CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE (C)

PAINTING

I. DECCAN

1. Ajanta (c. 475-550)

It is already mentioned that the Vakatakas share the unique distinction of ushering in a period of unprecedented cultural developments in India with their great contemporaries of the North, the imperial Guptas. The claim of the Vakatakas to this distinction rests much on the scintillating creations of the painters, which once embellished the walls of almost all the caves excavated in the Western Deccan during their reign. But, lamentably, most of the paintings being peeled away, there at present exists only fragments of what in the past represented one of the foremost expressions of Indian creative genius. Nevertheless, the remnants of paintings of the Deccan as well as of the South, executed in our period, remain to be an eloquent testimony to the achievements of Indian painters in the field of visual art. As no painting of this period has survived, the destruction of natural and human agencies in the North proper, the importance of these paintings situated to the south of the Vindhyan range increases further. For this period, at least, study of South Indian painting amounts almost to the study of Indian painting of the classical tradition as a whole.

A perusal of the contemporary literature reveals that the art of painting was fairly popular among the cross section of the people. There were various categories of painting, such as, portraits, landscapes, narrative paintings, etc., to meet the demand of the people of different socio-economic strata. Palaces and temples were adorned with painted decorations; and there were galleries, too, to nourish the aesthetic cravings of the patrons and connoisseurs of the art. References to a popular brand of painted scrolls, depicting instructive stories to inculcate moral to rural masses, are also noted in the early Buddhist literature. Among the painters there were both professionals as well as amateurs. The Mahavastu, a Buddhist text belonging to the second century B.C., includes the painters in the list
of artisans, while from Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra* it is evident that painting was one of the valued accomplishments for a sophisticated citizen. Place of painting in the social milieu of the élite may be appreciated from the fact that almost in all the best known Sanskrit plays, belonging to the early, middle and late classical periods, it plays a crucial role in complicating a plot or in saving a situation. Further, it is known from the literature that paintings were executed on canvas (*paṭa*), woodden panel (*paṭṭa*), and wall (*bhittī*). For obvious reasons examples on canvas and panels could not survive, and, therefore, our present study is limited to those wall-paintings that have endured the hazards of time.

The remaining paintings of our period are confined to a number of murals discovered mainly in the rock-cut shrines and monasteries of the western Deccan and a few temples of the South. Faint traces of painted forms may be noted in the caves at Kanheri (cave XVI, sixth century), Aurangabad (caves III and VI, sixth century) and Pītalkhorā (Chaitya cave I, sixth century), but more significant remnants are found in the Caves at Ajañṭā (caves I, II, XVI, XVII and XIX, fifth-sixth century), and Bādami (cave III, sixth century) in the western Deccan, and Bagh (cave IV, c. A.D. 500) in Central India. Besides, some of the excavated temples at Ellorā, viz. Kailāśa, Indrasabhā, Gaṇeśa and Lāṅkēśvara, contain vestiges of painting assignable between c. A.D. 750 and 800. In the South, paintings of considerable interest are marked in a rock-hewn Jain shrine at Sittāṇvāsal (seventh century), in the Kailāśanātha temple at Kānchipuram (seventh century), in the rock-cut temples at Tīrumalaiyur (Digambar Jain, seventh century) and Malayudipatti (Vaiṣṇava, between A.D. 788-840) and also in a Saiva temple at Tīrunandkēkara (ninth century). However, by far the most significant centre of pictorial art is Ajañṭā whence the basic norms of Indian classical painting appear to have radiated to various directions. Whatever may be the place of their execution—Central India, the Deccan or the South—paintings of the period show some common denominators formulated and standardized at Ajañṭā, only exception being Ellorā where, beside the main Ajañṭā trend, a new and significant visual conception may be noted as emerging.

In the study of Ajañṭā paintings belonging to our period, it would, however, be imperative to refer to the achievements consummated at the centre in the earlier phase. The paintings in Caves X and IX at Ajañṭā, executed in the second and first century B.C., respectively, show that almost all the essential characteristics of the pictorial tradition termed after Ajañṭā were already in a formative stage. While the
technical assurance of these paintings implies a long standing practice behind, their aesthetic attainments appear to be at par with those of the contemporary reliefs at Bhārhat and Sāñchi. This is evident not only in the selection of themes, which are usually stories from the Jātakas or processions of the Buddhist votaries, but also in the manner of their depiction in friezes and panels set, as if, on an unrolled ribbon. In this early phase of Buddhist narrative art the common practice of the painter and the sculptor was to arrange the figures in simple lateral compositions; and both of them equally aspired to achieve a linear rhythm within the set up of this arrangement. Another notable common aim seems to be the rounded modelling of forms, and in this respect the painters of Caves X and IX at Ajanta were, no doubt, somewhat ahead of their contemporary stone carvers of Bhārhat and Sāñchi. In the paintings of this period two modes of visualization may be noted as working simultaneously: one representing that type of contemporary reliefs in Bhārhat and to some extent also in Sāñchi, and the other showing a ‘Cubical conception’. The former mode shows a static frontality inherently connected with the technical limitation of the carvers and apparently belongs to the past and does not recur afterwards. The latter one, however, is of signal importance, for it shaped one of the vital characteristics of the Ajanta paintings of the subsequent ages. This mode is represented by the bulging rocks as well as ‘the cubical compartments which empty their contents into the forward direction’, and indicative of the direction of forthcoming, a feature so dominant in the Ajanta paintings of later days.

Apart from Caves X and IX, all other Ajanta caves containing paintings of worth consideration belong to our period and on epigraphical and stylistic grounds their chronological arrangement should be as follows: Caves XVI and XVII (c. a.d. 475-500), Cave XIX (c. a.d. 475-525), Cave I (c. a.d. 475-500), and Cave II (c. a.d. 500-550). Cave XVI: Unfortunately, most of the paintings in Cave XVI are lost now. Among the surviving ones, episodes both from the Jātakas and the Buddha’s life are noted. The Hasti and the Mahā-ummagga Jātaka are clearly represented on the front wall of the hall while the fragments of another Jātaka, viz. Sutasoma, depicted in Cave XVII in detail, may be also recognized. In the Hasti-Jātaka Bodhisattva was born as a benevolent elephant who jumped down from a precipice to die and be served himself as food to some hungry travellers. The travellers are shown amidst their feast on the body of the self-sacrificing animal. Of the Mahā-ummagga Jātaka, episodes showing adjudication of disputes by Mahosadha are represented. In the depiction of ‘the riddle of a
son’ a popular version of the story has been followed. Mahosadha was asked to settle the claim over the motherhood of a child between a woman and a goblin. In this version of the story he orders to cut the child into two parts so that it can be equally shared by the claimants; and seeing the hesitation on the part of the woman he easily recognises her as the real mother. Besides, ‘the riddle of the chariot’ and ‘the riddle of the cotton-ball’ are delineated here. The entire right wall is devoted to the events of the life of the Buddha, e.g., Sujāta’s offering of Pāyasa, the offerings of Trapussa and Bhallika, Buddha with his begging bowl in the street of Rājagṛha(?), a royal visit of Bimbisāra(?) to the Master, Gautama’s first meditation, the prediction of Asita, preaching of the Buddha, etc. Besides, there are scenes showing the dreaming Māyā and Suddhodana as anticipating the birth of Gautama. But from the pictorial point of view much more significant is the panel of the left wall depicting the forceful ordaining of love-sick Nanda by his half-brother Buddha on the occasion of the latter’s first visit to Kapilavastu. In spite of the damages suffered by the panel, scenes of Nanda’s tonsure, his sorrow at his forceful ordination, and his journey through air with Buddha, who intended to pacify him by promising the heavenly nymphs in case he practised the religious exercises, are easy to recognise. The most moving scene of the episode, however, is the one in which Sundari, the wife of Nanda, collapses at the sight of Nanda’s crown brought to her by a messenger with the news of his desertion of the worldly life. The sensation created by this tragic news is not only expressed by the sympathetic delineation of the swooning princess, but also by marking its reactions on the faces of her attendants. It seems that the figures, arranged as if on a stage, are emotionally united; and to speak of its composition, the scene represents one of the finest examples of Ajanṭā paintings.

Cave XVII: Cave XVII depicts incidents both from the Jātakas and the life of the Buddha, and contains some of the best paintings of Ajanṭā. The Jātaka stories represented in the cave are Chhaddanta, Mahākapi, Hasti, Vessantara, Sutasoma, Sarabhāmiga, Machchhā. Mātiposaka, Sāma, Mahiśa, Śibi, Ruru and Nigrodhamiga. Apart from his representation as one of the seven Mānushi Buddhas along with Maitreya, a number of events from the life of the Master may also be noted here. The events include the subjugation of Nālagiri, miracle of Śrāvasti, preaching of Abhidharma to his mother in the Trāyastrimsa heaven, descent at Sāṅkasya from the heaven along with Sakra and Brahmā by means of a ladder, the great assembly at Sāṅkasya where Sāriputta’s wisdom was displayed, his meeting with
Yaśodharā and Rāhula at Kapilavastu and his worship by the followers. Besides, the episodes from the Jātakas and the life of the Master, there are other themes, too, of which the most important is Śimhala's conquest of Śrīlaṅkā, and also a few unidentified female figures showing exquisite forms.

Of all the Jātaka stories painted in the cave, the Vessantara appears to have received the highest attention from the painters, for it occupies almost the entire left wall of the hall. In this well-known Jātaka, Bodhisattva, born as prince Vessantara, plays the role of a selfless philanthropist. His father King Saṅjaya was forced to banish him as he had given away the state elephant endowed with the supernatural power of bringing rain to the Brahmins of draught-stricken Kaliṅga. In spite of its poor preservation, the panel shows Vessantara as taking leave of his parents, driving with his family on a chariot through a market street; his life in the hermitage, his gift of the children to the wicked Brahmin Jujaka in the absence of his wife; the recovery of the children by his father Saṅjaya from the greedy Brahmin, and the happy return of Vessantara and his wife Maddi to capital through the grace of Sakra. In the representation of Vessantara Jātaka it appears that the art of narration in painting attained an unprecedented height at Ājaṇṭā. The selection of incidents, their compositional arrangements and delineation of individual characters, in spite of their seemingly inadequate stature, would eloquently speak of the sheer mastery of the painter in unfolding before the eyes of a visitor a story full of dramatic elements. Equally impressive is the story of Śimhala's conquest of Śrīlaṅkā. The scene portraying Śimhala as setting forth in a regal splendour on a white elephant along with his mounted vassals is remarkable for its surging movement and lively composition.

No less maturity is displayed in the delineation of the events of the Buddha's life. The entire panorama of Nālagiri's subjugation by the Master is an instance of it. In a simple composition showing vertical and horizontal forms the painter narrates this significant miracle of the Master's life in a language which appears to be visually perfect. The tension of the story accentuates along the repeated representations of the infuriated elephant that surges forward in the street of Rājagriha causing a great havoc among the citizens. But the mountain-like elephant, let loose by the conspiring Devadatta to take the life of the Buddha, kneels before the latter as he touches the head of the animal. The eyes of a spectator move laterally along two representations of Nālagiri and then suddenly become arrested before the unperturbed standing figure of Buddha. In the background the citizens of the street are shown as witnessing the Miracle
with awe and adoration, while in a palace window, overlooking the street, it seems that the conspirators Devadatta and Ajātaśatru are engaged in a bewildered conversation. But still more significant is the scene that shows Buddha’s return to his birth-place Kapilavastu after his Enlightenment. In an emotionally charged panel the great Being stands at the palace-gate before his wife Yasodharā and son Rāhula. But the separation caused by his desertion of the material world and attainment of spiritual sublimity, reflected in his halo and colossal size, appears to have created a psycho-physical gap between him and his nearest ones. Hence, Yasodharā in her diffidence puts forward Rāhula, the common bondage, as if, to bridge that unpassable separation. The motive force that brought the Master to beg at his own door also appears to be “entirely human, and this human feeling, in a more likely manner, is conveyed to us by the love-light in the eyes of Yasodharā, his wife, and by the astonished looks of Rāhula, his son. On his part Buddha, in spite of his towering stature in mendicant’s robe, melts in compassion as he offers his begging bowl to Rāhula. And to grace the occasion the celestials, depicted at the top of the panel, fail not to drop flowers from the heaven. Envisaged in a simple composition, consisting of vertical forms with one of the noblest expressions so far recorded in the art of painting.

From the pictorial viewpoint the scene depicting god Indra, gracefully gliding down through the clouds with his retinue of musicians least variations in surface treatment, the scene, no doubt, represents to worship Buddha, is also significant for the swaying movement of the figures shown in various postures and the diagonally receding clouds in the background. In another scene a nymph has been represented along with other celestials as coming down to worship the Master with an effortless ease through the air, the strong wind causing a swing of her ornaments and tussels. In the delineation of the nymph, which no doubt represents one of the finest female beauties painted at Ajanṭā, remarkable is the quality of modelling attained by the mastery of shading and touches of highlights. A Yakṣa of an unidentified story, depicted in this cave, also demands equal attention of the spectator. Charming is his calm mien, but still more captivating is the humane qualities that add to the grace of the Yakṣa. The soft and compassionate expression of the countenance has been articulated with the help of several lines that are definitive as well as suggestive, and capable of creating a plastic lucidity which is not frequently met with even in the paintings of Ajanṭā.

Cave XIX: Cave XIX contains a number of Buddha-figures painted on the walls. The left wall shows Buddha as handing over his
begging bowl to Rāhula, the latter being put forward by his mother Yasodharā—a theme also covered in Cave XVII. The other Buddha images painted in the cave closely resemble, physiognomically as well as compositionally, the Master's representations in relief on the facade of the cave. These Buddha-figures are significant, for they appear to be the precursors of the Bodhisattva-type represented in Cave I. In Cave XIX, on the roofs of the central and side-aisles, are found decorative designs consisting of floral motifs cleverly interwoven with animal, bird and human figures.

_Cave I_: Cave I is specially noted for its pictorial wealth. Once every inch of the cave appears to have been covered with painting. But, unfortunately, much of its painted surfaces has been peeled away. The existing paintings, however, include elaborate representations of the Jātaka stories, viz., Māhājanaka, Saṅkha-pāla, Chāmpeya, possibly Mahā-ummagga and Śibi; the last story being the version of the Śūtrālaṅkāra instead of the Pāli Jātakas. Moreover, there are the colossus paintings of the Bodhisattvas, which alone could have been sufficient to mark the cave as an outstanding place of visual interest.

Of the Jātaka stories the Māhājanaka, which occupies almost the entire left wall of the monastery, seems to have received special attention from the painter. The king of Mithilā, the father of Mahājanaka, was killed in a battle by his brother. His queen fled with Mahājanaka to Chānḍāla, where the latter was secretly brought up. Mahājanaka, attaining his youth, sailed for Svarabhuma with his merchandise but was ship-wrecked and carried by a goddess to Mithilā. There he married Śivāla, the daughter of the usurper who recently died. In course of time Mahājanaka, however, renounced the world. Śivāla, when she failed in dissuading him from his resolve, also took herself to ascetic life. Although the depiction of incidents shows no chronological order, there is hardly any difficulty in following the main thread of the story and identifying its major events. The story has been narrated in a visual language which is at once vivid and vibrant. The painter not only succeeded in infusing life and dynamism to different scenes, but also in creating individual characters which exist psycho-physically to play their respective roles in the episode. And, in spite of their individual existence, all of them appear to be emotionally integrated to impart an artistic unity to the entire panel. For example, in the scene of Śivāla's endeavour to lure Mahājanaka to the worldly pleasures by arranging music and dance, the distant look and total detachment of the latter from his surroundings bespeak of the artist's mastery in delineating characters. Even in the rhythmic movement of the
exquisitely poised dancer and in the pipe-playing of her two lady companions, the spectator may note a permeating gloom and an absence of real mirth; and this seems to have been caused by the fateful news of Mahājanaka’s renunciation of the world. This pensive atmosphere deepens in the scenes where he announces his decision to retire as a recluse or he departs from the palace on an elephant to attend a saintly discourse. The Mahājanaka story of Cave I reminds the visitor the story of Vessantara-Jātaka depicted in Cave XVII; and this is not merely for their sentimental affinity, but also for the quality noted in their effective representation. Same clarity of vision and technical efficacy may be marked in the laying out of compositions and delineation of figures in various moods and actions in these two major examples of narrative paintings worked out at Ajanta. Same feeling for plastic modelling, achieved by the variations of shades and highlights as well as by the manipulation of colours and lines, is present in both the paintings. But while the lines of the Vessantara in Cave XVII thrive in their strength and sharpness and are significant for their delimiting character, the lines of the Mahājanaka may be especially noted for their rhythmic movements with an inclination towards smooth curves to effect lucid plasticity of the forms. Indeed, the soft gliding lines, apart from their roles in shaping forms, create a pleasing visual effect on the viewer by their sheer rhythmic existence.

But to speak the truth it should be admitted that all the paintings of Cave I were not executed in same idioms, nor do they belong to the same technical height attained by their best examples. The Mahājanaka and the Chāmpēya Jātakas, and the scenes attributed to the episode of Nanda’s conversion and to the Ummagga-Jātaka invariably represent a single category of style to which also contribute the decorative motifs of the ceiling representing swans, bulls, elephants, etc. But the panel depicting the well-known lustration episode shows altogether a different idiom betraying lesser technical assurance. The dancing girls of the Māradhasana scene appear to stand stylistically in between these two categories, while in the delineation of Sibi Jātaka preferences to a certain angularity and a coarser treatment of the figures may be traced.

Although much of the inner surfaces of Cave I is covered by the illustrations of Jātaka tales representing the virtuous acts and martyrdoms of the Buddha in previous births, it is dominated by the painted images of the Bodhisattvas, especially by two of their towering figures depicted on the back wall of the inner aisle, immediately to the left and right of the ante-chamber fronting the enshrined Buddha. According to the Mahāyāna doctrine, under the spell of which
Ajanta as a Buddhist centre flourished anew in the fifth-sixth century, the great Bodhisattvas, as emanations of the cosmic Buddha, are the deliverers of all the creations from their misery of the worldly life and are dedicated to lead them back to the universal and divine Buddha. They are conceived as epitomes of compassion and, therefore, from a central position allotted to them they look after the teeming crowd of shapely figures represented in a strangely fluctuating, moving arrangement around them. "Of large dimensions they are yet weightless; fully bodied forth in solid rounded plasticity, they are yet melting in karuna, and seemingly in motion in the midst of a radiantly moving and rejoicing world, they seem to have become stilled into silence before a great realization. With eyelids lowered, they withdraw themselves into their own depths." It seems that the inner images of the Bodhisattvas have outgrown their outer frames, which are, in their turn, configurated by the master painters of Ajanta in terms of ideal forms crystallized through the continuous technical and aesthetic experimentations of their predecessors. Of the two Bodhisattvas, better known is Bodhisatta Padmapani who, holding a fully blossomed lily in his right hand, towers above his paraphernalia including a dark female beauty, possibly his consort, a chauni-bearer wearing a long blue coat and a dark mace-bearer in a white coat. Standing in a slightly bent stance and looking downward, wearing some select ornaments chiefly of pearls and an imposing headgear, the Bodhisattva shows a physically unreal but ideally proportioned figure. The face, shaped through the exquisite linear precision of the drawing supplemented by the deft application of shading and highlights, melts in an inner tenderness. As for the draftsmanship, it is not too much to say that in this piece of art the Ajanta painter has shown his best. Indeed, peerless is the hand that drew the lines of the eyes and the brows, of the nostrils and the lips and of the shoulders and the arms at their curves. Equally remarkable is the image of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who dominates his rich surroundings by his personal splendour accentuated by an immense bejewelled head-dress with a Divine Buddha at the crest. In his steady gaze may be observed his awareness of the worldly phenomena around him, yet it seems that he is immune from the bustle of life and, thus, shown in a composed state of mind. In comparison, however, Bodhisattva Padmapani appears to be more susceptible to the misery of the worldly creatures.

Cave II: Cave II is fortunate for still possessing almost intact its rich ceiling paintings. These paintings, executed on the ceilings of

the hall, antechamber, shrine, chapels and verandah, take the shape of square and rectangular compartments filled with a variety of designs including floral patterns, birds, fruits, imaginary and flying figures, geometric and ornamental motifs, etc. Although in a different colour scheme, they remind the draftsmanship of the ceiling paintings of Cave I. But it may be safely stated that the ceiling painting of the shrine of Cave II represents one of the finest examples of decorative designs delineated at Ajanṭa. The square of the ceiling is covered by a large rounded composition of concentric circles in bands. Between the outer band and the next within there is a row of lotus forms with leaves; in the next circle is a conventionalized wavy design; and at the centre blossoms a lotus of hundred petals. At the four corners of the ceiling, around this huge circular design are depicted four sets of gandharva couples, apparently to fill up the left out spaces of the square. From pictorial point of view, remarkable also is the ceiling-painting of a chapel showing a series of twenty three masterly executed geese.

In the list of subjects treated in Cave II are several stories from the Jātakas, viz., Vidhurapāṇḍita, Ivaṁsa and Ruru, and the Divyāvadāna. There are also a number of scenes depicting elaborately the theme known as nativity of the Buddha. Moreover, three Bodhisattvas, including Avalokiteśvara, are shown as the saviours of mankind from the eight canonical fears, viz., lion, elephant, fire, snake, robber, water, fetters and demon. Of these narrative themes the Vidhurapāṇḍita Jātaka and the nativity of the Buddha appear to have been painted as major subjects. The Vidhurapāṇḍita story covers a large part of the right wall of the hall. In this Jātaka Bodhisattva Vidhurapāṇḍita was a minister of the King of Indraprastha. He was won over in a game of dice by Punnaga, a yakṣa general aspiring the hands of the nāga princess Irandaṭī. Punnaga brought Vidhurapāṇḍita to the nāga palace to please queen Vimalā, mother of Irandaṭī, who was pining to hear a discourse from Bodhisattva Vidhurapāṇḍita. Although the composition and treatment of the story is not qualitatively at par with those of the Vessantara of Cave XVII and the Mahājanaka of Cave I, the painter has achieved here the desired result through a humble but intimate representation of various incidents. Irandaṭī in her swing in the palace-garden has been very intelligently composed and the overall effect of the scene is extremely pleasing. Absorbing also is the scene depicting the nāga king, queen Vimalā and Irandaṭī as devoted listners to the words of wisdom of Vidhurapāṇḍita. Equally effective is the delineation of the scenes related to the Buddha’s nativity. The standing figure of Māyā, shown as resting on a pillar, may be specially marked as an idyllic
female type. This is, however, not the lone type depicted in the cave. While the female members of the story of Vīdhurapāṇḍita belongs to this same category, the female votaries represented on the walls of the chapel show another type that reminds the spectator the Pallava female forms of the Mahābalipuram relief sculptures. The limited use of line in the paintings of Cave II marks a frank departure from the practice of the earlier Cave XVII and I. In the absence of adequate linear treatment, colour, usually of a charged red character, plays here the vital role of creating plastic modelling, for the benefit of which the shades and highlights are also liberally used. Despite some of its exquisite examples, the paintings of Cave II in general betray characteristics which doubtlessly represent decadence. Feebleness of lines marked lamentably, for example, in the scene depicting the Buddha's miracle of Sārīvastī, and the muddy application of colours as noted in a scene showing female votaries are no doubt indications of a technical exhaustion that apparently failed to create a joyous world of living beings for which the Ajanṭā painting is specially noted. It seems that with Cave II the long journey of the Ajanṭā painters reached a logical end, and as an art centre Ajanṭā accepted a natural death in preference to living on the memory of past glory.

Principles: The Ajanṭā wall-painting is essentially representation al in character. In the portrayal of the Jātaka stories and the episodes from the life of the Buddha the painter shows an unprecedented awareness of the entire visual world and, likewise, the world of imagination. In fact, here there is no limit to the scope of painting and both inanimate and animate objects, such as rocks and roads, palaces and forests, men and gods, flora and fauna are depicted with equal enthusiasm. But, as expected, in this age of classical consciousness an overall Humanism emerged as a dominating factor and consequently anthropomorphic forms, representing human, divine and semi-divine beings alike, stole the limelight. It seems that the painter's satisfaction was deepest when he portrayed human forms in various moods and actions and in variegated characters, too. Thus, the kings and nobles, sages and beggars, dancers and musicians, hunters and soldiers, princesses and maids, dwarfs and denizens, apsaras and kinnaras, nāgas and gandharvas fill up the wall surfaces and mindfully play their assigned roles in the stories depicted. Seemingly the age of the early narrative art, as known from the reliefs of Bhārhat and Sāñchī, makes a reappearance at Ajanṭā during the fifth-sixth century A.D.; but this time, of course, in a higher plane. The simplicity and innocence of the early age have been replaced with pageantry and consciousness that resulted from the ma-
terial and cultural progress achieved during the intervening period. While in the reliefs of Bhārhat and Śāñchi the Jātakas are told as simple tales, at Ajanta being expressed in terms of colours and lines, the same stories appear to grow in epic grandeur, the mute physical actions noted in the early narrative art is now being supplemented by variegated psychological expressions usually associated with dramatic performances. Besides, action (kṛyā), mood (bhāva) and sentiment (rasa) are now introduced to communicate ideas. Hence, joy and mirth, dejection and sorrow, greed and lust, love and compassion, and so many other mental states are fully expressed in the various scenes found on the walls of Ajanta caves. But still more astonishing is the fact that whether in sensuous pleasure or in extreme dejection, the characters are invariably shown in an unusual restraint, which possibly speaks of the aristocratic refinement and sophisticated bearing of the people concerned. But, perhaps, a better explanation to this all-pervading detached mood of the characters may be found in the intellectual background of the people for whom the caves were excavated and adorned with painting.

It appears from the depiction of the Jātakas, e.g. Chaddanta, Vessantara, Mahājanaka, Vidhurapandita, etc., that the Ajanta painters were all through unconcerned in maintaining a chronological sequence of the events along the development of an individual story. Instead, no order of direction, either from left to right, top to bottom or even otherwise, is found in the arrangement of the incidents. This is because to a Buddhist of the age the very concept of time (kāla) was purely subjective, an intellectual fiction. According to him, the human mind pieces together the series of events and the result is such notions as moment, day, month, etc. and the corresponding conventional language. It is said that ‘a particular impression (ābhoga-saṁskāraviśeṣa) is created in the mind of the hearers when they are addressed with the suggestive words: this is prior and this is the posterior with reference to things and events emerging in a sequence’. But this impression of time (kāla), as well as space (dik), is totally rejected as a concept by a Buddhist of the Mahāyāna school. It is, therefore, neither a lapse nor a freak on the part of the Ajanta painters, who worked to the tune of the requisition of their philosopher-patrons, that they followed no sequence of time and space in treating the stories.

The masterly execution of paintings on the walls and ceilings of Ajanta caves, however, rests on certain compositional principles, some of which are, without doubt, unique contributions of this grand school to the world of visual art. Of the devices displayed by the
Ajantā painters, the most significant seems to be ‘the direction of forthcoming’ of the objects from the very depth of painting to the borderland of its surface. The Ajantā type, says Kramrisch, “is not conceived in terms of depth. It comes forward. It is not visualized as starting from a plane near to the spectator and leading away from him, but it departs from a level at the bottom of its visual expanse and from there it opens up and shows its contents from within many compartments.” While the western painting in its great age creates an illusion of leading the spectator from the surface into the depth, the Ajantā painting does not lead away but makes him come forward. This feeling for ‘the direction of forthcoming’ appears to be the mainstay in the compositional lay out; and it similarly plays a significant role in the treatment of plastic modelling of individual forms. The well-developed and fully modelled rounded shapes are found to be ‘bodied forth’ from the depth of colour surface and no doubt conceived and delineated in the terms of forthcoming. In all likelihood this predilection for the forthcoming and modelled shapes is a by product of the visual aesthetics promoted by the contemporary sculptors responsible for the excavation of rock-cut sanctuaries and monasteries and the deeply chiselled relief sculptures that adorned them.

The layout of composition of the earlier Ajantā paintings, represented by Caves X and IX, appears to have been usually envisaged in terms of unrolled bands and rectangular compartments in which various incidents of the stories are depicted. This simple arrangement of narrative composition unmistakably connects them with the practices of scroll-paintings not infrequently referred to in the early Buddhist literature. But with the passage of time the Ajantā painters developed themselves conceptually as well as technically. In their narration of the Vessantara and Mahājanaka-Jātakas in Caves XVI and I, respectively, they introduced new dimensions in the sphere of composition. Discarding the earlier interruptions of bands and frames, a new comprehensive layout covering the entire wall-space emerged. The eyes of a spectator would no more falter on any non-essential barrier but move from one episode to another, and, following the steps of the painter, would even transgress from one wall to the other, notwithstanding the sharp right angle turn in between. It seems that after attaining a technical mastery over the medium, the painters throbbed in such an expansive mood that they became regardless of any barrier which stood in their overwhelming way of expression. But even so they had to introduce devices for separat-

ing individual events of a story so that the narration remained visually meaningful. Architectural members, such as, architraves, balustrades, gateways, windows, flat-walls, etc. are now found to play double roles. Apart from their relevance as backgrounds of scenes, they are now ingeniously arrayed as verticals and horizontals, as if, to provide separate compartments to distinct events. Sometimes trees and foliages are also found to play this role. But what is unique in Ajanța is the presence of certain rocks and rafter-like boulders of prismatic shape. These shapes, usually rectangular parallel epippad in form, not only provide receptacles and platforms to figures, but also impart an unmistakable stability to otherwise buoyant forms on the vast expanses of the walls. Moreover, the receding and bulging cubes tend to create in places niche-like voids from the depth of which figures come forth. Such cubes, usually treated in flat contrasting colours on their visible surfaces, also cause certain spatial illusion producing feelings for third dimension. Various directions of space-volumes effected by these rafter-like cubes, and also by such architectural objects as gate-way, pavilion, assembly hall, courtyard, city, street, etc., entail a kind of depth that has aptly been termed by Kramrisch as ‘multiple-perspective.’ And this is, no doubt, reminiscent of a visual concept that played a significant role in the early Buddhist narrative art of Bhārhatı and Sānci, where, not infrequently, an object is shown simultaneously at the level of eye as well as from above. The sheer presence of these prismatic rocks here and there has provided an element of visual diversion to the wall-paintings of Ajanța that chiefly deal with animated world. But so far the scholars made no attempt in tracing the source of this element, albeit some of them failed not to appreciate its significance as a device by the manipulation of which much of the otherwise dull and dark areas of the paintings had become visually interesting. It would not, therefore, be out of place here to suggest that this cubic element has also been borrowed by the painters from the current art of sculpting. For in some reliefs of Amarāvati as well as Ajanța itself it would not be difficult to trace instances in which roughly hewn rocks are found left out in the background and at the bottom, sometimes as platforms for seated and standing figures, in panels showing human representations. These rocky shapes, no doubt, inspired the painters who, however, succeeded in turning them further interesting by delineating in colours. Another interesting feature noted in Ajanța painting is the manner in which flowers are found to be strewn on various scenes. By their presence the flowers make the scenes unreal, i.e., not connected with mortal life, but with certain subjective phenomena of spiritual significance. These
flowers, as if scattered from the sky, also impart certain sublimity to the scenes.

The religious significance of the Ajañṭā painting is well admitted. Yet, conspicuously, the air they breathe is far removed from one that is usually expected in monastic cells. They are vibrant with life and unmistakably secular in spirit. This is perhaps for the reason that the painters, entrusted with the job of decorating the gloomy interior of the caves, came with a background which was essentially secular and developed in the cultural milieu of the age. Thus, the aesthetics they communicate appears to be a product of a common art movement in which poets, dancers, musicians and sculptors contributed alike. The simultaneous growth of various art forms side by side, no doubt, created an opportunity for the exchange of ideas and views, and even enriching one art form with elements borrowed from the other. Thus, cadence and gestures, known elements of dance and drama, play significant roles in the figure composition of Ajañṭā paintings. This interdependence of the different branches of fine arts seems to have induced the author of the Vīṣṇudharmottara to recommend the knowledge of dance and music as prerequisites for the understanding of painting. In the figuration of human forms, too, the painters were apparently inspired and guided by the imaginative use of simile. Hence, instead of searching models of beauty in the world of human being, they relied on the similitudes (sāḍṛ-śyu) perceived between the parts of the body of a human being and the shape of forms found in the animal and vegetable world. Thus, to delineate the eyes of a female beauty of restless nature their choice would be either the shape of a saphari fish or that of the Khañjana, a small bird with a lively dancing gait, or the eyes of the deer. But if he desires to depict a god or a great being he would paint the eyes following the shape of the water-lily or the lotus petal. It seems that this feeling for similitude worked behind the crystallisation of the canonical concept of magic marks, i.e. laksāṇas, of the Mahāpuruṣas or the great Beings. For instance, the eyes of the Buddha are lotus petal in shape; his brows show the arching curve of an Indian bow, and his face represents the perfect ovoid of the egg of a hen. His shoulders exhibit the shape of the massive domed head of an elephant, while his torso is likened to the body of a lion and his neck to a conch. All this, no doubt, testifies to the high sophisticated level of visual language of the painters who, along with the poets, dancers and the sculptors of the age, were responsible for setting forth an artistic standard which is turned Indian and destined to be active in and outside the country for ages to come.

Technique: Scientific investigations and studies on the Silpa texts.
conducted in the last fifty years, throw floods of light on the technique of Ajanṭā painting as well as the material used in their execution. The carrier of painting is constituted of the inner surface of the walls of the caves cut into the hard and compact volcanic traprock or basalts. The surface of the carrier, with deep furrows resulted in the course of excavation of the caves by the process of hammer-and-chisel strokes, was rough and uneven and, as such, provided teeth for the plaster applied on it to prepare the ground for painting. The ground, in its turn, consisted of two coats of mud-plaster. The first coat was coarse in texture with a considerable amount of fibrous vegetable-material and rock-grit and sand, which were added to mud to accomplish strength and compactness of the plaster. Evidently, the unevenness of the chiselled rock-surface was corrected by the application of this coat. This was again made smooth and polished by another layer of mud and ferruginous earth, once more mixed with fine-powder and sand and fine vegetable-material, and by the thorough application of trowel. Thereafter, this second coat of plaster was, when still wet, laid over with a coat of fine white lime wash so that the plaster could soak the lime. This lime wash, which otherwise may be called white priming, was allowed to dry and become as polished as 'the middle part of a mirror'. As the painting was executed on this dry ground, the Ajanṭā murals should be taken as fresco secco and not as true fresco or fresco buono, usually painted on a wet ground. This is further confirmed by the fact that the Ajantā painter used the animal glue, i.e., vajrale-pa of the Silpa texts, as the adhesive for binding the pigments to the ground.

The outlines of the figures were at first drawn on the lime washed, i.e., white primed surface of the ground with a crayon (varitkā). On the crayon lines were drawn saffron lines with a medium brush so that earlier lines became improved. The figures were then filled in with suitable colours applied by a broad brush. The colours were chosen from among a wide range of pigments including yellow, red, blue, white, black and green as also from the mixtures of these in various shades. Most of the pigments are mineral in origin: the red and yellow are red and yellow ochres and the green happens to be terreverte. For white was used Kaolin, lime and gypsum and lamp-black was used for black. Lapis lazuli, the mineral source of a brilliant blue, was imported, as it was not found in the region, while others are locally available.

The filling in colours on the figures was followed by the application of shading (varitana) by hatching (hatra), dotting (vindu) and
leaf-like stippling (patra) to effect rounded three-dimensional modelling of the forms. In places, besides the shading, the application of highlights was also made to indicate portrations and thereby enhance the effect of plastic modelling. Moreover, discreet use of the highlights sometimes even helps in capturing facial grace. The application of shading and highlights to create the illusion of different planes (natonnanta) was, then, followed by the wielding of brush-lines. Usually thick, wide and deep in character, and capable of imparting the quality of volume to the forms along with the charged colours, the lines at Ajanṭā varied in their thickness in accordance with the desire of the artist. Beside these vibrant lines, there are thin, sharp and precise lines, too, and they unmistakably betray a calligraphic character. While the thick lines are especially regarded for their unbroken and gliding flow, the thin lines are marked for their precision and underlying strength. Whatever may be their character, thick or thin, the brush strokes of Ajanṭā painters were always free and bold and invariably firm in outlines and they were chiefly responsible for the strength of the drawing for which the Ajanṭā is so well-known.

2. Bādāmī (6th century A.D.)

In the large Vaishṇava cave (known as Cave III), at Bādāmī the earliest Brahmanical wall-paintings have been noticed. Significantly, these are also the earliest among the Indian paintings that can be definitely dated. The Cave bears an inscription of the Chālukya king Maṅgalesa recording its completion in A.D. 578. The paintings form an indispensable part of the ‘most wonderful workmanship’ which, according to the inscription, had been lavished on this cave. An interesting aspect of these paintings is that they share a single visual conception along with the high reliefs of the cave. It is rightly pointed out by Kramrisch that, apart from Cave II at Ajanṭā, the interconnection between sculpture and painting is no where as clear as in this large Vaishṇava cave at Bādāmī. Wherever the wall space had been left out by the sculptor, that became immediately covered up in colours by the painter; and the sculptures were also painted with the same range of colours used in painting.

The remnants of painting show an extensive palace scene depicting a dancing performance accompanied with instrumental music and witnessed by a central figure along with his attendants. Some of the spectators, apparently the members of the royal household, are found to watch the performance from a balcony above.
To the left of the central figure performers of music and dances are shown. All the musicians, playing instruments including flute and drums, are women while the dancing pair consists of a male and a female. The palace appears to be an imposing mansion and the performance takes place in a pillared hall provided with a red curtain. The next panel depicts a figure in kingly posture (mahārājājītā pose), placing his right leg on a foot-tool and the left leg on the couch. He appears to be the king and several persons, possibly crown princes, are represented as seated to his right. To his left is the queen on a low couch with her attendants nearby, one of whom is noted as decorating her feet in red lac. Separated from the main scene by a sculpture of a Śārdūla, a flying couple of Vidyādharas is presented in the background of a feathery cloud. Besides, there are traces of other paintings in this cave as also in the smaller Vaishnava cave (Cave II) of the site.

The paintings are, however, mostly peeled away and existing patches of colours and several indistinct outlines are all that remains to testify to what once was the invaluable evidence of the stylistic development of classical Indian painting immediately after the last phase of Ajanṭā. Nevertheless, a close scrutiny of the better preserved panels indicates that the Bādāmī paintings are technically of the type represented by the later paintings of Ajanṭā (Caves I and II). But in style they do not conform to any of the variants of the grand style of the Buddhist centre. It appears that although Bādāmī belongs to the common denominator of the classical Indian painting, it interprets its visual potentialities in its own way. Here, too, the same feeling for plastic volume is noted, and the rounded forms are found to be 'bodied forth' from the depth of the wall. Modelling qualities of colour and line are also comparable with those of the later. Ajanṭā types and highlights are no less pronounced. But here the outline does not clasp the contour tightly, as noted so frequently in Caves I and II at Ajanṭā. Nowhere calligraphic, the lines of Bādāmī painting are found to be varying in thickness and extremely elastic. They move slowly and impart a rare lucidity to the plastic treatment of the forms. With a slackening of the contour the figures breathe an intimate warmth and delicacy of feel which undoubtedly bring them nearer to common people. Feelings for movement are not limited to the gestures of the musicians and the dancers alone. A movement hinges in suspense on the brows and lower lids and also in the large metal earrings of the woman bearing a fly whisks, while her cheeks, as also of the corresponding male figure, appear to be sensitive to the extreme. The countenances of the figures show certain softness and grace that are not usually met with at Ajanṭā.
3. **Ellorā (c. A.D. 750-950)**

Ellorā as a centre of painting is to some extent comparable with Ajañṭā. For here, too, we find paintings of various dates, executed in different rock-cut caves, covering a period of about five hundred years. Moreover, following the association of three distinct groups of caves at the place, the paintings of Ellorā represent three distinct religious themes, viz. Buddhist, Brahmanical and Jaina. Traces of earliest paintings have been marked in some of the caves belonging to the Buddhist group, excavated between the fifth and eighth century A.D. But these paintings, as noted on the ceilings of *Dh Thal* and *Tin Thal*, are so much peeled off that no proper appraisal of them would be possible in their present state. Chronologically next comes the paintings of the Brahmanical group of caves, which covers a period of three centuries or more from the seventh century A.D. Most of the murals of this phase have been discovered in the Kailāsa, the famed rock-hewn temple executed in the eighth century A.D. The minor group of unnumbered caves known as Gañesa *Lepā* also contains traces of painting belonging to the eighth to eleventh centuries A.D. The Jain group styled Indrasabhā, also preserves several interesting painted panels ranging in date from the eighth to the tenth centuries A.D.

The best specimens of Ellorā paintings, however, occur in the Kailāsa, especially in the western and southern porches of the main hall, and also on the ceiling of the latter. But these paintings of the Kailāsa neither belong to a single period nor represent a single school. For existence of several layers of painting in places, as in the ceiling of the western porch, has been revealed by the flaking of surface pigments caused by climatic erosion. The innermost layer appears to be contemporaneous with the excavation of the temple and in style its paintings show affinity with the later works of Ajañṭā. Significant panels of the layer include a scene depicting flying gods and their consorts amidst the clouds as making adoration with their joined hands to Śiva, the presiding deity of the shrine. The most prominent among the adoring gods has been shown as riding on a Yāñi, a fabulous animal with the beak of an eagle, the horns of a ram and the body of a lion. The god has been represented in three-quarter posture, somewhat reminding the stance of Mahājanaka in the scene of his ‘renunciation of the throne’ painted in Cave I at Ajañṭā. But the Ellorā god does not show sufficient modelling and appears to be chiefly delineated in lines which, in their turn, are found to be thinned down in comparison with those of Ajañṭā. Distribution of the gods and goddesses, painted in red ochre and ap
pearing in between white bulging clouds, is no doubt interesting. They show various postures and their flying moods create an atmosphere which is essentially celestial. The most interesting aspect of the ceiling of the western porch seems to be the panel in which two elephant cubs are shown playing in a lotus pond. Their trunks are depicted in realistic way; and one of them is shown to have caught a fish by his trunk. The other elephant shows a twinkle in the eye that makes the animal lively as well as humanised. There are also two anthropomorphic forms which, from the treatment of their fan-like palms, not unlike the webbed feet of a duck, appear to be water sprites. Equally interesting are the lotus leaves for their treatment in smooth and curving lines capable of imparting necessary plastic modelling.

The second, i.e. middle layer, represents a four-armed Viśṇu on his mount Garuḍa in the air. The figure of the god is elegantly slim and crowned with a head-gear that immediately reminds that of the Bodhisattvas of Cave I at Ajaṇṭā. Here Garuḍa has been shown as winged and flying in the sky and he, too, is crowned, presumably to indicate that he is the king of his class. The extraordinary long nose of the bird-king and the treatment of his eyes may be noted as the earliest indication of angularity that is to be further developed in the medieval Jain miniatures of Western India. The flying female figure, fair in colour and exquisitely delineated to the left of Viśṇu in an adoring pose, also betrays similar characteristic. Otherwise, however, the paintings of the second or middle layer also retains classic norms which are noted in the first layer. This is apparent in the execution of the Viśṇu figure in sharp but flowing lines sufficiently rich in modelling qualities. Besides, the stately pose of the god is also a clear reminiscent of the classic dignity known in Ajaṇṭā and Bādāmī. The uppermost layer represents among other an opulent figure of Gaṇeśa on a rat which, in spite of its heavy load, is shown galloping. Another scene of the layer depicts Śiva riding on a bull with Pārvatī, while the members of his retinue are found to be accompanying him in the march. An interesting feature of the panel is the movement of the figures, which is undoubtedly a new element that may not be noted in Ajaṇṭā at least in this manner. Certain folk elements appears to have been working in these paintings and psychologically, too, the figures are much more worldly in comparison with those of Ajaṇṭā. This feeling for movement seems to have received fuller treatment in the battle scenes depicted in the inner side of the architrave of the western porch. From some inscriptions mentioning certain names including a Paramārārāja in Nāgari characters of the twelfth century, it is possible to assume
that these scenes represent the last phase of Ellorā paintings. The treatment of figures, human as well as animal, and the composition of the panels show a clear conceptual difference that existed between the painters of these scenes and those worked at Ajantā. Both in spirit and style the battle scenes appear to be connected with the early Rajput painting of the North. Hence the Ellorā painting represents a phase of transition from the classical to early medieval in Indian painting. While the first and second layers of paintings of the western porch continued to conserve the Ajantaesque qualities, the final layer betrays a new trend indicating the advent of medievalism in Indian art.

Several painted panels of Classical import, belonging to the Kailāsa, however, demand special attention from the beholder. Of these paintings, the most significant seems to be the Naṭarāja delineated on the ceiling of the maṇḍapa. The figure is multi-armed and dances in a pose distinct from the god’s four-armed form prevalent in the south. In this painting the contemporary sculptural tradition seems to have closely followed. The dancing posture, physiognomical features, details of ornamentation, etc. co-incide with the Naṭarāja reliefs of the Chālukya period. The salient feature of the painting is no doubt the dexterous handling of the sweeping lines that not only portrayed the figure distinctly with its forest of arms; but succeeded in creating a sense of high tension associated with the idea of bhujangatrāśa, i.e. scared by snake, dance of the god. Fortunately, this is one of the most beautifully preserved panels at Ellorā. Another interesting panel is that of Liṅgodbhava showing Śiva appearing out of the Liṅga with Brahmā and Viṣṇu on either side. Though partially lost, this depiction of the Liṅgodbhava is not only artistically interesting, but also iconographically significant. Far behind the main hall, there in the centre of the cloistered wall at the back is a huge figure of Liṅgodbhava, with the images of Brahmā and Viṣṇu carved in similar huge scale on either side in separate cells, to indicate special significance of this particular form of Śiva in relation to the Kailāsa shrine. A special theme of interest for the Ellorā painter appears to be the vidyādharas flying in clouded sky along with celestial musicians. A vidyādharas scene, depicted in the maṇḍapa of the Kailāsa, is specially noted for its imaginative layout and elegant execution. Here the Vidyādharas are shown with their consorts against a background of trailing clouds following the compositional scheme of the sculptured panels of the Chālukyan age. Colour patterns created by the arrangement of dark against the fair, the lovely contours of the slim figures and, above all, the conglomerate of globular clouds in the back-ground
make the panel aesthetically one of the finest pieces at Ellorā. Similar *vidyādharā* themes are found depicted in Bādāmī as well as in Virūpākṣa temple at Paṭṭadakal, the latter example showing an arrangement of cloud that immediately recalls that of the Ellorā painting.

Indrasabhā, the Jaina cave, situated at the farthest end of the groups of caves at Ellorā, is still rich in painting. The surface of the ceiling and the wall is covered with painted scenes illustrating stories from the Jaina texts and delineating designs some of which are symbolically connected with the rituals and beliefs of the faith. The portraiture of Gomateśvara shown in frontal stance is found to be well-preserved and noteworthy for its sculpturesque massiveness. But much more interesting is the band on the ceiling which depicts Yama, one of the *Dikpālas*, with his consort on a buffalo, preceded and followed by the members of his retinue. The decorative treatment of clouds and the wide open eyes of the figures are especially significant as the beginning of a stylization that ultimately radically changed the visual outlook of the Indian painters in the subsequent ages.

Technically the Ellorā painters followed the example of his counterpart at Ajanṭā. The preparation of the ground is the same as that of Ajanṭā and same also the palette of the painter consisting of black, white, yellow, earth red and buff. But here the application of the colours appears to be somewhat thin and usually devoid of modelling effect. In the first layer of paintings, however, the colours are darker than those in the second, while in both the layers outlines are drawn sharply in black or deep red.

From the stylistic consideration, however, the Ellorā painting steadily moved away from its Ajantaesque beginning to a newly emerging trend that has been marked by some of the art historians as ‘medieval’ to distinguish it from the classical expression as known from the paintings of Ajanṭā, Bagh and Bādāmī. Thinning down of the plastic quality of colours and lines, a clear tendency to replace the smooth curves of the limbs by somewhat acute angles, and the wide open eyes and curved lower lips are among the features marked at Ellorā, especially in its later phase, that have been characterised as ‘medieval’ elements. But these are not all that the creative genius of the Ellorā painter introduced to the visual aesthetics of Indian painting. As they moved away from the pictorial principles of Ajanṭā, they created in the way new ones to suite their own aesthetic ideals. Hence, here at Ellorā the laws of ‘forthcoming, which implies the emergence of forms from the very depth of the
ground to the surface, and so frequently met with in the Ajantā murals, are no more found to be effective. Instead, the painter’s efforts concentrated in arranging the forms laterally and thereby creating visual patterns, both in line and colour, on the surface. It seems while the direction of the forms in Ajantā is from depth to surface, here in Ellorā that is from one side to another; and this is particularly manifested in the treatment of the clouds. Almost all the painted panels of the ceilings of the Kallāsa, Laikešvara, Gaṇesa Leṇā and Indrasabhā are replete with clouds. Variedly conglobated these clouds appear to support the flying figures as well as provide them a cloudsphere. As the clouds are found to be adjusted to the straight lines of the frames, much of the compositional arrangements of panels depended on them. In fact, the placing of the freely mobile figures between the cusped shapes of the clouds creates innumerable variations in the composition of panels. However, basically the panels are conceived two dimensionally and the figures and the clouds though shown as interwoven, belong to the same level, that is, the level of the surface. Pictorially speaking, at Ellorā the clouds play the role of the prism-like rocks and boulders and also of the various architectural members of the Ajantā paintings in separating as well as providing regions for individual and groups of figures. The Ellorā figures, in their turn, are mostly delineated as flying amidst the clouds and, therefore, appear to be weightless and their postures reminds the flying ones of the Great Kirātārju-
niyām panel at Mahābalipurām. Apparently they are meant for flying and as such their legs are slender and weak; but in contrast shoulders are well-expanded and strong, reminding the mighty Pallava figures of the said panel. Conical head-gears and select ornaments, as also their physiognomical slenderness, clearly indicate that the painters of Ellorā were quite acquainted with the ideals of figure representation of the Pallava South.

II. TAMIL LAND

Panamalai, Kāinchipuram, Malayadipatti, Tirumalai, Sittanavāsal (A.D. 7th-9th century)

The earliest reference to painting in South India are found in the oldest Tamil literature, i.e., the Sangama literature, of the early centuries of the Christian era. Frequent description of mural painting, painting on silk, screen painting for the staging of plays and painted canopies are mentioned in the Tamil Classics. Moreover, they contain references to Citrabalās, Citramandapas, and Obiamilayams,
both in the temples and palaces, to indicate popularity of painting among the people. Paṭṭinappālai, a poem, describes white temples painted over with pictures showing various actions. The Paṇṇiṇaḻ, an anthology of devotional songs, contains a vivid description of a hall bearing wall-paintings. Among the painted figures a group representing the mythological story of Ahalyā has been especially noted. These literary references show that the practice of decorating homes and temples with painting was widely prevalent in the Tamil country from a very early date.

The earliest extant paintings of the Tamil south may be traced from the beginning of the seventh century A.D. It appears from close examinations that many of the cave-temples excavated in the days of the Pallava king Mahendravarman I. Some traces of line and colour are still noticed, as at Māmaṇḍur, to indicate the glorious heritage of this lost period of painting. Fortunately, however, some paintings of importance have been discovered in the structural temples at Panamalai and Kāṇchipuram, constructed during the days of the Pallava king Rājāsīṁha who ruled towards the end of the seventh century. The painting of the Panamalai temple shows Pārvatī as watching the dance of her lord, Śiva. She stands grace-fully in flexions with one leg bent—a posture in which Māyā has been depicted in Cave I at Ajanṭā. She wears an elaborate crown and a huge umbrella is held over her. The dancing Śiva is shown in the lalāṭatilaka (foot touching forhead) pose, as multi-armed, and not unlike the relief version of the deity noted to the right of the entrance of the main cell of the Kailāsanātha temple at Kāṇchī. While the goddess may be marked for her grace, and the translucent application of colour as well, the painting of the dancing god has almost faded out, leaving no scope for its appreciation.

From the traces of painted stuccos in the cloistered cells of the Kailāsanātha temple at Kāṇchipuram it is not altogether impossible to assess the achievements of the painters of the age. Fragments of forms representing Saivite mythology are discernible in a number of cells, but what interests us the most is a surviving piece of painting on the back wall of Cell No. 41. It depicts Somaskanda, i.e. Śiva with Umā and his son Skanda, a theme that always received a special attention from the sculptors of the region. Though fragmentary, the panel shows Śiva and Pārvatī seated on a couch with baby Skanda in between and the gana, the follower of Śiva, on one side at his feet and a female attendant of Pārvatī at the edge of her seat. It is a lovely theme of fond parents and a playful child, of the ideal mates and the object of their love; and the painter failed not to capture the significance of the philosophy of affection underlying
this intimate aspect of the god’s manifestation. Though the paint
has mostly been peeled off and little is left of their countenances,
both Śiva and Pārvatī envisaged here in a sitting posture well-known
from the sculptural representations of the theme. The lines that
delineate the figures testify to the emaculate draftsmanship of the
painter. Thin but precise, they shape plastic volumes of the limbs
of the figures with a rare definition. Sometimes they are found to
be flowing, as in the cases of depicting the loose end of Śiva’s cloth
and drooping pendant of Pārvatī’s necklace; and sometimes pleas-
ing, too, as in delineating textile patterns of the lower garment of
the latter. The vermilion aureole around the head of baby Skanda
indicates the feeling of the painter for colour. Of the other faint
traces of painting in the cells, a half varnished head should also
be noted. It shows a fine oval face in yellow ochre with a long half-
closed dreamy eye, a straight nose and proudly curved mouth. Its
outlines are in a light red shade, while the background is painted
in a dull green. Plastic modelling of the figure is, however, some-
what thinned down. A fragment of painting depicting a kinnara
and kinnari (half-man half-bird) is also significant for its Ajantaes-
que characteristics.

Some traces of painting have also been recovered on the ceiling
of the rock-cut Vaishnava temple at Malayadipatti, assignable to
the beginning of the ninth century, and they appear to represent
stories from the Vaishnava mythology.

The Saivite cave temple at Tirumalaipuram also contains some
remnants of wall-paintings. It appears that once the interior of the
temple was profusely decorated. Lotuses, lilies, scrolls, ducks and
some geometrical designs still testify to the decorative interest of
the painter. A dancing figure, probably of a gana, along with a
drummer on his left is all that survives on the ceiling of what was
once an elaborate dancing scene. Apparently the classical tradition
is still active here, but to speak more precisely, only in structure
and in a summarised form. The Tirumalai painting has been assign-
ed to the eighth century, and its patronage is attributed to the
Pāṇḍyas who carried on the Pallava tradition in the further south
both in architecture and representational art.

Some of the finest paintings of the South are found in a rock-cut
Jaina shrine at Sittanavasal, an age-old centre of the Jainas. The
architectural style of the shrine indicates that it was excavated in
the early years of Mahendravarman I’s reign, when he was an
adherent to the faith.

The shrine was at one time fully decorated, but now only the
upper parts of the sanctum and the mandapa contain paintings. The ceiling of the pillared mandapa is divided into three lotus panels of which the middle one, the largest of the three, depicts a lotus pond. The pond is shown as covered with lotus stalks, blooms and leaves with haṁsaś, sūrasaś, mīnas and makaras swimming and feeding in the water. The composition of the panel becomes enriched with the playful presence of bulls and elephants, while three human forms are also there holding lotuses in their hands. This panel is, indeed, a positive addition to the realm of classical Indian painting. For, although the Ajantaesque plastic modelling has become thinned down here and the lines do not retain the similar verve, the compactness of composition and pleasing distribution of colours, e.g., the pink lotuses, white buds, green leaves, dark elephants, deep red and bright yellow men, etc. create a kind of colour harmony that is not usually noted even in the Ajanta painting. Classical norms of the latter seem to have been closely followed in the panel showing decorative lotus buds and blooms which are found to be carefully modelled with white sculploped lines and black outlines shaded towards the edges. But another pictorial vision appears to be also active at Sittanavasal; and it is noted on the ceilings of the sanctum and the mandapa in the depiction of painted canopies with geometrical patterns formed of cross, squares and triśuḷa and the figures of gods and demi-gods. The general impact of these painted versions of textile fabrics appears to be flat and dominated by a geometrical abstraction, and as such offers a striking contrast to the vision and treatment of forms in the lotus pond. It is, however, difficult to assert how far the paintings of cloth canopies are determined by the nature of the subject, i.e., the textile fabric containing geometrical patterns woven by the manipulation of counts of horizontal and vertical threads, and how far by the advent of a new visual concept that is usually termed medieval.

The decoration of the capitals of two pillars of the mandapa is well-preserved and shows elegantly intertwined stems of blooming lotuses. The pillars themselves are also adorned with painted panels and at least three of them are still discernible. One of the panels shows a king and his wife with an attendant, while two others represent dancing apasarases. Of the apasarases the better preserved one, portrayed on the left pillar, appears to be one of the finest dancing female forms ever executed by an Indian painter. Although it is now found only in red and black outlines, the dancing figure puts forth a rhythmic plastic form in an extreme grace. The pliable limbs of the dancer, her facial expression, select ornaments and,
above all, her dancing cadence, mould her into a true representa-
tive of the heavenly dancers.

Earlier it was believed that the Sittanavāsal paintings were
executed in the beginning of the seventh century, when the temple
was excavated. But a recently discerned inscription in the temple,
which refers to its renovation under the patronage of a Pāṇḍya
ruler, and the fact that the maṇḍapa was second time painted on
a lime-wash covering the original paintings, assign the extant Sitt-
anavāsal paintings, possibly except the ceiling painting of the
shrine, to the ninth century. The advent of certain angularities and
simplicity in the depiction of figures, especially noted in the treat-
ment of flower gatherers, stylistically corroborate to this late date.

The other significant paintings, datable to the ninth century,
come from a centre situated in farther south. The rock-cut temple
of Tirunandikkara in Kerala once contained in its inside hall ex-
tensive wall-paintings. Among the few remnants of them still
visible are outlines of the figures of Śiva and Pārватi. Even
the absence of colours, the lines, adequately rich in plastic quali-
ties, retain the fully modelled shape of the figures. Graceful and
benign, the god and goddess are found to be delineated in a style
that is unmistakably classical and lineally connected with the rich
tradition of Ajanta and Bādāmī.

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