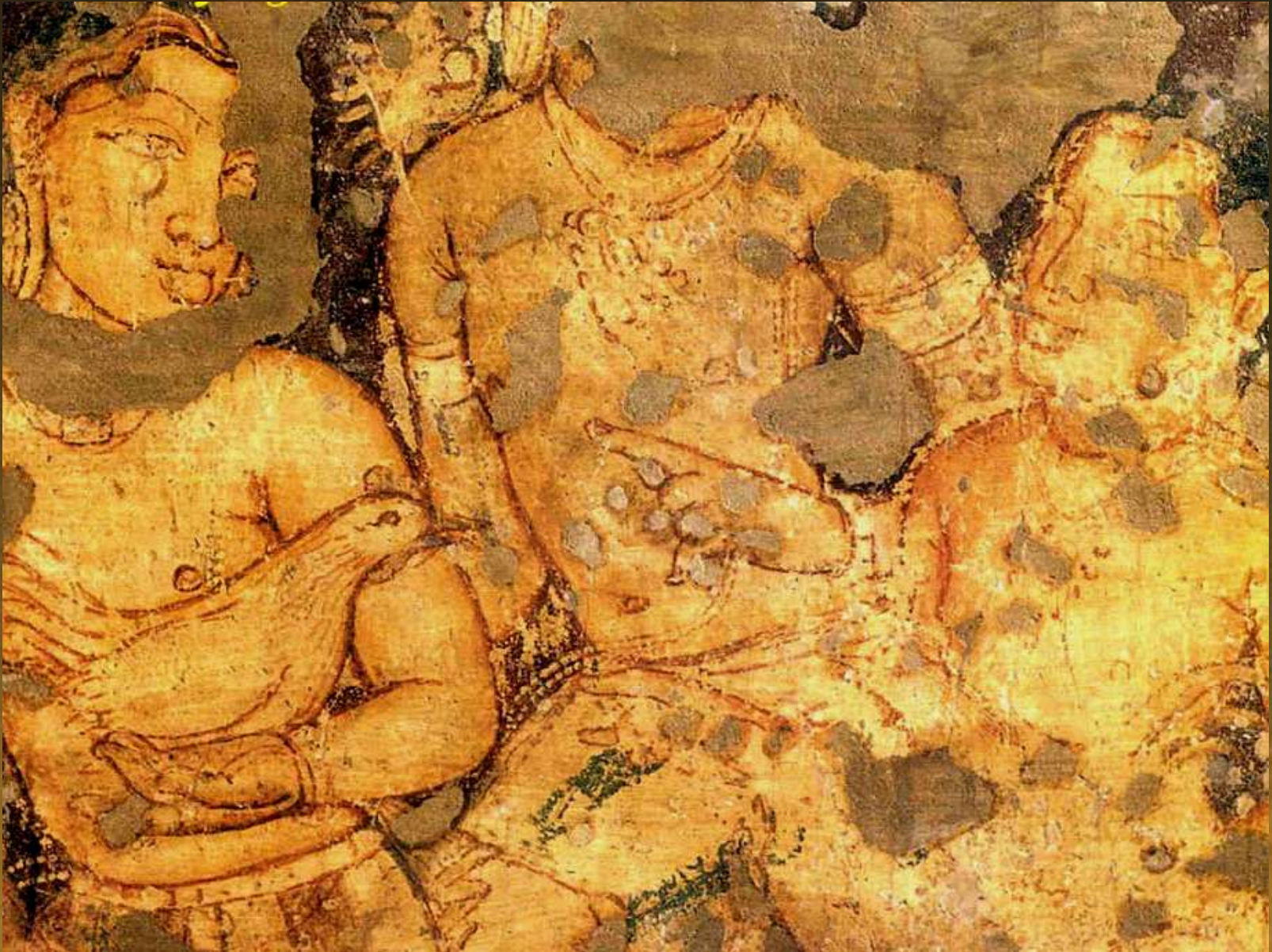


Patraja

Binduja



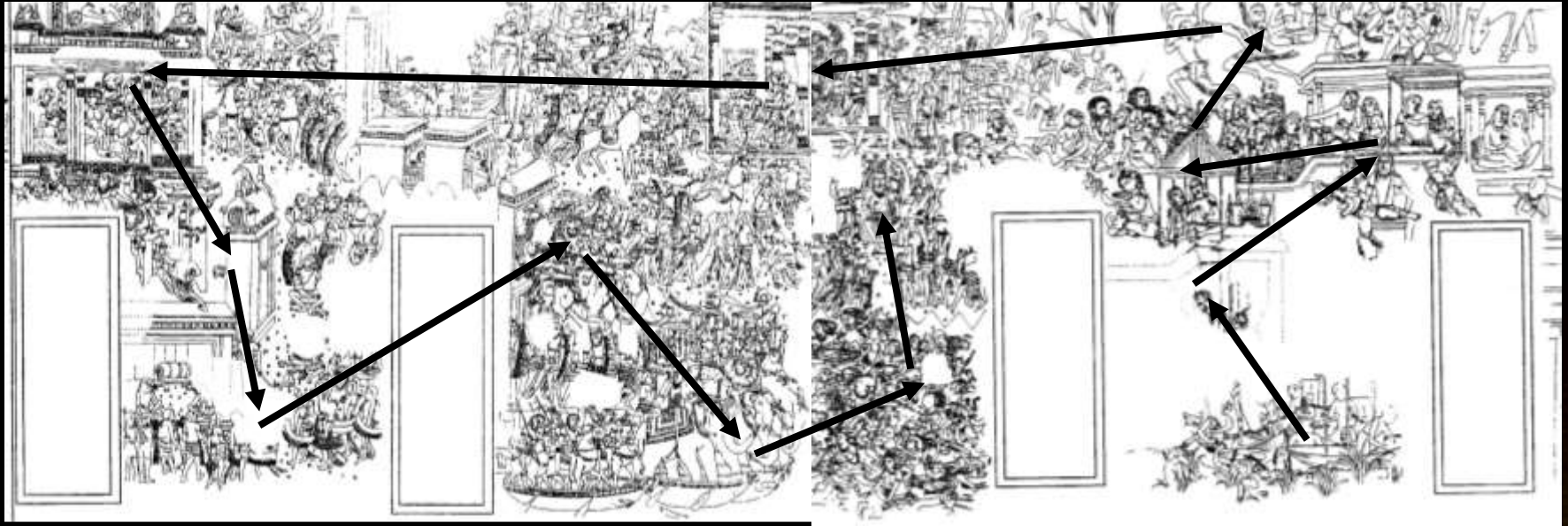
Airika



Illusion of a third dimension – Ujjotana



Composition – Narrative techniques (Simhala-avadana; Cave 17)

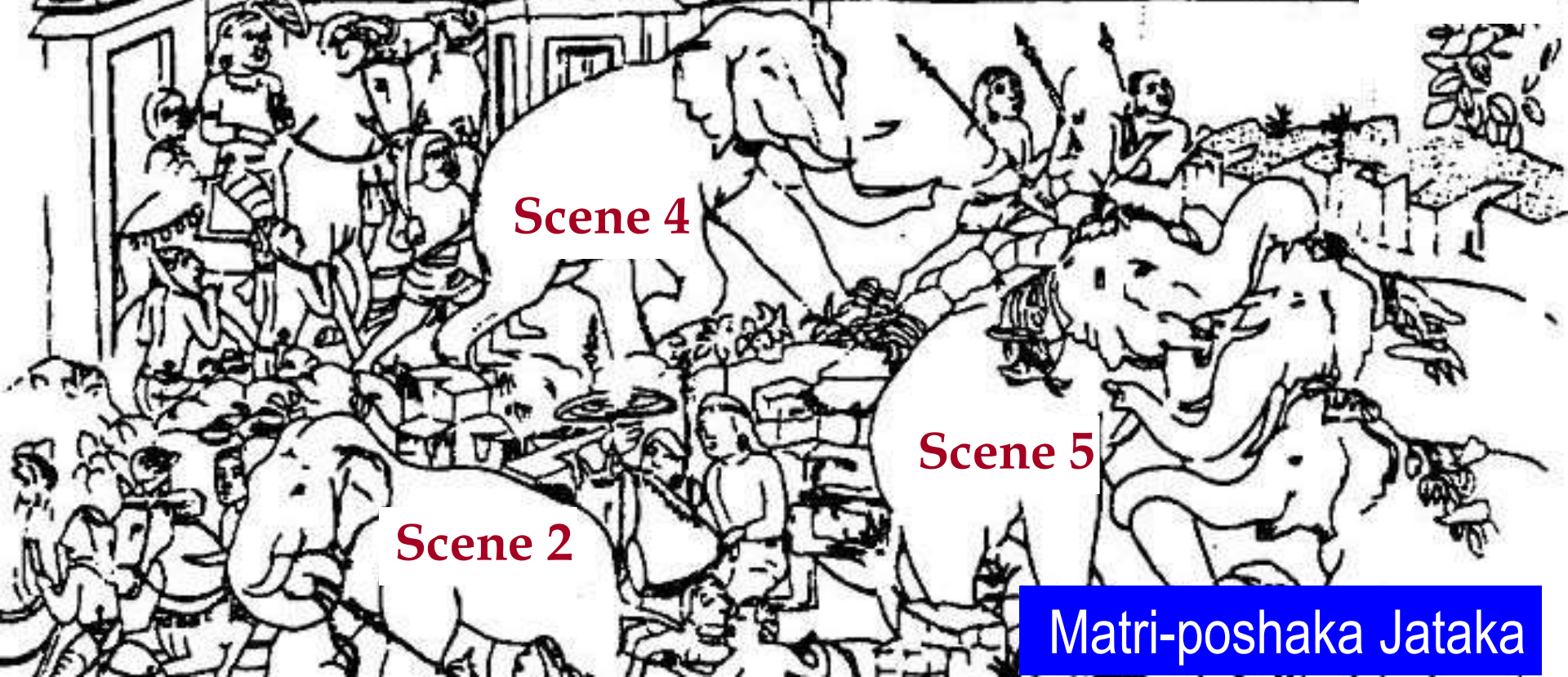


1. Simhala's ship stranded in Tamradvipa inhabited by rakshasis
- 2 & 3 Stranded sailors enticed by rakshasis
- 4, Rakshasis devouring unsuspecting sailors
5. Simhala and friends escape Simhakalpa through divine horse
6. A rakshasi follows to the palace to entice the king
7. Rakshasis kill and eat unsuspecting men
8. Simhala arrives and drives them all
9. Ministers wondering about the empty throne
10. Simhala with army goes to Tamradvipa to destroy rakshasis
11. Simhala lands in Tamradvipa
12. Fight and kill rakshasis
13. Simhala crowned

Scene 1



Scene 3



Scene 4

Scene 5

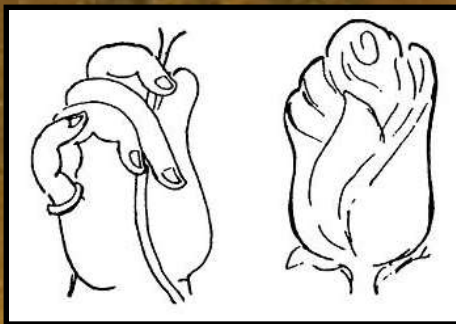
Scene 2

Symbolic depiction

elephant-head like shoulders

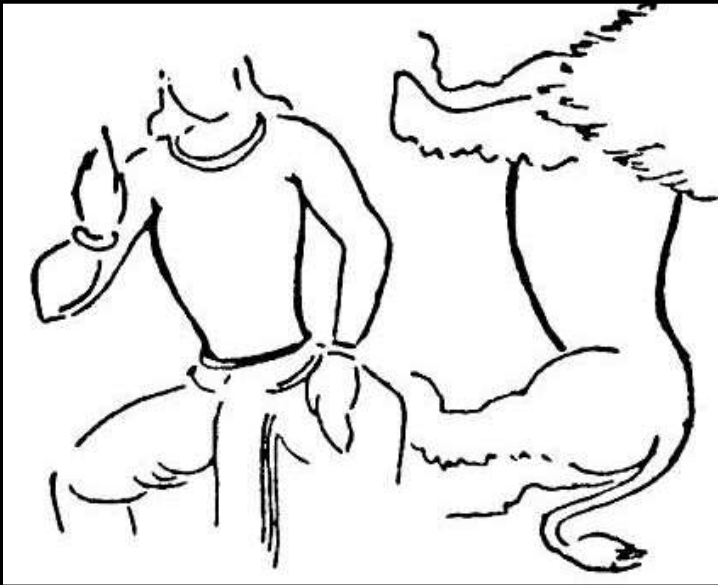


arms like its tapered trunk



hands supple like flower-buds

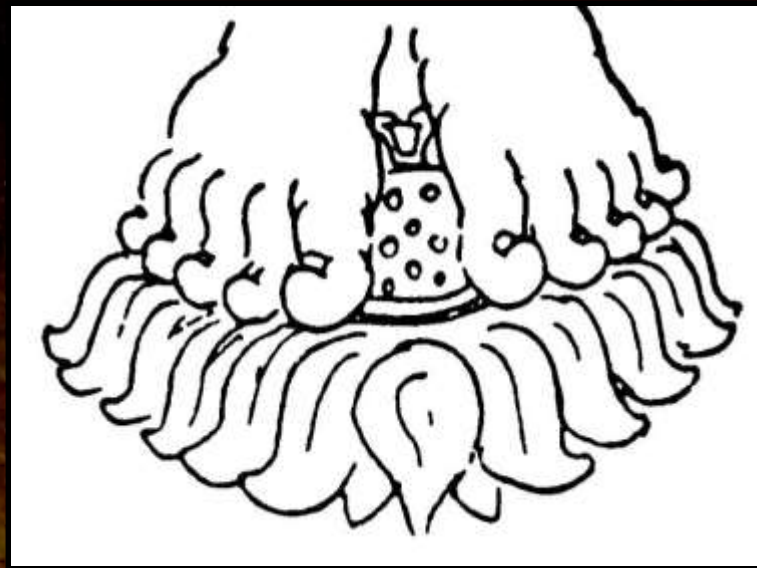




simha-kati (body-of-a -lion)



gomukha khanda (cow's-head)



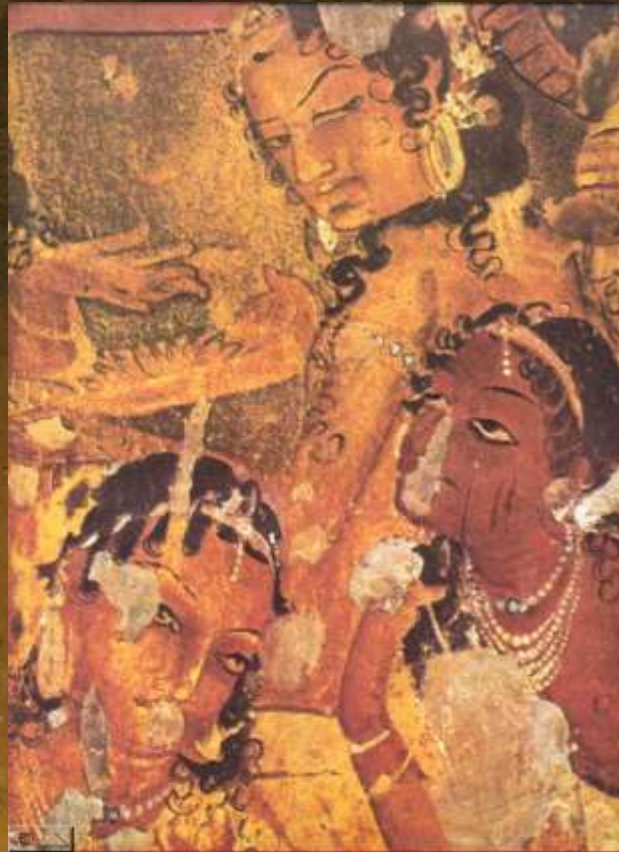
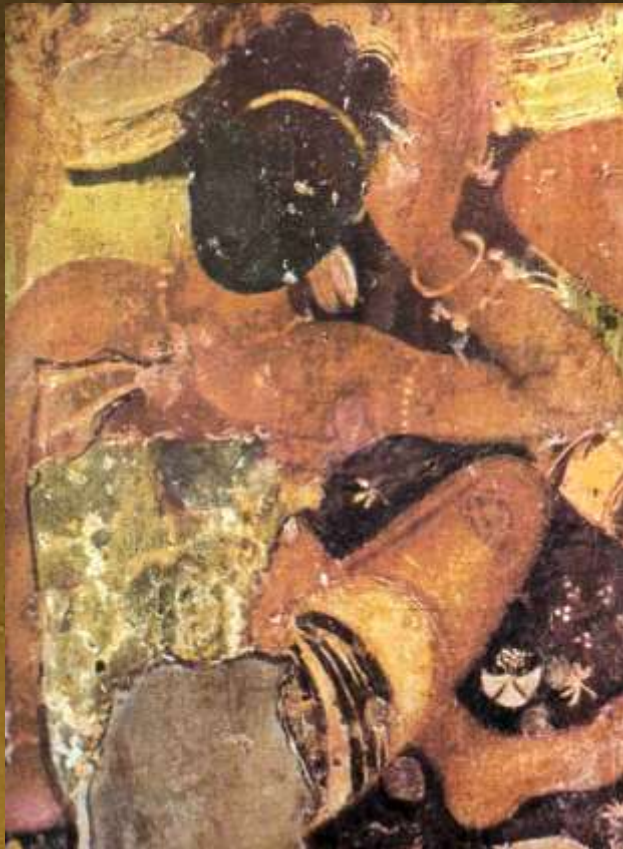
charana-kamala (feet-like-lotus)



parshva-gata
(strict profile)

to

rijva-gata
(frontal)



Body postures

Depiction of movement





*Contemporary life
through the Ajanta window*

Musical heritage

Flute

Flute

Cymbals

*Vertical
Drum*

Small Drum



Textile Heritage

Dyes (red, black & blue)

Dyeing and bleaching

Yarn manipulation

Sectional warping

Resist dyeing

Ikkat

Bandhani

Block printing

Discharge printing

Khadi (gold/silver print)

Sheer fabric (fine muslin)

Appliqué

Knitting

*Patterns &
garment construction*

Salwar-kameez

Kaftan

Cropped top for men

Women's blouse

Bias-cut

Drapes & knots

Dress and ornaments





Uttariya: A short choli of light material

Antariya: very short in kachcha style;

knotting at the centre both ends passed between the legs, fluted and tucked in at back centre to fall to the ankles; one end tucked in under the mekhala and the other over it.

Hairstyle: drawn back into one plait, with a few curls at the forehead; a fillet and a chaplet of flowers to which a semi-circular ornament attached on either side of the centre parting



Kundala: simple ring-type earrings

Mukṭavali: necklace of one strand of pearls

Keyura: on the upper arms; cylindrical, inset with pearls and tied on with ribbons

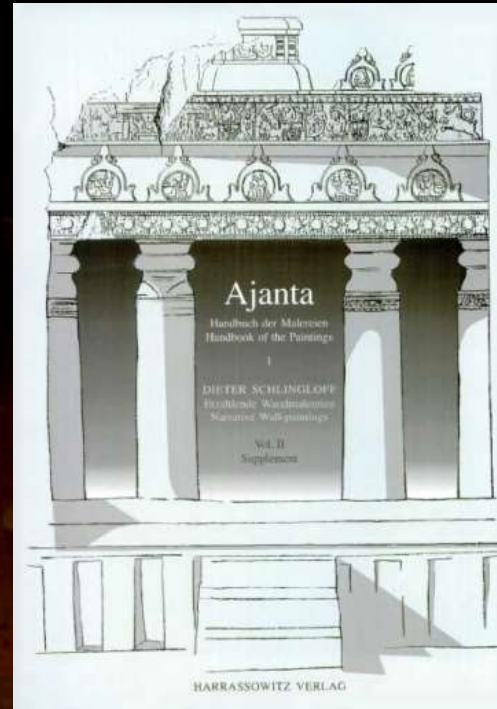
Valaya: of filigree work

Mekhala: decorated with discs; a small frill of cloth hanging at the side

Nupura: anklets are simple and cylindrical

Ajanta - Handbook of paintings

Dieter Schlingloff

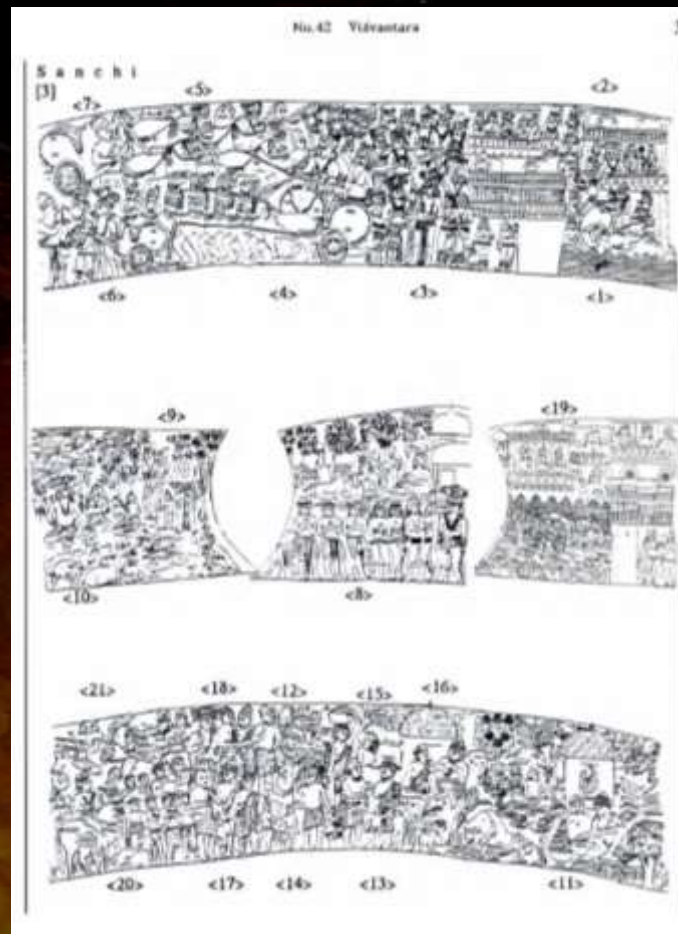


Content

- 1 Parallels in relief paintings (543 figs)*
- 2 Index of pictorial elements (245 figs)*

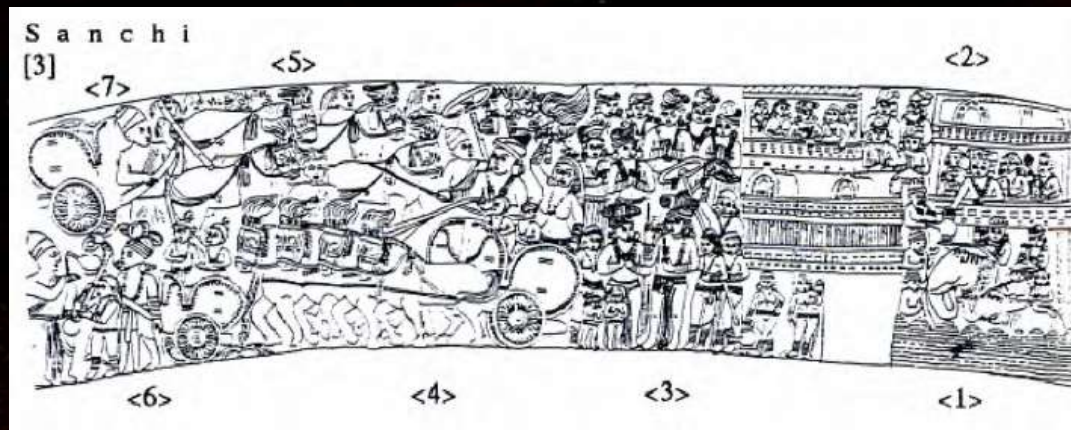
Ajanta - Handbook of paintings: Dieter Schlingloff

A sample page from '*Parallels in relief paintings*' showing where *Vishvantara Jataka* is seen in relief sculptures all over the Buddhist world



Ajanta - Handbook of paintings: Dieter Schlingloff

A sample page from '*Parallels in relief paintings*' showing where *Vishvantara Jataka* is seen in relief sculptures all over the Buddhist world



3 reliefs - Sanchi

4 reliefs - Amaravati

2 reliefs - Nagarjunakonda

1 relief - Goli

1 relief - Mathura

Gandhara - 8 reliefs

Lonad - 1 reliefs

Kizil - 6 reliefs

Qarakhoja - 1 relief

Miran - 1 relief

Ajanta - Handbook of paintings: Dieter Schlingloff

A sample of generic grouping of *'Pictorial elements'*

Environment of man

Water plants

Scattered blossoms

Shrubs

Trees

Water animals

Insects

Birds

Mammals in the wild

Domestic animals

Creations of man

Palace building;

Buildings in the city

House equipment

Vessels

Objects of practical use

Modes of transport

Arms & armour

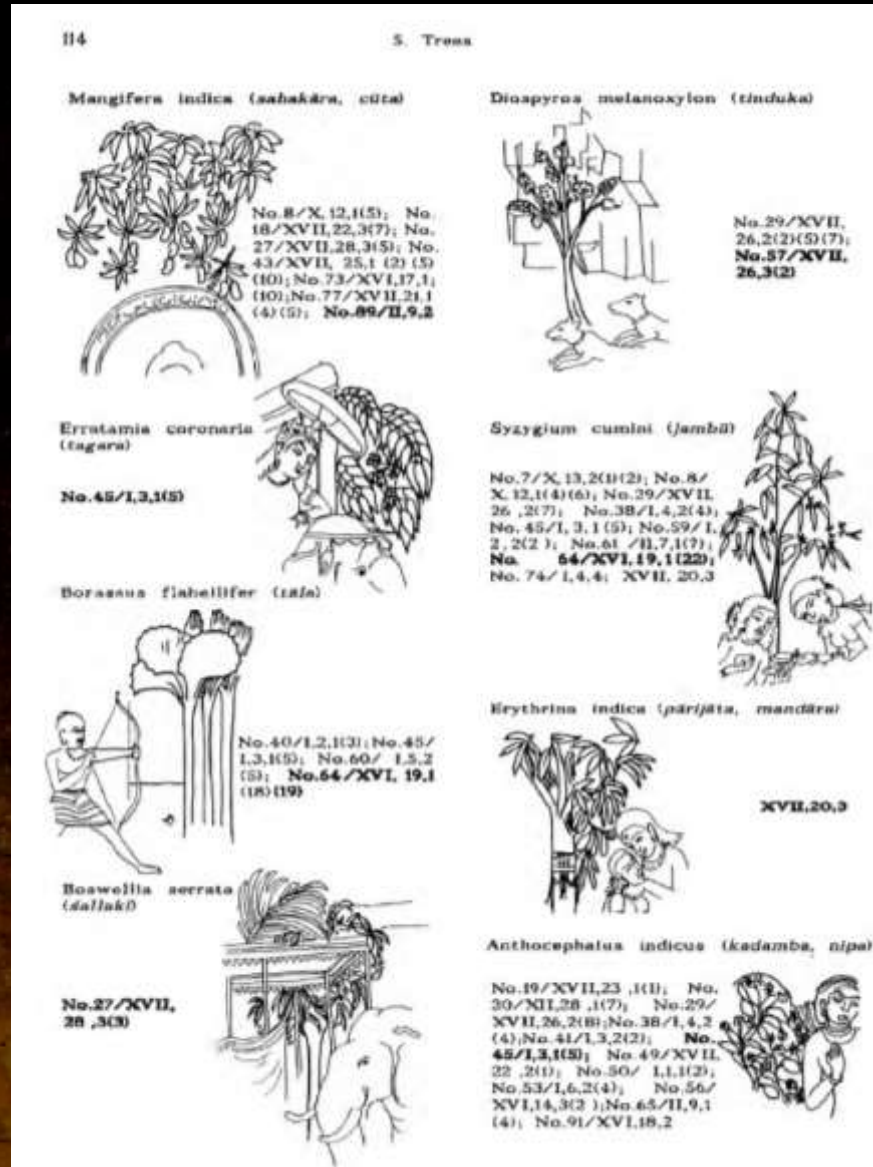
Food and drink

Music

Ajanta - Handbook of paintings: Dieter Schlingloff

A sample page (Trees identified)

Asoka
Banana
Bunyan
Jambu
Kadamba
Karavira
Kharjuca
Mango
Naga
Parijata



Peepal
Plaksha
Sala
Sallaki
Salmali
Tagara
Tala
Tinduka
Udumbara
Undefined

Ajanta - Handbook of paintings: Dieter Schlingloff
A sample entry (for Mango trees)

Mangifera indica (*sahakāra*, *cūta*)



No. 8/X, 12, 1(5); No.
18/XVII, 22, 3(7); No.
27/XVII, 28, 3(5); No.
43/XVII, 25, 1 (2) (5)
(10); No. 73/XVI, 17, 1;
(10); No. 77/XVII, 21, 1
(4) (5); **No. 89/II, 9, 2**

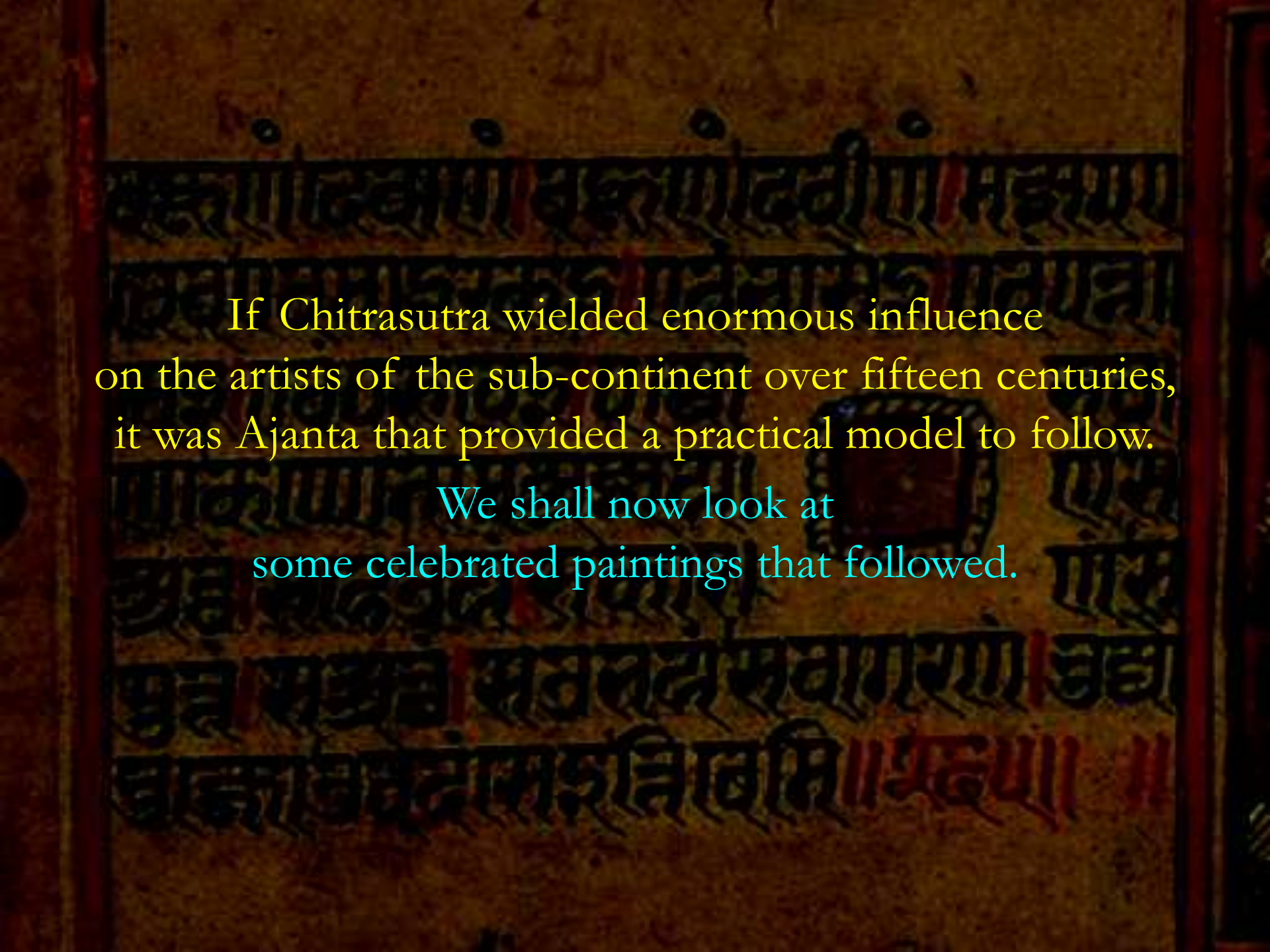
Legend gives botanical name, Indian names and identifies the caves and the painting, in his other book of line sketches

A detailed Ajanta cave painting depicting a group of figures in a domestic or social setting. The scene is rendered in earthy tones of ochre, brown, and green. In the center, a woman is seated, looking towards the right. To her left, another woman is seated, and to her right, a man is seated, looking towards the center. The background shows architectural elements like a doorway and a wall. The overall style is characteristic of the Gupta period, with fine lines and a sense of depth.

Truly, Ajanta is unequalled fantasy



Following Ajanta . . .

The background is a photograph of an ancient manuscript page. It features several horizontal bands of text in a dark, stylized script, likely Sanskrit. The text is arranged in a grid-like pattern. In the center of the page, there is a small, circular illustration of a seated figure, possibly a deity or a scholar, with a halo. The overall color scheme is dark and aged, with some red highlights in the text.

If Chitrasutra wielded enormous influence on the artists of the sub-continent over fifteen centuries, it was Ajanta that provided a practical model to follow.

We shall now look at some celebrated paintings that followed.

Pitalkhora in Maharashtra (5th – 6th century CE)



The gentle expression and typical soulful eyes of the worshipper is a character is a continuation of Ajanta

Bagh in Madhya Pradesh (6th century CE)



The paintings in Bagh follow Ajanta, but are more tightly modelled. These are stronger in outline and more earthly and human than those at Ajanta

Pallava paintings in Kanchi (8th century CE)



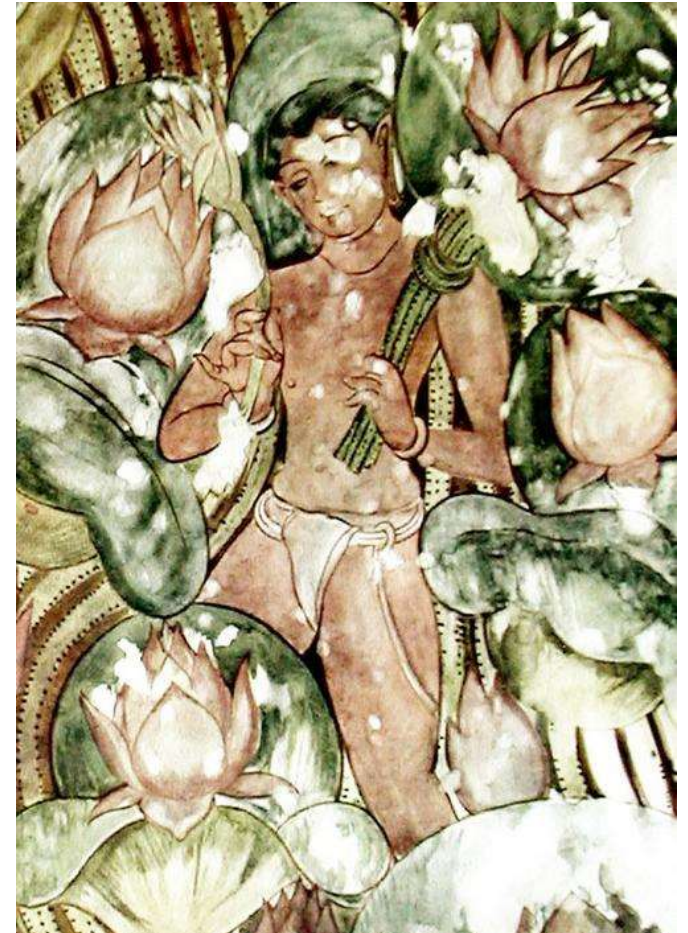
The remnants of paintings in the Kailasanatha Temple in Kanchi herald new idiom in the Tamil country.

Pallava paintings in Panamalai (8th century CE)



The remnants of paintings in the Talagirisvara Temple in Panamalai herald new idiom in the Tamil country.

Pandya paintings in Sittannavasal (9th century CE)



The Jaina paintings of Sittannavasal are direct descendents of Ajanta. The dancers on the pillars and the lotus tank on the ceiling of verandah show artistic maturity.

Chola paintings in Tanjavur (11th century CE)



The paintings on the walls of the corridors around the sanctum are reminiscent of the narrating and composing techniques of Ajanta.

Manuscript paintings in East & in the West (11th century)



A saga of miniature painting was started in the form of illustrations to the Buddhist religious texts under the Pala-s of the eastern India and to the Jaina texts in western India in the 11th century CE



Kalpasutra, Jaina school
Western India

Ashtasahasirika
Prajnaparamita

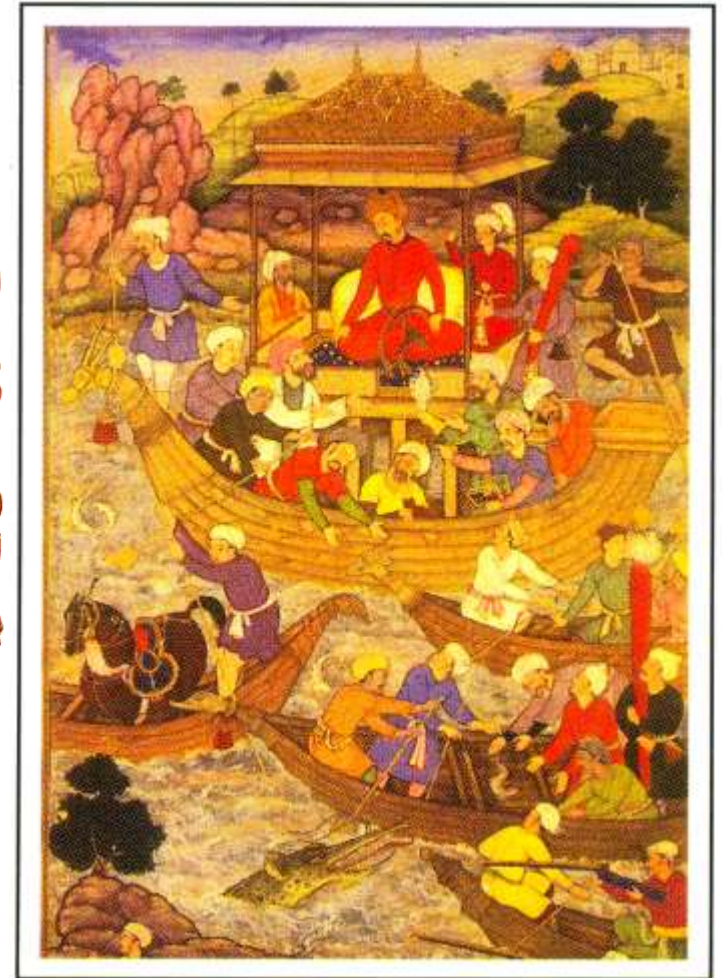


Pala School, Eastern India

Paintings of the Moghul court (16th century CE onwards)



This is synthesis of indigenous and Persian styles, marked by naturalism based on observation of nature and delicate drawing.



Paintings in the regional styles (16th century CE onwards)



The princely states of Rajasthan, Deccan and the Himalayan region, adapted this technique of intricate and delicate brushwork to suit their regional taste and idiom.

Lepakshi paintings of Vijayanagara (16th century CE)



Lepakshi in Andhra Pradesh is important for its narrative and innovative paintings of the Vijayanagara dynasty.



Nayak paintings of Tamilnadu (16th century CE)



The style of painting during the Nayak rule from 1600 can be seen in many temples in Tamilnadu. Basically narrative religious, these are renowned their surface richness and vivid colours mirroring contemporary life in compact composition.



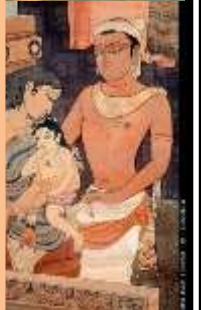
Kerala murals (From 14th century CE)



The Kerala murals in vibrant colours blend harmoniously with their wooden architecture, with their elaborate head dresses have a close association with Koodiyattam and Mohiniyattam



We pay homage to the last of the titans, S Rajam, a multi-faceted personality, who held high the Indian tradition



The following literature helped me prepare this presentation

Specific to this PPT

Kramrisch, Stella - A Survey of Painting in the Deccan (1937)

Kramrisch, Stella – Vishnu-dharmottara Part III (1928)

Percy Brown - Indian painting (1929)

Centre for cultural resources and training Website

Srinivasa Rao's blogs- 1 Art of Indian Painting; 2 Legacy of Chitrasutra

Wonder Mondo Website under Unique traditions in art

Saurabh's blog Puratattva

Jhirapalace' blog

For general guidance

AK Coomaraswamy - History of Indian and Indonesian Art (1927)

AK Coomaraswamy – Arts & Crafts of India & Ceylon (1913)

EB Havell - Indian sculpture & painting (1908)

EB Havell - Ideals of Indian Art (1921)

EB Havell - A Handbook of Indian Art (1920)

SN Dasgupta - Fundamentals of Indian art (1954)

C Sivaramamuthi & M Bussagli - 5000 years of Indian art

INDIAN ART

FROM INDUS VALLEY TO INDIA TODAY

by

G Chandrasekaran
S Swaminathan

Forthcoming talks (Dates to be announced)

7. Art in the southern region during medieval period
8. Art elsewhere during medieval period
9. Post-Pallava art of Tamilnadu
10. Bronzes
11. Indo-Islamic art
12. Indian influence in Indian Asia

நன்றி