

# Depiction of Bull in Ajanta Frescoes

## Abstract

Art, being an important part of religion and society, flourished time to time under the patronage of the rulers in India. It reached up its golden time in Gupta period as well as in Chola period. The rock-cut temples, temple architectures, sculptures, high reliefs and paintings were created up to the 10<sup>th</sup> Century AD. And even after that. Animals occupied an important place in the depictions and along with the deities but bull, as a normal animal and as Nandi were made in abundance in the Shiva temples of India. A bull had been a very interesting topic for the artists of Ajanta frescoes. They showed them in their natural forms not as Nandi, the vehicle of Shiva. They have painted them as a decorative motif, fighting with horns, lying in normal position etc. It was just a bull for them not a divine and dignified form.

**Keywords:** Ajanta Caves, Fresco, Bull, Cave Paintings, Nandivishala Jatak, Simplified forms.

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## Introduction

Art captured an important position in the religion as well as in society. Along with the rock-cut architecture, temple architecture, sculpture, dance, music and drama; painting captured a significant hold in all these arts. But up to 10<sup>th</sup> Century AD most of the art was done In the rock-cut temples and and temple architectures. To promote religion and show dedication of rulers, they made many temples in their empire and regions. In different time period different religions developed and remained as supreme religion for centuries. But after some time another religion overcame but the rulers did not destroy the previous ones Except by the Muslims. That is why most of them or rather all the idols related to Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism were destroyed by them but could not demolish.

The first paintings were made by the cave artists who created paintings on animals and painted in line drawings or sometimes filled in with limited colours. Their requirement to paint the walls and the ceilings were not to spread religion but to say something to the other members dwelling in the cave or the surroundings. The method of painting was used as a language which was based on the symbols, simplified forms and sometimes resembling forms of animals and humans. At various parts of India many caves are found which are similar in subject matters but somewhat different in depictions. This proves that the style depends on the place where the painters or the expressionists live.

The another landmark for the development of painting style was developed in the Indus Valley Civilisation where the forms of human beings and animals were simplified in artistic manner as the animals became the major part of the society. Animals and plants became the symbols of the merchants, subject for toys and painted pots and urns. They painted tiles and the earthen pots to decorate their homes and the utilities. A big amount of such things are found in the excavations at various places in India and Pakistan. Both the painting styles, pre historic cave paintings and the painted pots found from Indus Valley areas had been discussed in previous chapters with details.

Then a great gap occurs in between the art of painting of Indus Valley Civilisation and the Ajanta style of paintings. There are sculptures, some ruins and remains of architectures and rock-cut temples, but very little or can say scanty account of painting is found which were made or not during this gap And those which were found are the masterpieces of the wall paintings of the world and these are the Ajanta frescoes which occupy a dignitary place among the ancient art styles of the world. These are made in the caves of hills which were carved to dwell and to worship and used as monasteries. These belong to Hinduism, Jainism and the most prevailing religion of that time Buddhism. These paintings are painted on the ceilings, walls and pillars of the caves along with sculptures, high reliefs and the temple architecture. It was the part of the temple architecture those times.

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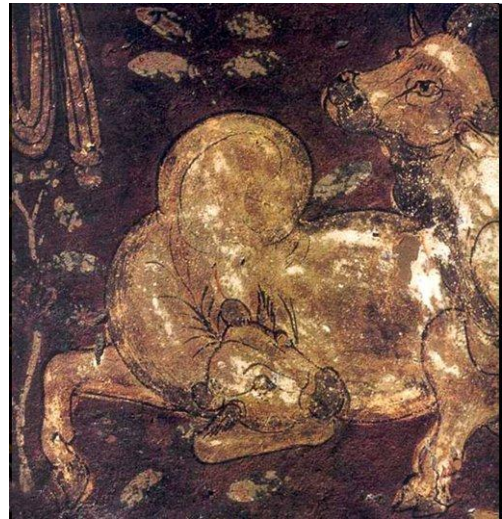
**Ajanta Cave Frescoes**

Paintings of Ajanta shows complete mastery and wide range like that of sculptures. It is located at the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra as a religious site where numerous paintings on Jataka stories related to the various lives of Gautam Buddha and his births. These are the masterpieces of the golden period of Gupta time. Its construction ranges from 1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE to 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD. The paintings are made in fresco technique here many animals are depicted at required places. Bull is not depicted as the part of the composition but decoration or design. In one of the paintings, two bulls are painted fighting out of which one is painted in pale yellow where as the second one is dark blue. The built and the body of the bulls are strong and they seem mighty enough. Both of them are fighting with horns ramming with each other. The tails are up lifted and coiled which is tendency of animals while they fight the tail lift up. The bulls are having huge hump and put their weight on front leg respectively. The other leg is lifted up to go ahead and forcing the body the hind limbs. The nostrils are shown blowing with anger and the eyes are ready to defeat the other bull. The movement in the painting can be observed which is very essential in a painting. The eyes travel from one point and reaches back to the same as an end. No other design or anything had been made in the painting along with these two bulls as to put full attention on the act. The spectator should enjoy the movement and rhythm in the painting as well as balance and harmony in the motion. The colour of the bulls do not matter as the power and strength matters.



**Plate 1 'Fighting Bulls' a painting on the pillar of Cave No.1 Ajanta Caves**

Another mood of the bulls can be seen in the 'reclining bulls' of cave 17 in which the bulls are stretching out on the ground in which one of the bulls is almost drowned, closing its eyes, stretching neck up to limit, its legs are also stretched in any direction. It has a huge lumpy hump. It seems as if these were tired too much and cannot move ahead. These might be the bullocks or roaming bulls. The bulls are taken out in line drawings and filled in with very light colours. Both the bulls look similar in size and attitude. The other bull is also lying down but seeing upward with open eyes. The ground is shown very dark whereas the bulls are light in colour. The line drawing highlights the expressions of the bull prominently. Again a motion can be observed. The eyes travel with rhythm in the painting. The line in the hump shows the movement of the hump which is bulged. All types of elements can be seen in the painting 'Reclining Bulls'



**Plate 2 Reclining Bulls Cave 17 Ajanta Caves**

An aroused bull can also be noticed in the wall paintings of cave 1 where the bull is facing the spectator in a very angry mood. Its motion of the body is very rhythmic and forceful. It looks as if the bull is coming toward the person who is watching it and suddenly will attack. The forceful movement and energy of the bull is noteworthy. The eyes are very impressive and message giving. It seems it is observing the person in front and after will take any decision. It can also be assumed that it came running with energy and speed and suddenly stopped after observing something different in the shrubberies or foliage. Its one hind leg is stretched in force and one foreleg is uplifted to run ahead. It seems doubtful and seeing in all directions to observe the happening. Its ears are alert to notice and hear the sound and its eyes are observing the situation. The hump of the bull is huge and lumpy. In all the background of the composition also supports the movement of the bull. The big flowers seem to be swinging in the environment due to the aggressive movement of the bull.



**Plate 3 Nandivishala Jatak, Cave No. 1 Ajanta Caves**



**Plate 4 Detail of the Bull**

According to the Jatak stories, this is the story of Nandivishala. Gautam Buddha took a birth of a bull named Nandivishala who was a reared bull of a Brahmin. Once a calf was given to a Brahmin, who called him Nandivishala and treated him with care and affection. When the bull grew up he felt obliged because the Brahmin had reared him up with care. To repay the expenses incurred toward his upbringing, he decided to help him. So, one day, he advised the Brahmin to put a wager of one thousand coins to prove that he possessed the strongest bull in the village, who could drag one hundred loaded carts. The Brahmin accepted the proposal and made the wager of one thousand gold coins in the local market to prove the strength of his bull (Varma).

A show was organised in presence of the people assembled there. The Brahmin harnessed the bull with a loaded cart, which in turn was tied with another ninety-nine loaded carts. When the show was on, the Brahmin called the bull, "O rascal! Now pull these carts. Quick! Quick!" These words were insulting. Thus hurt, Nandi firmly fixed all his feet on the ground and did not budge an inch. The Brahmin shouted and wailed; but it was all in vain because nothing could make the bull move. The Brahmin thus lost the wager and paid one thousand coins to a local merchant (Varma). So teach the people not to use bad words for the others whether they are smaller than you or dependent upon you.

The force of the bull and the characteristics resemble with that of the couple bulls found in the wall paintings of the Bagh caves. The whole composition is the replica of this bull except the second bull which is seeing in different direction and unaware of the action or the speed of the bull in front.

**Plate 5 Two bulls at Bagh Caves**

In one of the wall painting, a decorative and ornamental design of bulls like image is found which are seen in the design of foliage. These are leaping in the fields whose forelimbs are hanging above the ground and the hind limbs are hidden in the shrubs. One of these four bulls is painted in turquoise green and the rest of them are in pale yellow colour having impressions of details around neck. The horns of the bulls are sharp and straight and shown downward as these are leaping and seeing towards the sky. It gives an effect of slow motion seen in the movies today. The form of these bulls merges with that of the foliage in the background, middle ground and the fore ground. A soft movement of the leaps is noticed which gives a heavenly impact as if these were roaming in heaven. Another important aspect which can be observed is the rhythm in which all these are leaping. The eyes search for the images in the whole composition and after exploring the spectator feels skill, expertise, dexterity and proficiency of the artist who created such marvellous and unbeatable art works on walls in those days.

**Plate 6 The leaping bulls****Aim of the Study**

1. To know the animals forms in the frescoes of Ajanta caves.
2. To search for the depiction of bull in those frescoes.
3. Position of a painted bull in the frescoes.
4. To know whether it is given a notable spots.
5. To know the elements of art in which it is created.

**Conclusion**

Ajanta is famous for its marvellous sculptures and artistic paintings on walls. These are appreciated all over the world for the depiction of Jatak stories, motifs, design, patterns, jewellery designs etc. but the depiction of animals as a part of the composition is appreciable and noteworthy. Among these animals bull captured a magnificent position away from these compositions. Bull has been separately drawn and could fetch attention of the spectators.

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