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## **Abstract**

Among the oldest forms of art, cave paintings can be considered one of the most ancient modes of artistic expression. While several cave paintings exist, the Ajanta cave paintings located on the banks of the Waghora River in Aurangabad District, Maharashtra, India, are the most renowned. It is said that there are thirty caves in Ajanta, of which only five contain paintings. These works are believed to have been created between the 2nd century BCE and the 7th century BCE. The Ajanta cave paintings depict Buddhist religious stories, Apsara figures, scenes of daily life, battle scenes, animals, plants, and various other subjects. Among them, the images of Padmapani Bodhisattva, Apsara figures, Buddha visiting Himbulwat Puram temple are especially well-known. These paintings incorporate numerous aesthetic elements such as the use of colors, three-dimensionality, proportion, design, technical methods, medium application, expression of ideas, composition, linear expression, light and shade, and a sense of completeness. In the history of art, the Ajanta cave paintings occupy a prominent place.

## **Research Framework:**

Research Problem – To examine whether aesthetic expression exists in cave paintings.

Research Objective – To identify and highlight the presence of traditional artistic forms.

Research Hypothesis – Traditional artistic forms are present within the Ajanta cave paintings.

Research Methodology – This research is based on a qualitative study design.

## **Key words:**

Ajanta cave, Bodhisattva, Apsara, Aesthetic, Natural color

## Ajanta Cave Paintings and Aesthetic Expressions

Art is always connected with people's life. Art has many forms. One of them is cave painting. In the beginning, paintings were drawn inside caves. Ajanta cave paintings are one of the most important examples. The Ajanta caves are in Maharashtra state, in Aurangabad district, near the Waghora River. These caves are cut into a high hill shaped like a horse-shoe. There are 29 caves, and many paintings are drawn inside them. These paintings were made from the 2nd century BC to the 7th century AD. The paintings show stories about Lord Buddha, pictures of heavenly dancers (Apsaras), daily life scenes, animals, and plants. In 1983, Ajanta caves were accepted as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. They are also protected by the Government of India.

Today, paintings are drawn on canvas, boards, and paper. But in the olden days, paintings were made on cave walls. For this, the rough surface of the mountain rocks was changed and made smooth to draw paintings.

The cave walls were prepared in three different ways before painting:

- Fresco Buvano method – painting was done before the cement got dry.
- Painting was done after the cement became dry.
- Painting was done after the cement dried, using colors mixed with glue.

The cement mixture used for this was made from many natural things like plant fibers, plant gum, resin, lime stones, cow dung, husk, and thick animal hair. This mixture was applied on the walls, left to dry, and then paintings were drawn on it. This method is called the "Tenja method", and it can be seen in Ajanta cave paintings.

In Buddhist stories, events from the Buddha's life and tales of his various past births have been depicted as paintings in caves. Among the life events, the painting showing the Buddha visiting Himbulwat Puram Temple is considered especially important. The painting depicts the Buddha receiving food at Himbulwat Puram. This painting can be seen in the 17th cave. The Buddha is shown standing on a lotus flower, with a halo behind his head, and a canopy above his head. The Buddha's figure is larger, while the other figures are smaller, indicating that the artist intended to emphasize the Buddha's greatness. The painting also displays the use of bright colors, with yellow used prominently. Additionally, it reflects the characteristics of Gupta art style.

In the Jataka tales about the Buddha's past lives, the figure of "Padmapani Bodhisattva" is shown as particularly important. This painting is found in the first cave and is considered one of the best art



among the cave paintings. In the painting, Siddhartha kumara is shown to the left side of Yashoda Devi, gods playing the flute in the sky, and monkeys in the trees are depicted. The Bodhisattva's figure is larger, and the other figures are smaller, emphasizing the prominence of the Buddha. The Buddha's figure is depicted in a "Thiriyanga" stance, with a smiling face, deep emotions, spiritual qualities, and a youthful appearance. His right hand holds a blue lotus flower, and he is adorned with beautiful garments, necklaces, armlets, and a crown, all crafted with fine detail. Yellow is given prominence in the Bodhisattva's figure, while the other figures are painted in darker colors, according to researchers thought. Importantly, the painting also reflects characteristics of the Gupta period art style.

The Apsara painting is found in the 17th cave. This painting is considered to have a connection with the Sigiriya paintings. Features seen in the Sigiriya paintings - such as long eyes, gentle smiles, earrings, necklaces, and side poses - can also be observed in the Ajanta paintings, where Apsara figures are depicted.

The life scenes belong to the 2nd century and are also painted in the second cave. The paintings depict people's daily life, social events, and natural scenes. The compositions are arranged in layers, one above the other. Dark colors have been used. The figures are small, and their faces are shown slightly turned. The paintings are not limited to the walls; they also extend to the ceiling areas.

Not only animals and also plants are depicted as paintings. Figures of animals such as horses and elephants can be seen, often shown together with humans, and are painted in the second cave. The compositions are arranged in layers, one above the other. Delicate colors have been used for the animals. The paintings also show signs of deterioration. All the animals are depicted in side poses. Brownish colors have been given prominence in the paintings.

### **Historical Background of the Ajanta Caves**

In April 1819, a British officer named John Smith was chasing a tiger in the summer season. The tiger ran away and avoided capture by him. Exhausted from the chase, Smith went to a nearby boy who was tending cattle, bought some water, and drank it to relieve his fatigue. The boy told him that there were many caves nearby where tigers lived, but people did not go there because they believed the caves were haunted by spirits. The boy suggested that Smith and his companions should go and see for themselves. Smith listened to the boy and entered one of the caves. Inside, he discovered ancient statues and paintings. Rows of rock-cut structures, which had been hidden for over a thousand years,



were brought to the attention of the world by Smith. In one of the caves, which contained paintings of the Buddha, Smith even wrote his name. In total, 29 caves were discovered. These caves discovered by Smith were later named the Ajanta Caves and became famous in India. Each cave, with its large stone halls, statues of the Buddha, and captivating paintings, continues to amaze visitors.

Researchers believe that the reason the paintings here have lasted over 1500 years is due to the techniques and methods used by the artists. The caves are said to have been built in two phases. During the 2nd century BCE, the “Satavahana kings” constructed caves 9, 10, 12, 13 and 15. Later, in the 5th century CE, the “Vakataka kings” (referred to here as Hadisena) created more than twenty additional caves.

### Artistic Features of the Ajanta Paintings:

- The paintings reflect emotions appropriate to the situation and depict events in a dramatic, theatrical style.
- When showing human or animal figures, the proportions, movement, and lifelike qualities are carefully represented.
- Stories are presented in a continuous narrative style, with a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Natural settings, such as waterfalls, trees, plants, and wild animals are beautifully included.
- Decorative elements, like smoke patterns, floral motifs, elephants, human figures, and birds enhance the artwork.
- Paintings were first outlined in earthy tones and then colored.
- Colors like red, yellow, blue, black and green were used to paint the artworks.
- Dark and bright colors were combined to highlight the foreground and create visual depth.

### Aesthetics of the Ajanta Paintings

Although the Ajanta cave paintings depict many subjects, their aesthetic qualities are particularly important. To understand their beauty, one can consider aspects such as the use of color, proportion and scale, techniques used, choice of medium, composition of forms, use of lines, expression and overall completeness.

## Use of Color

The use of color plays a very important role in expressing beauty in the Ajanta paintings. It is historically significant that paintings created thousands of years ago still retain their vivid colors even today. All the colors used were made from natural materials. Minerals found in the earth, plant, and colors derived from animals played a major role.

For example:

- Red was made from red soil and certain plants like Sinthukumam.
- Yellow came from sources like yellow ochre and turmeric.
- Blue was obtained from indigo or lapis lazuli.
- Green came from natural green stones like malachite.

These colors were mixed with water or natural resins to create the paints used in the artworks.

The colors used in the paintings appear very deep and rich. Each color is applied in multiple layers, so the shade seems to change depending on the angle of light. In this way, color plays an important role in enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the artworks.

## Techniques Used

The paintings were created using various artistic techniques. Even though multiple colors were used, they blend naturally without clashing. The methods used to apply the colors helped the paintings last for many years without losing their quality. In fact, the techniques employed centuries ago are the reason the artworks have remained so well-preserved. Through these techniques, the aesthetic qualities of the paintings are clearly expressed.

## Design and Composition

The design and composition of the paintings also play an important role in expressing their beauty. Each cave has its own unique style of arrangement. Paintings are placed on interior walls and ceilings and the curves and varying heights of the caves influence their layout. For example, paintings on upward-curving surfaces create a distinctive appearance. The direction of light entering the cave affects the clarity and perception of the paintings. Changes in natural light can alter how the artwork is seen, offering a new visual experience. Variations in size also enhance the impact of the paintings.



Depending on the dimensions of the caves, paintings are designed to be larger or smaller, which further highlights their aesthetic qualities. This careful design increases the artistic effect of the works.

### **Composition of Figures**

The composition of the cave paintings follows an orderly method. Natural scenes, human figures, animals, and birds are all placed in appropriate positions. A key feature is that human figures are drawn larger, while other figures are made smaller. For example, the figure of the Bodhisattva is shown prominently. The scenes are arranged one above the other, allowing multiple events or stories to be presented on a single wall. Through this composition, the artist tried to convey many narratives within the same space. In this way, the aesthetic qualities of the paintings are also revealed.

### **Use of Lines**

The use of lines can be clearly seen in the Ajanta cave paintings. The lines appear lively and vibrant, giving the figures a realistic and direct appearance. Because of this, lines hold great importance in the paintings. Since every artwork shows the use of lines, they play a key role in bringing out the aesthetic qualities of the paintings.

### **Expression of Emotions**

Through the expression of emotions, the Ajanta paintings have touched both artists and researchers for centuries. Even today, they go beyond the influence of time and continue to awaken different feelings in us. The paintings show emotions in many ways. The facial expressions of the characters are drawn with great clarity. For example, sorrow is shown not only through facial features but also through body language, such as a bowed head. The eyes, too, play an important role - sometimes they appear as if they are directly speaking to the viewer.

Colors are also used to express emotions. For example, red symbolizes anger and blue represents sadness. Compassion is seen in the images of the Bodhisattva, while love is expressed in depictions of mothers with children and affectionate couples. Sadness is shown in scenes of separation and loss, and anger in fighting or battle scenes. Spiritual qualities are reflected in the images of the Bodhisattva. In this way, a wide range of emotions is expressed through the paintings. Emotional expression is one of the key elements of aesthetics, and this becomes clear when observing the Ajanta cave paintings.

## Expression of Ideas

The paintings were created to express ideas. The Ajanta cave paintings carry deep messages that reflect the stories, religious beliefs, social life, and human emotions of that time. The central theme of the Ajanta paintings is Buddhist philosophy. They depict the life of the Buddha, Jataka tales, and stories of the Bodhisattva. Social life of the past is also revealed - for example, clothing and ornaments show the social status of people. Human emotions, art, literature, culture and traditions are all represented in these paintings. Because of this, the Ajanta paintings not only tell stories but also bring out strong aesthetic qualities through their expression of ideas.

## Light and Shade

Light and shade play an important role in the paintings. By showing contrasts of light and shadow, the artists created an effect similar to seeing reflections in water. In the Ajanta paintings, light and shade are used very skillfully to give the artworks a lifelike appearance. Shading gives depth to the paintings, turning flat surfaces into three-dimensional forms. It also removes stiffness and makes the figures appear natural and realistic. Light and shadow are used to express emotions as well, bringing clarity to faces, feet, clothing, bodies and backgrounds. Through this careful use of light and shade, the Ajanta paintings achieve a strong aesthetic effect.

## Proportion

In the aesthetics of painting, proportion is considered one of the most important aspects. In the Ajanta cave paintings, proportion is carefully maintained in depictions of humans, birds, animals, and plants. This accurate use of proportion helps the figures to be easily recognizable. For example, both the Bodhisattva figures and animal figures demonstrate proper proportional balance. When proportions are used correctly, the paintings appear realistic and lifelike. If the proportions are not accurate, the natural quality of the artwork is lost. The Ajanta caves show how skillfully the artists applied proportion in their work. Their mastery of proportion strongly contributes to the aesthetic quality of the paintings.



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### Use of Medium

The use of medium is one of the main aspects of painting. In the Ajanta caves, two kinds of mediums were used - natural and artificial. Colors were prepared from natural sources, while the surface for painting was created on the cave walls.

For example, white pigment was obtained from lime. The rock surfaces of the caves were coated with a cement mixture before the paintings were made. This prepared base helped the colors to last long. Even today, similar methods are used with added materials in modern painting. Thus, the use of medium plays an important role in bringing out the aesthetic quality of the Ajanta paintings.

### Three-Dimensionality

One of the key aspects that brings out the beauty in paintings is three-dimensionality. In the Ajanta cave paintings, the three-dimensional quality is clearly visible. Since these paintings are created in a three-dimensional manner, they give the impression of being seen in real life. The lifelike expression of the figures is made possible through this feature. Thus, through three-dimensionality, the aesthetic qualities of the Ajanta paintings are effectively highlighted.

### Completeness

A painting is considered to have achieved completeness only when it reaches a state of fullness. Researchers state that the Ajanta cave paintings are examples of paintings that have attained such completeness. However, since they are ancient works, some parts of them are now seen in a damaged condition. At present, it is noteworthy that archaeologists are preserving and protecting these paintings.

### Conclusion

Although paintings of many religions are found in India, the Ajanta cave paintings that portray Buddhism stand out as especially significant. Through these paintings, religious expression also reflects the patronage and artistic appreciation of the kings. The cave paintings embody the highest level of aesthetic expression. All of these works were created using natural materials, showcasing the artistic skill and knowledge of the ancestors. Undoubtedly, one of the main reasons these paintings

continue to captivate us today is the use of colors. The location of the caves also plays an important role, as the paintings were created by carving into the rock surfaces of the caves. The paintings depict a wide range of subjects - religious themes, Apsaras (celestial maidens), scenes of daily life, battles, wars, animals and birds.

To this day, these works are preserved by archaeologists and remain an important source of income for the tourism industry. The caves attract both domestic and international visitors. The events, stories, and artistry presented by our ancestors in the Ajanta cave paintings appear vividly before our eyes, demonstrating the importance of this artistic heritage. Through such works, art can truly be seen as an integral part of life.

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