



AJANTA CAVES THEIR HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Ajanta Caves, Rock-Cut Caves are a horse-shaped collection of temples around the Wangora River in the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra. The Ajanta Caves, discovered by a British official in 1819, have been in the country's archeological and historical light ever since. Many experts have studied and researched the caves. The magnificent sculptures, perfectly laid out layout and paintings are full of Buddhist ideologies and beliefs. The lifestyle of the monks and the details of the life of Buddha and Buddhist stories are an integral part of the Ajanta Caves. There are 30 caves in total and each has a number. The numbering, however, is not chronological, and some of the caves that were later discovered, such as 15A, are suffixed.



KEYWORDS: Ajanta Caves, Rock-Cut Caves, country's archeological and historical.

INTRODUCTION :

The caves of Ajanta are located approximately 67 miles (107 km) north of Aurangabad in the Indhyadri Range of the Western Ghats. The 30 caves, famous for their early Buddhist temple architecture and many delicately carved murals, are in a 76-meter-high, horse-trough-shaped escarpment overlooking the Waghora (Tiger) River. The river originates from a beautiful waterfall called SaatKund (Seven Leaps) very close to the last cave. It serves as a powerful reminder of the natural forces that have shaped the basaltic layers of the

Deccan Plateau for centuries. Also a part of Gautala Wildlife Sanctuary, this ancient landscape provides a perfect backdrop to one of the finest collections of paintings from ancient India.

Ajanta is nothing more than a masterpiece of Buddhist art and sculpture. Like its glorious scene, it has an interesting story of perseverance. According to Spinks, the Ajanta Caves were built at a time when both Buddha and Hindu deities were revered in Indian culture. The dynasty supported by the Ajanta Caves probably worshiped both Hindu and Buddhist deities. According to the scriptures, these caves serve as a monsoon refuge for

monks, as well as a place of rest for traders and pilgrims in ancient India because of its strategic location. The caves are built from each other in a set of two-phase centuries.

The period of excavation (used as a synonym for cave carving) can be divided into two broad phases. The oldest caves (caves 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15a), belonging to the Hinayana phase of Buddhism, can be found in the 2nd century BC, with a period of activity dating back to the 1st century C.E. Kingdom of the Satavahana dynasty (2nd century BC - 2nd century AD). The later stage of activity in the 5th and 6th centuries, took place mainly under the

protection of the Wakataka dynasty (3rd century - 5th century CE). Wakataka was a contemporary of the Gupta Empire. The greatest prosperity of this period was in the brief but remarkable reign of the Wakataka emperor Harisena (460 CE - 477 CE). By then, the 'mythological tendency of Indian thought' (Kumaraswamy) had already given birth to Mahayana Buddhism through more rigid Hinayana practices.

The history of the caves is rather interesting. The caves are built from each other in a set of two phases of centuries. The first set dates from the 2nd century BC to the 1st century AD, while the second set of caves was built in the 5th century.

SATVAHANA FIRST PERIOD CAVES:

Cave no. 9, 10, 12, 13 and 15A were the oldest caves built. Most scholars and researchers agree that the caves represent the immense influence of the Hinayana or Theravada group of Buddhism. The exact timing of construction is disputed. A group of researchers, including Walter Spink, estimated the construction period to be around 100 BCE to 100 CE. The group believes that the caves were built under the protection of the Satvahana dynasty. Other studies, however, show the period of construction during the reign of the Mauryan Empire.

Figure 1.1 Lord Buddha's Life Circle in Ajanta Caves



The main feature of the caves of earlier times is their emphasis on stupa structure rather than sculpture. Both caves 9 and 10 are based on the hall of worship and caves 12, 13 and 15A are based on the style of construction of the monastery (where the monks live). Also, in Buddhism, the Hinayana stage did not worship the Buddha as a Hindu deity. According to some records, the Buddha himself forbade painting and sculpting his images. However, this changed in later centuries as the Mahayana phase of Buddhism began. The school was heavily influenced by Hindu worship practices and monks to spread the message and teachings of Buddhism, the Buddha's life and stories in visual presentations. It appears in later caves.

VAKATAKA SECOND PERIOD OF CAVES:

There is some discrepancy in the exact timing of the construction, also known as the Wakataka period caves. For many years it was believed that the caves were built in the 4th to 7th centuries; However, Walter Spink's study suggests that the construction period was actually shorter and ranged from 460 to 480 CE. His opinions and studies are widely accepted today. Emperor Harishen of the Wakataka dynasty is considered to be the chief protector of the second period of the caves, caves no. 1-8, 11, 14-29. The set of these caves dates back to the Mahayana stage of Buddhism and is therefore home to amazing sculptures and paintings. Paintings and sculptures became a source of worship. This stage began to accept women as nuns, and unlike the Hinayana school that denied happiness, the Mahayana form was open to desires between men and women. Paintings, sculptures and artwork reflect these influences.

Figure 1.2 Buddha in Dharma Chakra Mudra

Caves 19, 26 and 29 are chaitya houses or prayer halls. The rest of the caves are viharas or residences for monks. What is special is that not all caves are complete. According to research, unfinished caves were abandoned after Harishena's death. Although there is evidence that the caves were in use, most likely by the monks who lived there, their numbers may have diminished over time. According to Spink, the caves of the first period before the reign of Harishen were abandoned for more than three centuries. The king, along with his Prime Minister Varahdev and viceroy Upendragupta, dug new caves. Excavations stopped around 468 due to threats from the Asmaka kings, and work continued only in Cave 1, which was started by Harishen and Cave 17-20 under Upendragupta. By 472, however, all work had ceased as the Asmaka kings occupied the territory. Although work resumed, it stopped again after Harishena's death in 477.

Figure 1.3 Buddha Seated View in Cave 17 of Ajanta

Only Cave 26 remained under construction because the Asmaka kings hired him. Since 478-480, no new caves have been built, but many have been added to those that already exist. These changes were minor additions, such as the addition of statues and small temples, and appeared mainly on the facade, the walls of the inner caves, and the return sides of the entrance. Spink's chronology was based on the dating of nearby caves, the style of art, the chronology of dynasties, and the many imperfect features of caves. Other historical references to the Ajanta Caves are found in the records of the Chinese traveler Xuanzang, as well as in Abu Fazl's 17th century Ain-e-Akbari report.

DISCOVER OF THE CAVES:

John Smith discovered the caves in 1819 during his hunting expedition. While wandering around, he came to the cave of 10 and then asked the villagers to clear the forest that had grown around

the cave. Within a few decades the caves became popular because of the paintings inside. The Nizam of Hyderabad converted the place into a museum. Roads were also built during his career and tourists were allowed to visit the site for a small fee. This led to the degradation of the site but after independence the caves came under the control of the Maharashtra government which took measures to stop the breakdown.

PAINTING HISTORY:

There are many paintings in the Ajanta Caves. People mainly find murals made in both stages. Ancient paintings show that it was built during the Satavahana period. Some of the caves have paintings of the Gupta period and later. Ajanta frescoes are classical paintings made on the surface of dry plaster. The pictures were created in detail with a wide range of features. The roofs of the caves were also elaborately decorated. Cave 1 contains pictures of Jataka stories related to the past life of the Buddha.

The Ajanta Caves were built from basalt stored in the form of south-eastern rocks. These rocks were formed long ago by volcanic eruptions. The workers carved the rocks with proper planning as there were also cracks during the process. Workers carved pillars, roofs, and statues out of the rocks. Along with this, painting work was also done. Tourists can enter through the entrance built between Cave 15 to Cave 16. The entrance is decorated with elephants and snakes.

WORSHIP HALL:

The Pooja/Worship Hall, also known as the ChaityaGriha, was built in the form of a rectangle. The hall is divided into a bhola and two lanes. The hall has naive/stupas and aisles. The stupa is a hemispherical structure with relics of Buddhist monks and nuns, while the apse is a semi-circular structure with a vault or semi-dome. People marched around the naive/stupa around the pillar. Some caves have large entrances with windows through which light enters the cave. The architecture of the Christian church was shown in the construction of the hall of worship but they had no chapel.

Fall of Ajanta:

The sudden cessation of activities in Ajanta inevitably coincides with the untimely death of Wakataka Emperor Harisena. But the seeds for disruption were sown long ago. To the south of Ajanta was Asmaka province, to the north was Anupa (where there are garden caves) and Risika, which included Ajanta, was the heritage domain of Harisena; He did not want to defeat them. This explains the fact that within a few years of entering the throne, excavation work on the site began under the protection of various colonies. Despite the war history, it is not difficult to understand that the situation was relatively calm for the neighboring rulers, as they had come together to sponsor projects in one place. This, however, did not last long. At the beginning of 469, Asmaka started a fierce battle with Risika Swami. All the work at Ajanta The suspension lasted until 472 CE, and continued until 474 CE when Asmaka won the war. From then until the sudden demise of Harisena in late 477 AD, many efforts continued. With the death of the emperor, the golden years of Ajanta also came to an abrupt end; As anarchy reigned supreme in an unjust succession, violent conflicts over territorial supremacy erupted and the Wakataka Empire erupted. By 480 CE all excavations had stopped, most of the protectors had either been removed or removed from their positions. From the sounds of screaming and chanting, life was almost back, to the primitive silence interrupted only by the chirping of birds or the chirping of monkeys. Finally, the latter stage of growth at Ajanta was driven by a dozen or less court patrons who hope to build a monument of grandeur and beauty. Unlike the earlier era where there was a community effort to lay the foundation of Ajanta, this second stream was about to dry up as the fortunes of its handful of donors changed. In the end, what led to its rapid expansion forced him to abandon it abruptly.

CONCLUSION:

There were many historians and archaeologists whose numerous paintings, sculptures, murals, and their efforts to understand and comprehend their meaning must be saluted. Some notable contributors to the history, art and preservation of the Ajanta Caves include James Prinsep, BhauDaji,

Walter Spink, Dieter Slingloff and Manager Rajdev Singh. In 1983, the Ajanta Caves became a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Today, Ajanta Caves are one of the most visited tourist destinations. This route offers a magnificent view of the caves on one side and the valley on the other. Cave archaeologists, architects, historians and tourists alike are conspiring.

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