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Colors of Ajanta & Dreams of Women: A brief study on six eminent heroines of sacred beauty in Ajanta Paintings

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ABSTRACT

Ajanta Cave painting reveals Buddhist themes, exclusively *Jataka* tales (stories of the Bodhisattva's previous lives) and episodes from prince Siddhartha to *Goutama* Buddha. The paintings served as pictorial sermons, conveying fundamental Buddhist teachings of compassion, sacrifice, and the path to a perfect way of human life. The caves provided a serene environment and spirituals inspiration for Buddhist monks to hunt their religious activities. The paintings are valued for their elaborate detail, spiritual depth, and aesthetic beauty, making them timeless cultural treasures. The specific focus of the paper will be on the artistic importance of six eminent beautiful heroines in Ajanta painting which gives integration between *Jataka* tales and Ajanta Murals with spiritual and artistic essence of human mind.

INTRODUCTION

The Ajanta caves are thirteen rocks cut Buddhist cave monuments which date from the 2ed century BCE to 480 or 650 ACE. It is situated in Aurangabad district of Maharashtra state of India. The

Ajanta caves are the master pieces of Buddhist religious art with depictions of the *Jataka* tales. It was once a Buddhist Monastic Centre and formerly represents as an ancient Buddhist monasteries or colleges. It had a large emphasis on teaching and religious aspects on the basis of Buddhist thought. In a series of creative bursts over the centuries, the caves of Ajanta were festooned with hundred of subtle and wonderful murals depicting since from the lives of Buddha and Buddhist cosmology. Many of these paintings illustrate stories from the 35 *Jataka* stories which are related to the previous births of the Buddha as Bodhisattva in human or animal form and the great events in life of Buddha such as his birth renunciation, attainment of enlighten, and other various events are also given. The Ajanta caves have been known as fountainhead of all the paintings of Asia by many historians. The caves included several paintings and sculptures which are finest surviving examples of ancient Indian art and cave paintings. It has also enriched our visual art history of Indian subcontinent.

Female Portrayal in Ajanta Murals:

Moreover, in paintings of Ajanta there are beautifully drawn female portrayals by Ajanta artists. Actually the whole classes of women characters have been drawn by them such as Ladies standing in balcony, Queens of court and their maids, Princesses busy to doing her makeup, the king in his harem with female dancers, music bands in royal household and every day scenes such as common women in their household chores, children playing with hens, and so on. The artist's attention to detail can be seen in the depiction of the paintings while women and other people walking in a procession through the town when other women come to the road to see them or heavy-breast princess or queen watching dance in royal harem and her maids, other audiences are entertaining a lots. So, these all expressions are described beautifully by the Ajanta artists. Therefore, we can state that the Ajanta artists were uninhibited lot. On the other thing is, these women were the constructive subject to the Ajanta artists that gave full scope for expressing their creative power on the picture. So, all objects of the circumstances are succeeded for producing the realistic mood. These paintings also work as transportation of nature so the picture's objects not only to create a fascinating art, but also to communicate a message and emotions. Although stories of Buddha and related to his previous life are the main themes at Ajanta. The paintings are mine of information on life during the early historical period in ancient India.



An Account of *Mahajanaka Jataka* Story, Cave-1, Ajanta

Sacred Beauty with Illustrations of the *Shadanga*:

Apart from other women portrayal in Ajanta paintings, I have only taken the six heroines among of them because of their power of nobility, magnanimous and eye-catching beauties are appreciated ever today. These six heroines are— *Shivali*, *Krishna Rajkumari*, *Irانداتي*, the Dying Princess, *Kirishna Apsara*, *Gopa* the Buddha's wife. These six heroines of Ajanta are the art connoisseur's delight for all time. They are placed in a very important role in depiction of *Jataka* Stories at Ajanta and as well as in the visual art history worldwide. The *Jataka* stories were best suited for the propagation of the faith so that Ajanta artists designated the Master-priest of particular *Jataka* stories for the subjects of painting. The object was to emphasize the importance of good living and cultivation of good qualities rather than the ethical and doctrinal import of Buddhism. In fact, the paintings are mainly drawn from the episode of Lord Buddha and his previous life so these women were closely associated with him and also about his previous births. These paintings are regarded as the finest portrayals in the world and have enlarged their influence worldwide.

In Ajanta caves, there are beautiful illustrations of the six branches of painting. These six branches or limbs of painting are known as *Shadanga*. These are: *Rupa-Bheda* (Variety of form), *Pramana* (Correct Proportion), *Bhava* (Depiction of Emotion), *Lavanya-Yojanam* (combination of Grace), *Shadreshya* (Portrayal of Likeness), and *Varnika-Bhanga* (Color mixing and brushwork to turn out the desired effect). Here, I am giving short descriptions on the six branches of the paintings and how they influences Ajanta Arts. These six heroines are growing so well among those wall paintings and carefully followed by *Shadanga* or the six limbs of paintings. Their emotions and characters are depicted with great understanding and ability- indignation, greed, love, and compassion are sweeping through these arts. The Ajanta art-practice is an evidence of the brilliance of ancient Indian culture.

***Rupa-Bheda* (Variety of form)** - The first aspect of painting is *Rupa-Bheda*. The meaning of *Rupa-Bheda* is the knowledge of form and its impact. This knowledge of appearance can be picking out by eye to soul. The *Rupa-Bheda* consists in knowledge of special characteristics of effects, such as natural and artificial or non-natural. In Ajanta paintings, the difference appearances among the male and female images are existed with other natural objects. Moreover, subjects are the real matters of the painting.

In reality, these paintings are dealing not only with religious subjects but also with the sky, water, earth, plants, birds, mountains and human beings. There are also imaginary being demon forming the train of *Mara* who tried to mislead Buddha, various gods of Buddhism or semi-divine beings such as *Nagas*, *Dikpalas*, *Gandharvas*, *Apsaras*, *Kinnars*, *Yakshas*, *Dwarpalas* etc.

***Pramana* (Correct Proportion)** - *Pramana* is addressing the correct special perception of the objects painted. It is also maintaining a sense of harmony, balance and a correct proportion within the figure and in its relation to other figures in a canvas. It comes out to the painting as a whole. Sometimes, these proportions are presenting as symbolic and suggestive.

***Bhava* (Depiction of Emotion)** - The *Bhava* draws out the inner world of subject of the painting. Mainly, it helps to express its inner feelings or moods. It takes a combination of many factors to articulate the *Bhava* of a painting. Hence, through eyes, facial expression, surrounding atmosphere, birds, animals, even water, sky, rocks are employed to bring out the *Bhava*. In narrative paintings of Ajanta, the depiction of dramatic effects and responses of the characters from frame to frame bring out the example of special skills of Ajanta artist to describe the sense of *Bhava*.

The famous portrayal, *Krishna Rajkumari* (the black princess) depiction in palace (cave-1) is one of the unique example *Lavannya* or grace. In this presentation one finds the lyrical eyes looking downward with compassion. Today the painting has discolored but its highlight and shade comes out properly. Her Jewelleries and ornamentations from necklace to arm-band are prominently placed without discouragement of the flow and movement of the gesture. Her eyes are much said without saying anything. She is also a finest example of *Bhava* (Depiction of Emotion).

***Lavanya- Yojanam* (Infusion of Grace)** - This aspect is addressed to the creation of grace, beauty, charm and illuminating of the painting which are always a peer attraction and the hearts of the viewer. It aims to uplift and brighten the mood of the figures in a painting and the viewers.

The *Indra* and the flying celestials (cave-17) are revealing the grace of human body which is clearly indicate the power of the artist in *Lavanya-Yojanam*. The image of *Naga Princess Irandati* amusing herself in a swing royal garden, Cave-2 is one of the finest examples of the *Lavanya-Yojanam*.



Indra, King of the Gods, descends from heaven to see the righteous prince and observe his generosity, Cave –17, Ajanta

Shadreshya (Portrayal of Likeness)–*Shadreshya* shows perfectness of a painting which is used for merging the inside aesthetic of art with the outside and explains how the fundamental nature is reflected and modified by the external factors. Here *Lavannya* or grace is closely associated with this external factor of *Shadreshya*. These elements of paintings are used by the artists so that the viewers can decode the hidden meaning in paintings.

Varnika-Bhanga (Color mixing and brushwork to turn out the desired effect) - Descriptions, shading, ornamentation and coloring are the decorative aspects of the paintings. *Varnika-Bhanga* is an artistic manner of color combinations, tones and shades. It does also apply for representing several of moods and circumstances of paintings. The *Chitrasutra* Chapter of *Vishnudharmottra* remarks the five principle colors – they are white, yellow, red, blue and black. The pigments are used by Ajanta artists such as red and yellow ochres, lapis lazuli for the blue and *terra verdaor* glaucomite for green, black was derived from lamp-black and white from lime and gypsum. It has not been possible today to verify the existence of the binding medium such as glue or gum. Possibly, animal glue was employed.

Colors have a capacity to influence human perception, behavior, and their emotions deeply. So, colors are the medium of the message and they also work as an interpreter of the painting. For example, in Ajanta paintings, black or blue are associated with erotic and significance character while yellow and brown with heroic. It was a perfect use of color arrangement for successfully conveying the intended feelings. These are exactly what are implied in the ‘Six Limbs of the Paintings’ mentioned above.

Six Eminent Heroines and Colors with Their Dreams:

Sivali, *Krishna Rajkumari* (black princess), *Irindati*, The Dying Princess, *Krishna Apsara* (Black *Apsara*), – they all are the profound female character among the Ajanta paintings and as well as in their own life story which are described in *Jataka* tales. These women are so renowned not only for their sacred beauty but also for their humanity, forgiveness, sacrifices, intelligence, for-sighted and firm in mind which glorified their life for immemorial time. They exhausted their love and affection to Buddha’s life. Their courtesy, simplicity, sweetness are throbbing in the portrayals and establishes a high thematic drama of Ajanta paintings. Their Sacrifices were gradually helped to Buddha to proceed

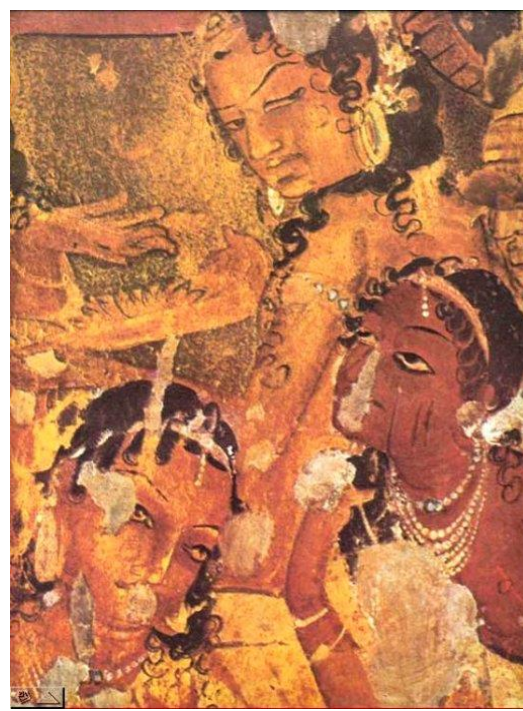
towards the ordained monk. Here, I want to talk of their fine representations of simplicity and transparency in the paintings. They draw attention to their graceful contours, highlighting nose, eye-lid of meditative nature, hair styles, all kind of ornaments and jewelries.



A Scene from Palace Life & Their High Status Livelihood, Mahajanaka *Jātaka*, Cave-1



Queen Sivali, Mahajanaka *Jātaka*, Cave-1



Palace Maids responding in shock and in sorrow to the news that Mahajanaka will leave the Kingdom and Sivali, Cave-1

In cave No-1, there is a scene in a fresco which presents the *Mahajanaka Janaka*. The *Mahajanaka Jataka* describes the future Buddha's birth as a prince named *Mahajanaka*. Above picture shows a scene from palace life, in which *Mahajanaka* watching a dance performance for his amusement arranged by *Sivali*. Their royal life is clearly shown by their rich jewellery and ornaments. Beside this, in this panel, we can see that queen *Sivali* is nude but her other maids are fully clothed. Artistically this portrayals a example of supreme aesthetic sense. But as time past by *Mahajanaka*, he become disconnect with his family life. *Sivali* was heartbroken and she attempt to change his mind but her every effort become wasted. She always wants to give a birth a son but it never happened in this life. Finally, *Mahajanaka* attracted to the worldly life. Palace maids are responding in surprise and in sadness to the news that king Mahajanaka will leave the kingdom and their mistress *Sivali* will be left alone. Their eyes are made according to the tradition enclosed in the *Chitrasutra*. We see that a newly initiated monk is sitting with his begging bowl. Their eyes are the windows to the soul and the artists concentrated on portraying the feelings of his subjects through their eyes. There are five kind of eyes to be painted, which are depicted in the *Chitrasutra-Chapakara* or (meditative), *Matsyodara* (female or lovelorn), *Utpalaprabha*(placid or peaceful), *Padmapatranibha*(frightened or weeping), and *Sankhakriti*(angered or deeply pained).

The *Krishna Apsara* or Black *Apsaras* is one of the eminent female images at Ajanta. If we stand in the front of entrance doorway of this cave no. 17 at the right hand side the flying angles or *Krishna Apsara* beautifully portrait here. She wears very beautiful head ornaments while she is flying on ornament on her head in turned against wind direction. Because of wind her eyes has become tweet and her neck ornament is flying on back. In her arched eyebrows, long almond-shaped eyes and slightly pointed chins, one finds here, for instance, the six limbs of painting as counted in *Vishnudharmottra*(a text on aesthetics).



The Dying Princess
Conversion of Nanda, Cave-16

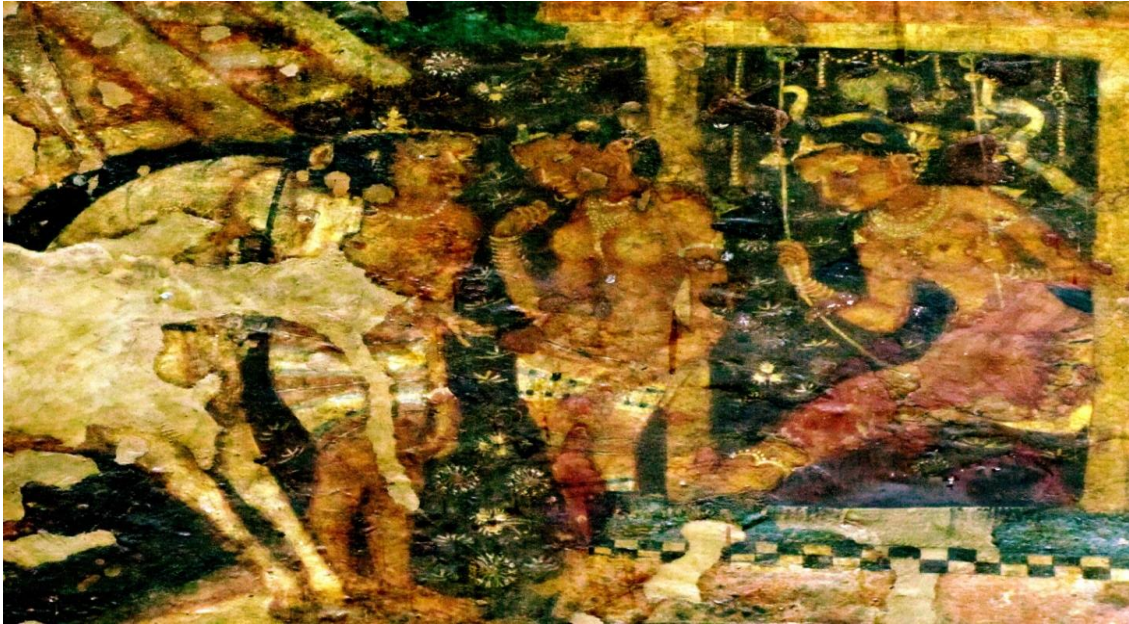


The Buddha before his wife Yashodhara
and son Rahul, Cave-17

The dying princess is considered to be one of the important paintings produced in cave no. 16 at Ajanta. The scene reveals the critical stage of Nanda's wife. Nanda is a cousin brother of Buddha. There another female behind attends with *Pankha* (hand Fan) while two woman on the left are looking on with the expression of thoughtful grief depicted in their faces. She feels ill after hearing the decision of her husband that to give up the crown and to become a monk. This painting can be included in the

category of 'Classical' in a qualitative sense. The illusion of warm, rounded breast is conveyed by unobtrusive modeling and standing. The color remains cool and fresh even now, so that the female images are presenting themselves to the eye in the different light.

Naga princess *Irاندati* is one of the most beautiful lady in the Ajanta Paintings. It is from *Vidhura Pandita Jātaka* story. This scene presents that time when the Yakkha (Yaksa) General Punnaka was flying over the Naga Kingdom and saw the Naga princess Irاندati amusing herself on a swing adorned with flower and singing a song all by herself in the royal garden. No sooner than he looked at her he lost his heart to her. It is one of the fine example of the *Lavanya- Yojanam* or grace and Depiction of Emotion.



The Naga Princess *Irاندati* amusing herself in a swing royal garden, Cave-2, Ajanta



Krishna Rajkumari (The Black Princess), Cave-1

A very powerful painting in cave 17 shows the Buddha return to his home city *Kapilavatthu*. *Rahul* requested his father and missing him dearly. On the seventh day of his return *Yashodhara* took his son to his father. She had tutored the child to ask the Buddha for his rightful inheritance, being born the son of prince. The Buddha is shown putting forward his begging bowl, which is all that he has to offer. *Rahul* followed the Buddha, saying "Give me my inheritance." No body tried to stop him, nor did

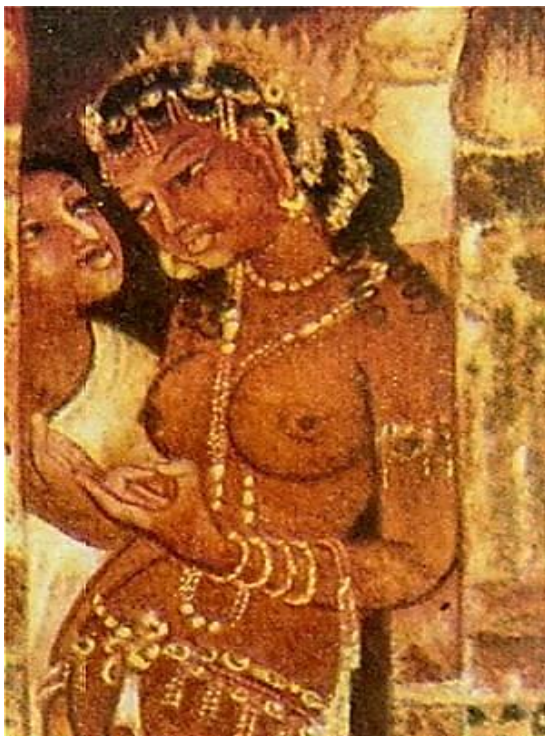
the Buddha prevent him from following him. He then looked at his father and said “Lord, even your shadow is pleasing to me”. The concern of the artist, however, is not to represent the photographic reality around him. His philosophy told him that material world was a veil of illusion. He had to lift that veil and look beyond. It is one of the finest example of the *Shadreshya* (Portrayal of Likeness or similitude).

Characteristic of Eminent Beauty in Ajanta Paintings:

Some features have revealed from these six heroines and other woman portrayals of Ajanta paintings. These are mainly appointed with the six heroines of Ajanta. These are as follows:

Clothed in Nakedness:

In Ajanta paintings, there are many images of Princess, Queens and other women from aristocrat family are existed as nakedness. Throughout the Ajanta painting, at least the central figures of female characters are generally unclothed where as all the maids fully clothed. Nanda’s wife, princess *Sivali*, the Dying Princess, *Maya Devi* the Sirdhatha’s mother, *Irindati*, *Krishna Rajkumari*, *Kirishna Apsara*, all these beautiful ladies have disposed themselves with in few cloths or mostly nude. On the other hand, lower classes or ordinary women are fully covered with cloth, such as the maids surrounded to *Sivali* are fully clothed but Princess *Sivali* is not. Such an example goes to the *Irindati*, the dying princess and so on other princess. Here, it had a seared philosophy and artistic justification which makes concludeto thearea of perfection. Ajanta Painting’s obsession with the sensual body has always provided a space to the appreciation of Indian Art. For this reason, throughout the history, the art of India – literary and visual art both have consistently celebrated the beauty of human body. Indeed the whole tradition of the artistic mind was an aim to perfecting and transforming the body with a view among the higher adepts, to making inspirational, omniscient, even god like. This obsession with the beauty of the human body survived waves of innovations. Actually, the Ajanta paintings deemed to make a contact with sensibility.



Maya-Devi, Siddharta’s mother
Nativity of the Buddha, Cave-2



Conversion of Nanda, Cave-1

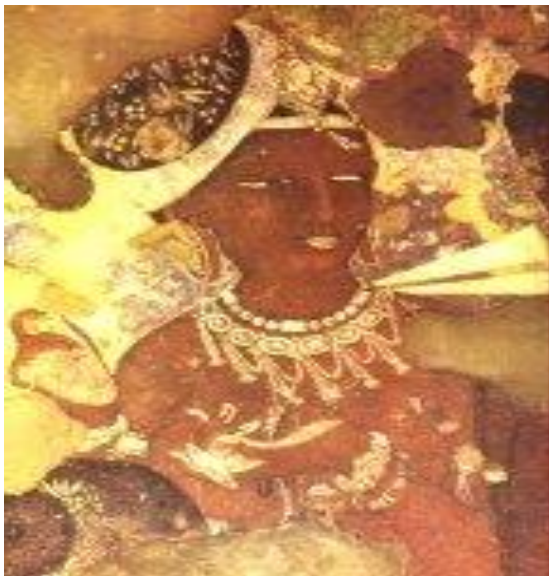
It may have sanctified philosophical inner meaning which is ever flowing on the imperishable portrayals. These heroines are existed as cloth-less because the artists wanted to characterize themselves

as example of sacred beauty. Always the human body has considered as essentially sinful, shameful by the common people because this body bares many troubles in human life such as jealousy, cruelty, annoy, old aged etc.. Therefore a person always seeks to cover up themselves with an artificial mask of happiness and humanity. So, the Ajanta artists do not want to represent his heroines as coated with sin. The Ajanta artists believe a concept to apply the moral sensibility on these paintings. As a result in all these heroines are taken few cloths on their body and there are no eve taking the fall for fall. Actually, in this way, they tried to express beauty of their mind, sacrifices of their life and exhausted their love through the paintings. The body in other words is not the means to be whipped into the submission but produced itself as a vehicle of divinity.

Sivali, the Dying Princess, *Maya Devi* the Sirdhatha's mother, *Irindati*, *Krishna Rajkumari* these all are not only connected with the temptation but instead with fertility, abundance and prosperity. There is an open embrace of sexuality as to make one route to universal divinity. Hence, the outer beauty of human body and inner beauty of soul are all creating mixed up and make a close intimacy with the account of simply human life.

Black is Beautiful:

'Black is Beautiful' and 'Black is the Light of the World' these principle are thoroughly followed by the Ajanta artists. Princes *Sivali* is black, the dying prince is black, and *Krishna Rajkumari* (BlackPrinces) is also black. *SaktiPandara* and the Consort of *Padma-Pani* are also remained as black skinned. Basically, all famous heroines of Ajanta painting those are acknowledged as famous beauty in the world, they seem in dark completion. Perhaps this dark shade for a contemporary taste, the Ajanta artists included black color as an attractive complex for their skin. So, artists used black colors for discriminating the main female character among the other females and characterized as example of sacred beauty. *Sivali* is one of the most prominent examples for a legendary female but the artists drawn her with black complexion. According to the views of Ajanta's artists, fairness is not a true identity for female's beauty as we see in the poem of Kalidasa, the great poet and play playwright of 5th century. His heroines have been remained as dark skinned in several poems and dramas by him. *Krishna Rajkumari* (Black Princes) is a most beautiful lady among the other female images of Ajanta but she is also complexion of pitch-dark shade. Her curly hair has fallen on the forehead which makes her grace as image of faultless. She has taken various ornaments on her body but she has remained in deep thinking. Viewers may think after seeing her portrayal that she would be waiting for her love for immemorial time.



Krishna Apsara (Black Apsara)
Cave-17



Consort of *Padma-Pani* Cave-1

Painting is one of the forms of the communication through the art. The Ajanta artists are much said without saying anything through these cave paintings. The artists symbolized the intended message and allow the viewer to decode and interpret the hidden meaning of these female portrayal or other paintings. There are many complex feelings which cannot be expressed through drawing, therefore the artists used variation of colors complexion or used line for expressing the body languages and eye movement etc. and so on in order to describe their individual presentation and depth of creativity.

Hence, the Ajanta paintings are not only a canvas of depicting the life of human history of that time but also a tool of conveying a wide range of stories, their way of life, their thinking, emotion, feelings and inner world symbolically in a hidden mode. So, the paintings of Ajanta caves are the manifesto of various sentiments. The non-violence city, friendship, worship, requisition, gaiety, repose, love, fear, shyness, strainers- these all characteristics are clearly and excellently drawn in the pictures.

Freedom in Fashion and Style:

Females hairstyle and fashion executed with a freedom and grace which have a few parallels in Indian art. The attenuated poses, great variety of hairstyles, all kinds of ornaments and jewellery are indicating the skilled artisans. These six heroines are representing the true fashion sense and styles of the life of their times.

Conclusion:

These six heroines were alive in paintings by the creative power of Ajanta artists. Color and brush produced the desiring effect of these paintings which show the evolution of their emotion, sorrow, happiness of their life. However, the colors create a life in a picture as well as emotion, sorrow, happiness, dreams, sacrifices – these all are one of the colors of human life which is produced throughout the *Jātaka* stories. These females are not distinguishing themselves with other portrayals of Ajanta painting for its artistic view but also are remaining as erudite female characters in the *Jātaka* stories. The colors of these six women characters are weaving dreams in Ajanta paintings and we are communicating their dreams through these paintings.

These paintings were made by the successors of a very long tradition. The art of painting was their legacy and it was their duty in life to paint, to carry on the vision of collective understanding that their ancestors had been formed over the ages. As we may imagine, they had no need to write their names upon the paintings. The Buddhist monks received sacred hymns and they were immortal of the world of deep thought. It was great wisdom of importance and fulfillment to play one's role as a part of the world, to contribute one's sensibilities and brilliance into that eternal fire of creation. These modest painters had a great vision, a vision of humanity and kindness, which moves and charms us even today. The reader should observe the Ajanta paintings not because these are only painted by the colors or outlines but those were consequences of the time of ever persistence.

According to the book '*Ajanta Aparupa*' of Narayan Sanyal, I have enclosed my paper with that charming folktale which was introduced by the local people of Fardapur, that is – many years ago, the *Apsaras*, *Gandharvas* felt very tired for their daily life of heaven. They wished to spend some time in the earth. So, they went to *Indra* (King of Gods) to take permission for this reason. *Indra* agreed to give the permission as well as he also alerted them to return before the sunlight. He said if they not come back before the dawn, the door of heaven will be closed forever. They all flew down to the earth, took a bath in Waghora river and spent all night in this valley. Then they slept and forgot the promises of *Indra*. In morning, the heaven closed the door and these all divine beings stuck into the cave wall for ever days. These beautiful pictures are themselves. The villagers have no idea about the importance of the Ajanta when these caves were discovered. The Ajanta has known by them as lovely stories at that time.

Therefore, it can be said that paintings of Ajanta, are fine examples of women representations; these heroines and other female images are melodies of the flute of the color for Ajanta.

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