VOL. X

NO. 3

NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY

SIR TASHI NAMGYAL

Commemoration Lectures
BUDDHIST ART OF AJANTA AND TABO

By

M. N. DESHPANDE
Director General
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA
New Delhi
PREFACE

When I received an invitation from the Director, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, to deliver Sir Tashi Memorial Lectures at Gangtok (Sikkim), I decided to talk about the paintings in the Tabo monastery situated in the Himalayan region of Himachal Pradesh. To give it a broader perspective, I thought I should also describe the art of Ajanta which led to the development of the art of painting in different parts within and outside the country. The lectures were delivered on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd of November, 1973. I hope the lectures will be found useful by scholars and lay-men for the proper understanding of Buddhist art.

Mr. Denjong Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal, Chogyal of Sikkim, was gracious enough to be present at all the three lectures. He also extended all facilities during my stay at Gangtok and I had the pleasure of discussing with him some of the problems of Buddhist art. I am indebted to him for arranging the lectures and to the Director of the Namgyal Institute for their prompt publication.

The photographs and drawings accompanying the text have been supplied by the Archaeological Survey of India. I am grateful to my colleagues in the Photo and Drawing Sections for preparing them with great care and to Shri B.M. Pande for his help in making the text press-ready.

M. N. DESHPANDE
CONTENTS

I. The Art of Ajanta: Sculpture ... 1
II. The Art of Ajanta: Murals ... 21
III. Tabo: the Himalayan Ajanta ... 32
I. The Art of Ajanta: Sculpture

I am beholden to Denjong Chogyal and Dr. A. M. D. Rozario, respectively President and the Director of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, for having invited me to deliver Sir Tashi Namgyal Memorial Lectures at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. The late Denjong Chogyal Chempo Tashi Namgyal was known as a distinguished personality in many fields of human activity. He will be long remembered on account of his intellectual and scholarly pursuits. I, therefore, feel honoured for being called upon to deliver these three lectures instituted in his memory. I do not profess to be a scholar in Buddhism but have studied, during the course of my long service in the Archaeological Survey of India, the Buddhist Art of India, including that of the remarkable centre of Indian art namely, Ajanta, which is well-known for its mural paintings. During the course of my work in north India, I was fortunate to visit the monasteries in the Lahul and Spiti District of Himachal Pradesh and to study the paintings at Tabo. I thought that it would be appropriate to talk on Ajanta (fig. 1) and Tabo during the course of my lectures. The first two lectures would be devoted to Ajanta while the third will deal with Tabo which can be aptly described as the ‘Himalayan Ajanta’. I shall try to bring home to the learned audience the importance of these monasteries in the history of world art.*

India has a great art tradition traceable through the centuries in her literature and archaeological remains. Of the latter, Ajanta occupies a place unique in the history of world art as the foremost art-centre of ancient India. Though well-known as a rich repository of mural paintings, it has architectural splendour and sculptural beauty rarely matched by any other centre of art in the country.

The art of Ajanta owes its inspiration to those early Buddhist bhikṣus who came to western India in the wake of the spread of Buddhism under the patronage of Asoka (273-36 B.C.). Among many cultural emissaries who went to different parts of India and Ceylon to preach Dhamma, the master of (Yavana) Dharmrakshita stands out for he appears to be responsible also for starting a new architectural activity in the Deccan, connected with the propagation of Dhamma. It is believed that he commenced his work from Sarparka (modern Sora, District Thane), a flourishing port-town and a find-spot of the edicts of Asoka. The perpendicular cliffs of the ambedalodal trap formation of the Sahyadri with horizontal beddings must have caught the imagination of the Buddhist monks as being ideal for the excavation of monasteries and

* The photographs illustrating the talk have been reproduced here by the courtesy of the Archaeological Survey of India.
prayer halls. It is very likely that the inspiration for such experiment might have evidently come from the early Aśokan caves attempted in the quartzite gneissic rock of the Barabar and Napajuni hills in District Gaya, South Bihar. These early caves, excavated by Aśoka and his grandsons Daśāratha, appear to have set the new style for carving out, in the more permanent medium of rock, monastic centres meant for quiet contemplation and religious study by the monks. Such caves are undoubtedly in the tradition of the ancient Indian custom vouched in the Svetāvatāra Upanishat which describes a place a monk should use for quiet meditation. It says, 'labha-jal-ulray-adityh mamo ṃukile na te chakshu-pidane guhā-nivāsāvayr praṇayāvat.' The serene grandeur of a mountain abode always attracted the recluses and the avadhoṣh found the hilside of the Sarayušāri suitable for the establishment of suṣūlīrūmās (vāhāra) and chaitya-gīthas. It appears from the available evidence that structures in the rock-cut form were brought into existence in western India some decades after the arrival of (Yavana) Dharmarākṣa. Examples conforming to Hinaśyāṇa have been located at Bhaja (District Poona), Konāre (District Colaba), Pitalkhora and Ajanta (District Aurangabad) and many other places.

These early excavations were patronized by merchant-princes who lived and prospered under the benign rule of the Sāvatvāhana kings with their capital at Pratīśhṭhāna (identifiable with Puthan in District Aurangabad). Although these rulers professed Brahmanism, they were also tolerant towards Buddhism. The country was rich, prosperous and peaceful under their rule. Trade and commerce within the country and with the Mediterranean world brought in enormous riches. The early stage of rock-cut activity belonged to the Hinayāṇa faith as the other school—Mahāyāṇa—was non-existent at that time. The excavations of this period can be placed in two centuries before and after the Christian era.

In this context it will be worthwhile examining the location of different Buddhist rock-cut caves in the Deccan. This study at once reveals that most of these Buddhist establishments were situated on the ancient Sāvatvāhana or āwāvan-routes. Ajanta was no exception. The situation of Ajanta is significant in more than one way. It is about 130 kilometres north of Puthan (ancient Pratīśhṭhāna), the capital of the early Sāvatvāhanas and lies on the ancient arterial trade-routes connecting north India, through Ujjain and Māhāshāmī, with Pratīśhṭhāna in Dakshināpatra and further with ports on the south-coast coast, through the ancient Tagara, Konārapur, Amaravati (ancient Dhānyakalyaka), Gaurapalli, etc. Half-way between Ajanta and Pratīśhṭhāṇa is a place called Bhokarlīn which can be identified with Bhogavāsthana of the early Sanchi inscriptions. The last-mentioned place, which has recently been excavated by the Universities of Nagpur and Aurangabad, has yielded remains of the Sāvatvāhana period including a very fine ivory figurine showing affinity with the ivory figur of Lakshmi of Indian origin found
at Pompeii in Italy. Ajanta also lies near another trade-route connecting Brach (ancient Bharukachchha, Baryaka of the Periplus and Po-la-kha-chep’o of Huien Tsang) with Pratishthānā through ancient townships like Frakash and Pashal recently brought to light by excavation. As already mentioned, the selection of the site was conditioned by the chief conside-
ration of quietuer and scenic beauty. At Ajanta, the serene grandeur of nature is at once in evidence and the words of the Upasishadic seer (see above, p. 2) that an ideal place for the contemplation of the Divine in a 
hidden cave protected from wind, situated in surroundings made favour-
able to the mind by the sound of water and other features and not offen-
sive to the eye, are amply borne out by the selection of the site. The stream Waghora, rushing down from the high grounds, takes seven leaps at the head of the semi-circular end of the gorge; the resultant water-
falls, pools of water (Sāt-kund) as also the melody of running water add charm to the place. In an inscription in Cave 16, the valley is described as resonant with chirping of birds and chattering of monkeys and the monastery as inhabited by great yogins.

It is not known what was the ancient name of Ajanta. However, about less than half a kilometre from the cave group is a place called Lenapur (cave town). It is not unlikely that this small hamlet came into exist-
ence about the time the first group of workers came and settled down at Lenapur for the purpose of excavating a monolithic cave-establishment. The name Ajanta, however, can perhaps be the ancient Ajitaṭāya, a place mentioned in the Mahāmāyārī, with the yaksha Kṣatradattīniṭra (one with peak-like teeth) as its patron deity. The caves have obtained their present name of Ajanta from a neighbouring village; the usual local pro-
nunciation of which is Ajīntā. It would thus be seen that the words Ajitaṭāya and Ajanta seem to be very closely related. It is also likely that the full ancient name of this monastic establishment was Ajitaṭāya-
sīhāna from which the word Ajīntā could be an easy derivative. Ajīna is also the lay-name of Maitreya or the Future Buddha.
The caves, now famous throughout the world, were once lost into obli-
vion and were re-discovered in the first quarter of the last century. A 
recently discovered inscription engraved in the platter over a pillar in Cave 10 gives the name of a British officer with the date 1819. It ap-
pears that this first recorded visit took place immediately after the caves were noticed by the officers of the Madras Army in 1819.
The caves, however, find mention in the travel accounts of Huien Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim who stayed in India for about fifteen years in the 
first half of the seventh century. It appears that he did not visit the 
caves and his description is mainly based on hearsay. He says “In the 
east of this country (Mo-ka-la-ch’u Mahārāshtra) was a mountain 
range, rides one above another in succession, tiers of peaks and sheer 
summits. Here was a monastery the base of which was in a dark defile, 
and its lofty halls... and storeied terraces had the cliff on their back and

3
faced the ravine. This monastery had been built by A-che-lo of West India ... Within the establishment was a large temple above 100 feet high in which was a stone image of the Buddha above seventy feet high; the image was surrounded by a tier of seven canopies uneartched and un SUPPORTED, each canopy separated from the one above it by the space of three feet. The walls of this temple had depicted on them the inCidents of Buddha's career as Bodhisattva, including the circumstances of his attaining Kesithi and the omens attending his final passing away, all great and small were here delineated. Outside the gate of the monastery, on either side north and south was a stone elephant."

At the outset it must be made clear that the thirty caves at Ajanta were excavated over a long period when the country was being ruled by the Satavahana and the Vakatakas. The Vakatakas hailed from Basam (ancient Vatsagulma, District Akola, about 130 kilometers north-east of Ajanta. The latter caves, containing inscriptions, testify that a minister and a subordinate var VAR of Vakataka king, Harishena, were re- sponsible for the excavation of Caves 16 and 17. The Vakatakas, besides being contemporary of the Imperial Guptas of north India, were matrimonially connected with them and thus this royal house came to represent the classical artistic tradition in the Deccan. In fact, Ajanta caves symbolize the high water-mark of ancient Indian tradition and the paintings assume great interest as giving a vivid picture of the social life and customs of ancient India.

As already stated, the earliest caves at Ajanta belong to the Hinayana tradition. An inscription on the facade of the oldest chaitya-garba, Cave 10, mentions that the chaitya-mukha (façade) was the gift of one Vasishthiputra Krishna; and that viharā, Cave 12 was the gift of a merchant Ghanapatadasa. Recently two new inscriptions have come to light (A. Ghosh, Epigraphia Indica, Vol. XXXVI, Part VI, pp. 241—244 in Cave 10 and these belong to the second century n.e. One mentions a donation of a bhūsi (wall) by Kanhaka of Ruhada while the other mentions the gift of ananda by Dhamadeva.

The work at Ajanta began in the middle of the second century n.e. when Caves 10 and 12 were excavated. Almost about a century later was excavated Cave 9 which is a chaitya-garba with a closed façade. To the same period belong the Caves 8, 13 and 15A. However, the second phase of activity at Ajanta is of great importance. Almost after an in- terval of about 600 years, very ambitious excavations were planned at Ajanta to encompass the entire crescentic valley in order to meet the changing and growing needs of the faith, namely the broad-based Mahayana Buddhism. Accordingly, two magnificent chaitya-garbas, Caves 19 and 26 (the third one, Cave 29, was left unfinished) and commodious viharas, Caves 1, 2, 4, 6, 7. 11-15, 16, 17 and 20-24, each of the latter type, almost invariably with a shrine of Buddha and some with shrines for minor deities e.g. yakshas and riches for Buddha and
AJANTA
PLAN OF VĀKĀTAKA PERIOD VIHĀRA (CAVE NO. 17)
Bodhisattvas, were excavated. Almost all the excavations were completed in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. under the patronage of the Vakataka rulers. An interesting inscription in Cave 16 in Ajanta mentions the dedication of a dwelling which was fully adorned with windows, doors, beautiful picture gallery and stairs and had a temple of Buddha inside, by one Varahadatta, the minister of the last of the Vakataka rulers.
Harishena, of about A.D. 475-500. Another inscription, in Cave 17, tells us of a chief of a family subordinate to Harishena. It describes how under his patronage was excavated a gem-like monolithic maṇḍapa. Cave 17 itself, with a shrine for Buddha and an adjacent water-reservoir and a gandhāra-kajj ('perfumed-chamber'), which evidently is the chaitya Cave 19.

Rock-cut activity at Ajanta commenced, as already stated, from the middle of the second century B.C. and continued till almost the end of the sixth century A.D. During this long period, the artistic and architectural activity underwent developments and the caves excavated in different periods beautifully illustrate such a development. Before we examine this process, it will be appropriate to understand the significant features of the two principal types of caves, namely the chaitya-grihas and the vihāras. A chaitya-graha, sometimes called simply a chaitya, was a prayer hall, apsidal or rectangular on plan, with a nave and side aisles marked out from each other by a row of pillars and a stūpa (often called chaitya) at the rear end of the nave (fig. 2 and plate 1). A stūpa, often called vihāra, is a monastic abode and had as its nucleus a central hall with flanking residential cells (fig. 3). At Ajanta, the progressive architectural development in the chaitya-grihas excavated during the Śātavāhana rule under the Huvajñāna influence and those excavated under Vākātaka patronage with Mahājñāna influence can be clearly detected. The early chaitya-grihas closely imitate contemporary buildings built in timber, the vaulted ceiling hereof still retaining the original attached wooden ribs. The later chaitya-grihas excavated under the Vākātakas, although following in a general way the plan of the typical chaitya-graha, were more elaborate in structural and sculptural treatment. Caves 19 and 26 exemplify the later efforts. Both these cave temples have received the highest attention by the addition of elegant pillared porches, charming façade and skilful integration of architectural and sculptural details. These two chaitya-grihas have fore-courts with attached pillared rooms to provide for the accommodation of priest monks.

The later vihāras of Ajanta, of which Cave 1 or 17 may be taken to be the most representative examples, presuppose a long development from the pillars and rather austere examples of the earlier period. The vihāras of the later period had a pillared porch or a verandah supported by elegantly decorated pillars, the sculptured capitals of which carry spectacular entablatures with friezes or panels of sculptures including scenes from the life of Buddha (plate 11). The interior hall was supported by pillars arranged in a square and cells for monks pierced into the walls. An ante-room leads the visitor to the sanctum enshrining a colossal image of Buddha through well relieved door-frames.

In the fifth century and perhaps a few decades later, activity at Ajanta was so vast that the work progressed simultaneously in different sectors. The vihāra, Caves 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7, together with smaller intervening
the world 

caves, were excavated at the outer end of the valley and Caves 11, 16, 17 and 20 in the central sector. The other vihāras, Caves 21 to 24, together with the chaityagriha, Cave 26, at the inner end, were commenced a little later but were executed during the early part of sixth century and some were left unfinished.

The Sculpture of Ajanta

The splendour of the paintings of Ajanta has overshadowed the elegance and serene dignity of its sculpture, as a result of which the latter has not received its due attention. The study of Ajanta sculpture is of utmost importance for the understanding of plastic art in the Deccan. The sculptural activity in Buddhist caves in the Deccan is broadly divisible into two main periods. Ajanta does not, however, contain any
sculpture of the earlier period, covering about four centuries, from the second century B.C. to the second century A.D., when the caves associated with Hinayâna at Ajanta, the chaitya-grhás, Caves 10 and 9, and vihāras, Caves 8, 12, 13 and 15A, were excavated. The lacuna is now filled by the fortunate discovery of a large number of early sculptures in the cave-group of Pîtalhôra in District Aurangabad, about 70 km. to the west-south-west of Ajanta. Sculptures in the caves at Bhujá, Kondane, Nauik, Bodha, Karla and Kanheri further help in showing an almost unbroken tradition of sculptural art of the earlier period. Thereafter, there was a comparatively unproductive period in the northern Deccan, the centre having shifted to Andhâra-deva, where, under the patronage of the later Sâtvâhañana and Iśahvâku rulers, the existing art-tradition blossomed forth as exemplified in the Buddhist monuments at Amaravati and Nagarjunâ-konda. The discovery of sculptured limestone slabs of the Amaravati type at Ter (ancient Tagara) in the Deccan attests to the synthesis of these art-traditions. The northern Deccan came into prominence once more with the rise of the Vâgânika power, when an all-round development of fine arts like sculpture, painting and architecture was witnessed. Under the new impact of iconic Buddhism, figures of Buddha and the Bodhisattvas came to be carved as the chief objects of worship in the caves. Vâgânikâ inscriptions in the Ajanta and Ghatotkacha caves would indicate that this second phase was ushered in the last quarter of the fifth century A.D. Once a beginning had been made, side by side with the excavation of new caves, the existing Hinayâna ones were suitably modified and sculptures or paintings of Buddha and the Bodhisattvas added thereto as at Pîtalhôra, Karla, Nauik and Kanheri, while entirely new groups of caves were excavated at places like Aurangabad, Ellora and Ajanta itself.

Ajanta imbibed artistic influences which penetrated into the Deccan from both the north and the south. The figure-sculpture of Ajanta thus reflects the best in the art-tradition of contemporary India, generally drawing its inspiration from the artistic movement set afoot under the aegis of the Guptas and the Vâgânikas yet retaining fundamentally autochthonous elements. The basic character of Ajanta sculpture is unconsiously but quite naturally related to the indigenous school of the Deccan sculpture which flourished under the Sâtvâhanâs and was later nurtured in the Krishna and the Godavari valleys. Indirect influences also traveled from north India. A recently-noticed inscription on the pedestal of a Buddha-image in the sanctuary of Cave 4 of Ajanta states that the image was the deva-dharma or religious gift of a person named Mithuna who was the son of Abhayamândin and the owner of the monastery (vihâra-svâmi). The name of the person may suggest that he hailed from Mathura, an important centre of Buddhist and Buddhist art in northern India. The influence of Sarnath is apparent on the sculptured decoration introduced during the fifth and the sixth centuries at several centres in
the Deccan. The later carvings, especially in the chaitya Cave 3 at Kanheri, show nearly the same refinement of modelling and spiritual expression as are met with at Sarnath. These features, which form the fundamental characteristics of Gupta art, are palpable at Ajanta in the standing figures of Buddha on the façades of Caves 9, 19 and 26 and particularly
in the standing figure of Buddha in *abhaya-mudra* in Cave 19. Bartering such exceptions, the general character of the sculpture has a certain amount of ponderosity and heaviness of form, despite a conscious attempt at imparting a spiritual expression and finer sensitivity to the sculpture by refined modelling.

In the present context, I have selected a few important subjects to illustrate the rich variety of Ajanta sculpture. The most important subject is naturally the Buddha. The worship of Buddha as the saviour of humanity had taken root in the Deccan by at least the fifth century A.D. and the artist took particular delight and care in fashioning his figure in rock. The presentation of Buddha in both *chaitya-griha* and *vihara* had become a necessity. The colossal images of Buddha carved in the *parvatha-griha*, located at the rear end of the pillared *vihara*, thus form a class by themselves. In this class, Buddha is usually shown seated in *vajrasana*. Flanked by a Bodhisattva acting as the whiskbearer, the figures of Buddha have a sublime spiritual expression and appear to be the embodiment of *karuna* or benevolence in most cases. Among such figures, special attention may be drawn to the sculpture in Cave 1 (plate III). In another case, however, probably to match the greatness of Buddha, a sculpture of colossal proportions was carved in Cave 26, where the *parinirvana* (extinction) of the Master is treated with an utmost warmth of feeling (plate IV).

The figures of Buddha flanking the entrance to the *chaitya*, Cave 19, are remarkable examples where the sculptor has lavished all his skill in bowing on the Master a superb expression of detachment as also of universal love. He has refrained from producing colossal but has, for once, produced masterpieces. The fine modelling and the delineation of feeling by subtle touches have given a rare charm to these sculptures.

The highly-ornate façade of the *chaitya-griha*, Cave 19 (plate V), has a wealth of reliefs affording an opportunity for the study of sculpture of the classical period. Some plastic decoration cropped up here and there later on, but it only helps in understanding the artistic decadence and the changing pattern and needs of the faith. The façade was artisti-
cally conceived with a view to achieving an aesthetic unity by the harmonious blending of architecture and sculpture. The carvings on pillars and pilasters, the rows of chaitya-figures framing prone faces, scrolls of foliage in horizontal bands—all these were introduced on the façade to project pleasing architectural features and to bring out the beauty of sculpture thoughtfully introduced at appropriate places,
Coming to the principal carvings on the façade, we notice two sculptured panels set within an architectural framework of delicately-carved
pillars on either side of the mukha-mudra and a standing figure of the yakshā Kubera on either side of the chaitya-window. The first set of sculptures flanking the entrance depicts Buddha. In the sinistic panel he appears in his mendicant's garb at the palace-door at Kapilavatuu, where his son Rāhula, led by his mother Yātiśahāra, receives the begging-bowl from him (plate V). His peerless wisdom and compassion are indicated by his superhuman stature and spiritual expression. The crown held over his hallowed head by heavenly cherubs further enhances this effect. The scene is, no doubt, inspired by the painting in Cave 17 and is a masterpiece of Ajanta sculpture as the latter is of Ajanta painting. The corresponding figure on the dexter side (plate VII) depicts Buddha in varada-mudra, his figure steeped in karuṣa. On his right side is a standing woman bereft of all ornaments and near his left foot is another woman, this time prostrating. Probably both represent Amṛapālī, the favourite courtees of Vasūtī, who, according to Anavaghoṣa, appeared in white garments and divul of body-paint and ornaments before Buddha like a woman of good family at the time of worshipping and 'prostrated her slender body like a blossoming mango-creeper and stood up full of piety'.

As a total composition, the principal figures in the niches flanking the entrance stand gracefully in slight tribhanga postures half-inclined inwards and, therefore, facing the devotee entering the shrine, their benign expressions creating a feeling of assurance in the heart of the worshipper. The soft mellifluous contours of the bodies which were enriched originally by painted plaster, coupled with the charming expression exuding spirituality, make these figures stand out from the rest.

The adjacent panels on either side depict Buddha as an object of cult worship: on the sinister side, he is portrayed as standing on a double lotus with varada-mudra against the drum of the stūpa under a finely-carved mukha-torana; above which rises the anda, haramika and triple chhatrās atl flanked by nāga-crested celestials. The corresponding panel on the right has two compartments, the upper one having a seated figure of Buddha in dharma-hakka-pravarttana-mudra and the lower, a standing figure in varadhamudra.

The upper part of the façade is relieved by a central chaitya-window of an elegant design, with a figure of richly-bedecked and majestically-standing yaksha on either side. These two guardian yakshas, in the classical Gupta-Vaikālaka idiom, are genetically related to the yakshas of the Sālavatīya period (Pitalkhora and Nauki). Verging on corpulence, they stand in tribhanga posture with a tight belt (udara-bandhita) around their belly. The general contours of the body are soft and flabby. The legs are rather heavy and short but less than their archetypes. The facial expression is calm and charming with a smile concealed under a thick lower lip. The round halo around the face bestows an air of spirituality. A dwarf attendant emptying the bag of wealth of its jingling
Plate VII. Ajanta, Cave 19: Buddha figure flanking the entrance

contents adds greatly, by contrast, to the majesty of the yaksha, who has a Buddha-figure on his crest which is a unique feature.

The lord of the nāgas with his consort on his left and a standing whisk-beater on his right (plate VIII), carved in a niche on the flanking wall at right angles to the façade of Cave 19, is a product of superb
Plate VII. Ajanta. Cave 19: nāgarāja with his consort

Artistry. Seated in dignity, he is seated on a rocky platform in muhārāja-lilā posture with a seven-hooded cobra behind his head. The form of the body is graceful and slim and bears an expression of peace and devotion. The lavish ornamentation, besides adding beauty to the sculpture, makes up for the nudity of costume worn by the figures.

All the vihāras of Ajanta usually have a garbha-geha to enshrine a
colossal figure of Buddha. Cave 1 contains a fine specimen of such a sculpture depicting Buddha in añarmanchaka-pravartana-mudrā (see above pl. III). On the pedestal is seen the Wheel of Law flanked by a deer on either side to suggest the provenance of the sermon, viz., Megasthene (Sarnath). The main object of worship, Buddha, is flanked on either side by a stout whisk-bearer. These attendant figures are similar to the yaksha-figures on either side of the chaitya-window in Cave 19 in regard to modelling and may, therefore, represent the work of the same group of artists. The viśṇuśāhanas, with garlands in hands on either side of the painted halo amidst clouds represented by ringslets, are also well conceived figures. The composition is extremely well-integrated and the attention of the onlooker is focused on the main object of worship. The sculpture, however, tends to be rather heavy and lacks the grace of those on the façade of Cave 19.

The story-telling pattern followed in the paintings of Ajanta is at times repeated in sculpture. One such example is to be seen over the cell to the left of entrance to Cave 1. The four great encounters in the life of Gautama which prompted him to forsake the life of pleasure are carved here on the façade (see above, p. 18). The life of pleasure led by the prince is also depicted in the panel above the central chaitya-arch: where he is seen listening to the music produced by a lady holding a veena on her lap. The two panels to the right depict the young prince Gautama on a horse-driven chariot going for a ride, where scenes of death, old age and disease confront him.

Cave 26, a chaitya-grhā not far removed in time from Cave 19, contains on its interior walls a large number of small and large sculptured panels, suggesting a definite departure from the earlier tradition of decorating the interior wall of caves with paintings. The wall-space on the left of the cave is covered by two large panels connected with the life of Buddha. While the rear and right sides bear panels depicting Buddha flanked by the Bodhisattvas. On the left side is depicted the temptation of Buddha by Māra; its lower portion showing the dalliance of his daughters to allure Buddha (plate IX). Failing in his attempt to disturb Buddha meditating under the Bodhi-tree, Māra thought of spreading a golden stare and commanded his youthful daughters Rati (fost), Trishnā (thirst) and Arai (delight) to tempt him by their bewitching charm. Their coquettish gesture, attractive charm and melodious music, all failed to tempt Gautama and save him from the path of Enlightenment. They are then shown seated on the right lower portion with their father, defeated at the failure of their mission. The story-telling quality of the sculpture, the unity of the composition and the ingenious disposition of the figures attest to the mastery of the sculptor in his art equaling that of his brother-artist in painting.

Under the influence of polytheism of Mahāyāna, the worship of the Bodhisattvas began to have an irresistible appeal to the Buddhist laity
on account of the most humane qualities and the spirit of self-sacrifice of the Bodhisattvas to the extent of abjuring the highest knowledge and Buddhahood for the good of humanity. Bodhisattvas, who had till now been sculptured as attendants of Buddha, now came to be carved independently. Particularly popular was the litany of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara depicted both in painting (garbhagriha of Cave 2 and veran-
dah of Cave 17) and in a large sculptured panel in the verandah of Cave 4 (plate X) and another two panels near Cave 26. The litany usually contains a central figure of Avalokiteśvara with eight small panels, four on each side, showing him in the act of giving protection to the devotees from the calamities of life. He is usually shown with jātī-mukta (matted hair) with Amitābha on his forehead. He holds a
lotus-stalk, with an opening bud in one hand and generally a rosary in the other. He is invoked in all cases of danger and distress, and it is interesting to notice that they are varied, such as those that caravan-leader might suffer in his journey by land and sea, the fear of wild animals like the lion, elephant and cobra and of goblets, fire, assassins, incarceration and shipwreck. Such panels had a special appeal to the people engaged in commerce by land and sea. Similar panels are met with at the Buddhist cave-groups of Aurangabad, Ellora and Kanheri, the one at Aurangabad being the most vivid and the best executed one. One of the representations at Kanheri depicts Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara with his consort Tārā standing in the centre amidst smaller panels illustrating his nonviolent actions in granting protection to devotees in distress. Besides these representations, mention must be made of the sculptures of yukṣīra Pāñchika and his consort Hārīti, the goddess auspicious to children. Pāñchika (also called Jambhala, the Buddhist god of wealth) and Hārīti are invariably met with in the monasteries of the Guṇḍāra region and their worship also became popular in western India. Cave 2 of Ajanta and Cave 7 of Aurangabad have subsidiary shrines dedicated to them, while at Ellora they are sculptured in a separate niche in the middle of the group of the Buddhist caves. At Ajanta, smaller panels depicting only Hārīti with children or with Pāñchika are carved in Caves 2 and 23 on the architraves of the cells inside the vihāras.
II. The Art of Ajanta: Murals

The oldest and rare contemporary text with Ajanta dealing with fine arts is the Vishnuharmottara (c. 6th century A.D.). In the Chapter Chitra-śāstra it mentions that painting is an art par-excellence: kalanām pravṛttāṁ chitrāṁ bhūrma kāmārtha mokṣakham ut yathu jñānāṁ pravṛttāḥ kṣitiśca-tathā kalanāṁ-tathā chitra-kālāṁlīkāḥ.

The art of painting has a great antiquity in India. The paintings in the caves of Hoskangibad, Pachnurthi and those recently discovered at Adinagar near Bhopal and at Gupetvar near Gwalior would suggest that this art was practised by the Middle Stone Age cave-dwellers. Throughout the centuries this art has been practised by the village potter to decorate the pots and pans and to relieve the drudgery of life. The Vishnuharmottara (Chapter 35) tells a myth about the origin of chitra. It mentions that the sage Nārāyana wotl the good of the people at his heart expounded the chitra-āśra. He is said to have drawn the figure of a beautiful woman on the ground with mango juice. Out of this figure was created a beautiful apsarā by name Urvashī. The sage taught this art to Visvakarma, the divine architect. The significance of this myth lies in the fact that painting and perhaps sculpture were practised together by artists under the general supervision of the master-architect.

Before we go into the question of the art of Ajanta paintings it would be appropriate to understand the technique of Ajanta paintings. The Ajanta artists employed a very ingenious technique in preparing the 'ground' and in executing the paintings. The 'carrier' for me paintings was the compact volcanic rock, with its many cavities. The surface of the rock was made uneven and rough so as to provide a firm grip to the covering plaster. The holes in the volcanic rock further acted as keys in keeping the plaster firmly fixed to the wall.

The 'ground' of the paintings was made of mud-plaster to which were added vegetable fibres, paddy husk, rock-grit and sand as reinforcing and binding material. The ground-coat of this plaster, which was laid on the rock, usually consisted of coarse material with fair amount of fibrous vegetable material, rock-grit and sand. Over this basal layer was added another layer of mud and ferruginous earth also mixed with rock-powder or sand and finer fibrous material. The surface was then treated with a thin layer of lime-wash over which pigments were applied. The plaster was reinforced, in a few cases, with cloth, stitched on the surface and paintings drawn thereon. This new feature has just recently come to our notice in one cave as a result of careful observation of a young scholar-cum-photographer.
The pigments used by the Ajanta artists, with the exception of black, consisted of inorganic minerals such as red and yellow ochres, lapis lazuli for the blue and terra verda or glaucomite for the green. The black pigment was derived from lamp-black and the white from kaolin, lime or gypsum. The ochrous clays such as the red and yellow were procured from the clayey products of the weathering of the rock. The pigments were ground and mixed with water and applied on the surface. It has not been possible to prove the existence of the binding medium such as gum or glue. Perhaps animal glue was employed.

The Vishnusahasraya also mentions five primary colours: nila (blue), samudra (sea-blue), pancha toshakha (five flower petals), krishna (black) and harita (green). The green colour was called harita or lime, nila was raja (blue), and pancha toshakha. At another place, the text mentions svetapala, raksha-red, pancha-yellow, krishna-black and harita-green as the primary colours.

We next deal with the various types of varna and the use of the brush for shading purposes. The Vishnusahasraya mentions three types of shaded: (1) patravartana with lines having the shape of patra or leaf, (2) harivarta or very minute (vakshma), while the (3) bindusvarana is formed by dots. The brushes used for the paintings were very carefully made out of a sweet smelling root of khichana mixed with boiled rice rolled into a pointed stump. The tilaka was a finer brush made out of a thin hair of a calf or a cotton swab or a small feather attached to it. A lekhini, which is another name of tilaka, was used for applying colours. It was made from soft hair from the ear of a calf and fixed with lac. It was either thick and broad or thin according as it was meant for different types of painting and shading. Sometimes hair from the squirrel's tail and the bofly of the spider was used for making the brushes.

Nothing about the names of the artist of Ajanta or anything about their life is mentioned. However, on the basis of the available historical data, it appears that they had their compact organization in the form of guilds consisting of different kinds of specialists relating to the art of painting. The guilds had also arrangements for training young students in the crafts.

The subject-matter of Ajanta paintings

The Buddhist monks following this age-old tradition thought of painting the stories from the life of Buddha on the walls of caves for the benefit of the visiting pilgrims. As already mentioned, the Jataka stories were best suited for the propagation of the faith. The Ajanta artist, therefore, selected under the direction of the Master-priest a particular Jataka. For example, the Cittaviveka Jataka was demonstrated Buddhasattva’s boundless generosity, the Vessubhandu Jataka his charity, the Vishnupandita Jataka his wisdom. The object was to emphasize the importance of virtuous living and the cultivation of good qualities (paramas) rather than the
Fig. 4: Ajanta, Cave 10: Part of a scene depicting worship of the Bodhi tree
philosophical and doctrinal import of Buddhism. Along with Jātaka stories, scenes from the life of Buddha as Gainaut (his birth in the Lumbini garden, events of his childhood, Māra’s futile attempt to tempt him, his attainment of the highest knowledge, the conversion of Nanda, subjugation of Nalagiri, were painted on the walls. The near realistic and yet imaginative depiction of the Jātaka stories must have created a deep impression on the devotees of the spiritual grandeur of Buddha and the creed he preached.

The subject-matter of the early paintings in Caves 10 and 9 (śīra second and first century B.C., respectively) appear to be worship of the Bodhi-tree and śītap by a royal party (fig. 4). In Cave 16 are also painted scenes from the CChudānta Jātaka and Sama Jātaka. In all these paintings, we do not notice any pictorial rendering of the Master for such a depiction was forbidden by the Master and was not, therefore, employed by the Theravāda artists. Instead, they depicted Buddha symbolically by painting either the Bodhi tree, the throne, the wheel, the pañikas or triratna.

However, under the growing influence of Mahāyāna many more caves were added and were simultaneously embellished with paintings. This middle period of painting, commencing from the last part of the fifth century A.D., specialized in the depiction of narrative stories from the Jātakas and Avadānas. The Mahāyāna Jātaka (Cave 1) elucidates the manner in which the Jātaka stories were narrated. Besides the Mahāyāna Jātaka, the important Jātakas and Avadānas painted on the walls of Ajanta are:

- Sankhapāla-Jātaka, Cave 1
- Chañmayya-Jātaka, Cave 1
- Vīdhārapūrva-Jātaka, Cave 2
- Vessantara-Jātaka, Cave 17
- Hāma-Jātaka, Cave 17
- Sīvikāvatāra, Cave 17
- Sibi-Jātaka, Cave 17

The delineation of Māṇushi Buddhas in human form was another subject in which the artist took great delight and interest. The painting of Māṇushi Buddhas on the door of Cave 17 is very interesting from iconographic point of view.

The ceiling of the vihāras were also painted with a variety of subjects. The growing influence of the Mahāyāna creed brought in its train ideas of the Buddhist paradise and as a result celestial beings like kinnaras, vīśākhas ana gandharvas varying in the heavenly regions amidst clouds were depicted. Floral patterns, geometrical designs, jewelry motifs, mythological beings, playfulness birds and humans were portrayed on the ceilings (plate XI). A decorative band in the roundel on the ceiling of the yaksha shrine in Cave 2 shows a chain of twenty-three goses amidst a jambu creeper, each gose rendered naturalistically and yet differently from each other.
so as to evoke admiration for the artist who produced their graceful movements. The roundels with concentric bands of variegated colours and patterns around a central lotus with a gandharva figure or couplets in the corners amidst clouds were a very common composition of the ceiling decoration.

The tradition of painting the flat ceilings of caves in compartments such as those seen at Ajanta is noticed in Tun-huang caves in north-central China and also in the Bamiyan caves in Afghanistan. This arrangement follows a pattern for these compartmentalized paintings indicate the beams and cross beams of structural buildings. Even the roundels appearing in architectural compartments are ingeniously integrated with architectural elements.

Many paintings bear painted inscriptions indicating that it was the gift of some Sākya bhikṣu for the attainment of supreme knowledge by all...
Plate XII. Ajanta, Cave 1 : Šāriśūtivā Paśumnānī

Dānings. In one inscription the gift is said to endow on the donor good looks, good luck and good qualities. The miracle of Śrāvasti was also a very popular subject at Ajanta. Rows of Buddha figures, one above the other, came to be painted so as to depict the Thousand Buddhas. In Cave 2 there is an inscribed record mentioning the subject as ‘Thousand Buddhas’ (Buddha Sāhas).
The narrative subjects at Ajanta are painted on the expansive canvas of the walls and have no formal imitation of frames. A story may cover the entire wall and at times extend on the adjacent wall, at an angle of ninety degrees (Muhammaduku Fadaka). A few scenes appear in panels and these are painted on pillars like the famous toilet-scene in Cave 17. The painted scenes on the walls of the yakshu shrine and the Harihara-Pāṇḍhara shrine in Cave 2 form a total composition showing worshippers approaching the yakshu and Harihara-Pāṇḍhara images for worship. In the case of the yakshu shrine, the setting of the painted scene is placed in temporary structures like those erected in a fair while the scenes in the Harihara-Pāṇḍhara shrine are placed in the garden surroundings and are framed by delicately curving foliage.

The famous panels of Bodhisattva Padmapāla (plate XIII) and Vajrabhairava on the back wall of the hall, on either side of the ananta also conform to a plan. They enter a visible in the magnificent image of Buddha in the sanctum sanctorum. The trinity formed by the Buddha in the centre and two Bodhisattvas on either side is depicted in sculpture and painting.

The back wall of the verandah of Cave 17 fortunately retains a fair amount of paintings and thus helps in understanding the manner the
exposed portion of the Cave which received brilliant sun-light were treated. Here, above the door lintel, are painted the Māruśthi-Buddhas with the gānḍhāras coupled below it in the long frieze. The sculptured vīrikṣhākās above the door-frame are also plastered and painted forming part of the total composition (Plate XIII). On either side of this magnificent door-frame are painted figures of gānḍhāras descending from heavenly abodes and in an attitude of obeisance to the Māruśthi-Buddhas. However, further wall space, on either side, is devoted to the depiction of a Māruśta story (Vīśvaṃtara Māruśa), subjugation of Nalagiri, an incident from the life of Buddha. Planking the entrance were also painted figures of Bodhisattvas. The short end on one side of the verandah depicts the wheel of nāmaṇīra. The total effect is enhanced by the treatment of the ceiling. It will thus be appreciated that the painting, sculptures and architecture in each cave were so integrated so as to enhance the cumulative effect.

The late paintings at Ajanta, consist of paintings of Buddha and the Bodhisattvas. They are painted on architraves and pillars in Caves 10 and 9. To the same period can also be attributed the subject like the Miracle of Śrāvakāśa and these are usually painted on the walls of the antechamber (antarala).

A word is also necessary about the lighting arrangement for seeing the paintings. There are indications to suggest that when the paintings were actually drawn, oil lamps were used. These were suspended in iron hooks found embedded in the plaster. This feature has come to light as a result of close observation in the recent past. Normally the paintings were seen by devotees during day time. It is our experience that after entering the cave it takes some time for the eyes to get adjusted to the dim light. It is not unlikely that white cloth sheets were used for reflecting light. Thereafter, on the dark walls appear myriad of figures as if issuing from the wall surface and taking definite shape and form. The caves get beautifully illuminated when the rays of the setting sun penetrate the caves through doors and windows and the walls are hailed in the reflected glory of the sun’s rays. It is a wonderful experience to watch the figures in normal light and to appreciate the effect of shading and of thick and thin lines which help in bestowing plastic modelling to the figures drawn on the flat canvas.

The various episodes from the Jātakas come to life with an almost dramatic appeal for the artist has employed various rānas or aesthetic moods in the delineation of the subject. However, the paintings are steeped in two dominant moods: karuṇa rāna (compassion or pathos) and śūnā rāna (placidity or peace). All the other rānas such as trīṇāra, hāsa rāna rātra, bhājānaka, vīśhārṇa, utthita rāna are subterfuge to these. These rānas perform the same function as in a drama where situations are created which are at once full of pathos and gaiety to the extent of evoking laughter.

28
The Vishnuharmottara describes the blemishes and merits of paintings. The eight merits of paintings, according to the author, are: sthāna (place), bhūlambo (posture), maithunam (form), vibhuktaḥ (departure), śādīṣyam (conveyance), kṣhayavijayati (withdrawal), cha pūṣṭhaka-śiśunā (suffering the child), and cha pūṣṭhaka-śiśunā (withstand). The same subject is dealt with by Yosidhara, in the commentary on the Kīṣanārtha where the limbs of painting are described as six-fold: appropriate representation of form (rūpa-pādo), correct structure or proportion (pramaṇān), infusion of action and feeling (bhūti-yeṣuṣaṇa), infusion of the quality of grace (dīvayuṣayam yeṣuṣaṇa), similitude or likeness (ṣādīṣyaṇa) and the last dealing with the use of brush and colour. The quality of sādīṣya, however, which is very important is not intended to portray the mirror-like likeness but the essential realism of the portrayed. At another place the Vishnuharmottara makes this point of sādīṣya very clear. It mentions that the artist must be able to delineate the distinction between a sleeping person and a dead person. The former must be shown full of life force while the dead person completely devoid of it.

The Ajanta paintings have great aesthetic quality and that they exude warmth and as it were 'breathe' and 'smile'. The Vishnuharmottara describes this quality as follows:

'Lauutvā cha bhūlambo śāshtya-tvā tathā mīna haśatvā cha mādhuryaṃ saṅkṛta iva dyātā'

'Saśvayya iva vyarchitvām inbhūttakṛtām'.

'The painting glints and embraces by its disposition as if coming out to meet the spectator and smiles with grace and appears absolutely full of vitality. 'It breathes and such a chitra is really full of all auspicious signs.' It is this quality of Ajanta paintings which keeps the visitors spellbound. He forgets his existence and is lost in ecstasy. The exquisite colour-taste, perfect brush-work and sense of modelling lend such vividness to the pictures that they have an irresistible dramatic appeal. The artist is so careful about minor details in building up the narrative effect that one almost feels the breathe which makes the ornaments and the bann-ners painted on the walls swing and sway and flutter.

In the narrative scenes hundreds of figures are painted yet each and every one of it is distinct from the other. The different episodes in the compositions are separated by the clever use of architectural features, and vegetation. The difference in space and time from one incident to the other is also brought out by clever dispositions of scenes away from each other and in appropriate surroundings. Individual scenes are characteriz- ed by perfect grouping of figures, the principal character being given the greatest attention and is usually placed in the centre. The episodes in the Mahājanaka Jātaka illustrate this point very beautifully. The artists sometimes take the liberty of not portraying essential architectural features so as to depict the scene without any hindrance. For example, the pillar of the structures under which a dance-scene is depicted is indicated but not painted lest it obstructs the view of the dance (plate XIV).
Plate XIV. Ajanta, Cave 1: scene from the Mahāprajāpātī Sūtra depicting a dance

The greatest quality of Ajanta paintings is, however, that it is imbued with feeling and can be appropriately called a Bhāva-vātaka. Bhāva-vātaka is defined as that type of painting where the rasa such as śringāra, etc. are revealed to a person by mere observation and which create wonder in mind (śringāmārās varta naśya naśaṇādeva yamyate). Bhāva-vātaka is tathā-khyatā caitukamītakāsakānātān āhyāta.

30
It will thus be seen that the Ajanta paintings conform to the highest standards laid down in the Vishnudharmottara. In fact one feels that the text of Vishnudharmottara, which is later in date than Ajanta, codifies all the norms and standards which the Ajanta artists prescribed for themselves. The painting is described in Vishnudharmottara as possessing the quality of dispelling anxiety and bringing forth prosperity and the cause of unequalled and unfettered delight. It fulfills the main objectives of human life, namely dharma, artha, kama and moksha.

The influence of Ajanta paintings was felt over a wide area in Ceylon, Nepal, Tibet, Afghanistan, Mongolia, China, and even distant Japan came under its influence. The Ajanta monasteries is seen in the paintings of all these countries to a smaller or greater degree. The paintings at Sigi-
riya in Ceylon are closest to Ajanta. They almost appear to be an extension of the Ajanta tradition. The wall paintings at Bagh, about 250 kilometres north of Ajanta, suggest that the artist employed at this place belonged to the same school.

Ajantism assumed new forms in different spheres and its remote climes. Says a Sanskrit poet:

\[
\text{kuhahe kehahe yau navatami upaii sath eva}
\]
\[
\text{rajan ramanitya\ddash}
\]

'the nature of beauty is such as assume new forms every moment', so does the art of Ajanta.
Dr. D. L. Snellgrove in the preface to his book *Buddhist Himalaya* stated that "The Himalayas can still testify to its activity, for these regions (Nepal valley and Kashmir) which once saw the passage of Buddhists to Tibet have now become dependent on Tibet for the life of their religion. The source in India has long been dead and only the Tibetans possess the living traditions which can enliven the ancient places." Recent history, however, has robbed the above remark of its validity. Tibet no longer plays any part in the domain of Buddhism so far as the Himalayan region is concerned. It is once again India that is providing the cultural substratum, as of old, for the understanding of Buddhism. In this context I thought it worthwhile to present before this scholarly gathering an account of the monasteries in the Spiti valley of Himachal Pradesh so as to promote renewed interest in the study of Himalayan art.

It was in 1914 that Dr. A. H. Francke of the Moravian Mission wrote his work *Antiquities of Indian Tibet* and this was published by the Archaeological Survey of India. In this work he gave an account of his journey in the Himalayan region undertaken in 1909 and onwards. In the companion volume of his work published in 1925, Dr. Francke collected together Chronicles of Ladakh bearing on the history and antiquity of the region with special reference to the spread of Buddhism in that region. Tabo and Ki monasteries find a reference in these two works. The only other work that was undertaken thereafter appears to be by Giuseppe Tucci and Snellgrove. Unfortunately, no proper documentation of the various gompus in this region was made nor was any effort made for their protection. It was in the year 1965 that I visited the gompas in the Lahul and Spiti region in order to draw up a plan for their proper conservation. As a result of this visit, the gompas at the Tabo have been brought under the protection by the Archaeological Survey of India and I am glad to say that the work of preservation of the paintings and the structures has made satisfactory progress.

During the course of my visit to this region, I inspected, besides the monasteries at Ki and Tabo, the monasteries at Targuit and Khoksar. However, I shall confine myself to a general description of Ki and a somewhat critical evaluation of Tabo. The gompas of Tabo are extremely important for the appreciation and understanding of the art of the Guge style which flourished in the region of western Tibet from the tenth century to almost up to the end of the seventeenth century. It is well known that the Guge kingdom disintegrated as a result of repeated campaigns of king Segye-nam-zyed of Ladakh and only about sixteen years later both Guge and Ladakh were at the mercy of Central Tibetans and the Tibetan frontier just excluded Tabo.
The paintings at Talo are fortunately better preserved and vie in splendour with those of Ajanta and the monastery can be described as the Hirakulajay Ajanta. This does not, however, mean direct stylistic relationship with Ajanta as they are separated by almost six hundred years. The paintings also differ in another respect, namely that the carving of the Talo paintings is not the rock art of Ajanta but consists of pressed-clay walls of the monastery. The paintings have a family relationship to those at Tisa-pa-rang, Mtho-gling and Mang-Nang-Nang in Gurge proper and owe to a great extent to the art of Kashmir and to some extent to the Nal school of art which influenced Nepalese and through it the Tibetan art. The Gurge style is represented at its best at Talo and in the present political context they assume great importance as the only surviving representations of the Gurge style in India. Perhaps the Alchi monastery in Leh may have some early paintings influenced by the Gurge style.

Before we actually describe the monastery it will not be out of place to briefly review the politico-religious conditions which favoured the spread of Buddhism in the Spiti region. At the end of the tenth century, western Tibet came under the rule of a new dynasty known as the kings of Gu-game. Of the line of kings of this dynasty, Ye-shes-a (light of wisdom) is important to us for the understanding of the spread of Buddhism. Further names of two significant personalities of this period come to our mind. These are: (1) the renowned Tibetan scholar Rin-chen Sang-po (a.d. 930-1055) and the Indian Master Atisia (c.d. 985-1064). Rin-chen Sang-po was one of the twenty-one youths sent to India by Ye-she-a, the king of Gurge. He studied in Kashmir for many years and visited Buddhist centres in central India. He had as many as seventy-five masters. He initiated a whole school of Tibetan scholarship by translating many Indian works in Tibetan. Rin-chen Sang-po must have travelled into India down the Sutlej valley and across the foothills to the Bhor valley and then north-westward to Kashmir or perhaps he might have taken the northern route through the Spiti and the Chandra valleys. The Talo gompha is attributed to Rin-chen Sang-po and there is inscrptional evidence of this fact in one of the painted inscriptions in the gompha. The inscription reads, 'This temple was first founded by the ancestor of the Budhaictva, in the 44th year and now 46 years later the Royal Descendant the Mighty One Chhang-Chop-o, motivated by the though of enlightenment, has carried out repairs to this temple.' This record clearly indicates that the kings of Gu-game, Ye-shes-a and his nephew Chhang-Chop-o took special interest in Talo. In this gompha are set on the wall twenty-four stucco images of deities of the Vajradhara mandala of which the central figure is a fourfold image of Vairochana. Two images of Rin-chen Sang-po are placed near the image of Vairochana. Atisia arrived in Gurge when he was 60 years old. Having got his initiation at a very young age into the Hussyra cult from a yogin named
Rāhula-gupta he went to various monasteries and travelled to Tibet through Nepal. He stayed for three years in Gīrg-Le as the Chief Religious Guide and thereafter went to central Tibet. After visiting Lhasa and Yer-pa he finally settled in Nye-thang. He died in 1054 and Chos-ten was erected over his relics. He was responsible for influencing the religious thought of Tibet to a very great extent.

Ki Monastery

Situated on the conical hill about 300 metres high from the river-bed on the eastern bank of the Spiti, the Ki monastery (plate XV) is a picturesque pile of buildings looking from a distance like a hill fortress. It is approached by a difficult pathway from Kaza, the subdivisional headquarters of Lahul and Spiti District along the left bank of the Spiti river and leads to the Ki village at the foot of the hill. A steep climb from the village Ki leads one to the gate of the monastery which consists of an unostentatious structure of mud bricks with a low gallery atop. From the entrance to the summit, a winding and uneven stepped passage leads from one tier to the other through the residential quarters of the Lamas. The tiers are constructed in random rubble masonry in mud mortar.
The houses are built out of mud bricks or pressed clay each with a small wooden door frame and a window, door jams of which are decorated with a raised and burnished black coloured decoration. The door frames are also surrounded by some wood-work. The monastery on the top of the hill consists of a set of buildings on three sides of a small courtyard. The jambay known as Mani-lang is an isolated and independent structure on one side of the courtyard. Opposite Mani-lang is a building on a high plinth called Da-Khung which is the principal place of worship and a place of religious instruction for the young Lamas. On the eastern side there is a double storied structure consisting of buildings called Nago-gurusum, Cham-jhin, Zin-shung and Ku-lang with several interconnected passageways, apartments for the stores, kitchen and sacred chambers of worship not usually accessible to outsiders. From the archaeological and artistic point of view, Mani-lang and Nago-gurusum are of special interest as both of these contain remnants of old paintings, while the Cham-jhin contains a large number of ancient thangkas of great artistic and iconographic interest. The monastery was ranged many a time during wars and the Dogra invasion of 1837 caused great damage to the monastery.

Mani-lang is a small oblong structure having a half-open verandah and has a covered circumambulation path around the inner room which opens into the verandah. The room contains a huge round colourful prayer-wheel set rotating by a mechanical device. It contains on the inner side the sacred mantra ‘Om Mani Padme Hum’ and other religious texts. The Laru operating the prayer-wheel (Dhing Jur) is supposed to mechanically repeat the scriptures with each rotation of the drum. On the four walls of this building are painted figures of Buddha and the Bodhisattvas. The rear and the southern walls have two rows of paintings, the lower row containing larger figures, each with a halo behind the head. The paintings on the eastern wall also consist of two rows of figures. Female deities with many hands are also seen on the eastern wall. Three-headed male and female figures also find place among the painted subjects. The proper identification of the subjects painted on the walls will have to wait till such time as the paintings are cleaned, photographed and subjected to a critical study. There are no paintings from the ground level up to the height of three to four feet (0.92 to 1.22 m) the surface being merely ochre washed. There is a painted bird of inscription along the top bordering the paintings four to eight inches (101.6 to 203.2 mm) below the ceiling.

The other four walls of the verandah flanking the doorway was also once painted and the surface has suffered a lot of damage and only traces of painting can be seen which do not help in a proper assessment or recognition of the subjects.

The structure consists of compact mud in layers with a flat roof of earth-work supported on wooden frame-work and rafters and beams.
The building proper stands on an artificially raised floor to form the topmost tier and is about nine (2.74 m.) to ten feet (3.05 m.) high and appears to be one of the latest additions to the monastery-complex and may not be older than one hundred and fifty years or so. But all the same, it deserves protection on account of the paintings it contains. The building with its circumambulatory path can be compared with the Lha-Lun temple in Spiti (Liling on the Survey map) described by H. Lee Shuttleworth in Lha-hun Temple, Spiti, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, No. 39. Unlike the Lha-Lun temple, Mane-lang is a later structure but retains the ancient architectural tradition.

The structure known as Nagpo-Gurumam is situated to the east of the courtyard. It contains ancient paintings, but these are now restricted to the southern wall surface, the rest of the paintings on the other walls having been obliterated by damage or subsequent plastering of the surface. The painted surface is almost completely covered from view by the stucco figures kept on a raised platform against the wall. The paintings in the Nagpo Gurumam appear to be earlier than those in Mane-lang.
The subjects painted consist of Buddha in various attitudes.

Above Nagpo-gurum is a hall known as Chum-phu which is a veritable mine of old thangkas. Most of the thangkas are of Tibetan origin and are religious offerings from Tibetan Lamas. The monastery has besides a fairly good collection of bronzes and silver ware required for daily use and for ritualistic worship. Some of the objects are of delicate workmanship and the artisans engaged in preparing the pots and pans still practise this ancient profession. The orchestra containing a variety of musical instruments is equally interesting. The masks and costumes used by the dancers are colourful and gay. The pinnacles, with the vajra and vangyal is considered the lord of the soil and is perched on the top of the monastery complex.

The Monastery at Taka.

Enclosed within a fairly high compound wall of rubble masonry and pressed clay about 100 yards square (63 m. x m.), the monastery at Taka (Plate XVI) is a picturesque group of mud-brick structures (Plate XVIII) that have defied the ravages of time for the last many centuries. The group consists of the following nine structures of importance:

1. Do-wang.
2. Zelama (the painted image of Zelama on the wall).
3. Gon-khang (a place of worship).
4. Chamtso Chibo (The hall containing the image of Buddha).
5. Dom-lang.
6. Lang Chibo (the big hall).
7. Ser-lang (or meaning gold and, therefore a gompha with profusion of golden colour).
8. Chi-khang (middle room).
9. Lantse chung (formerly used for the initiation of monks).

There are besides a large number of stupas or Chos tseu within and outside the monastery.

The part of the monastery forming the portion of Do-wang, Zelama, and Gon-khang are interconnected and form the most ancient part of the monastery. The Zelama which appears to be a later addition, now affords entrance to the Do-wang and Gon-khang. The monastery belongs to the Ge-lak-pa or 'yellow hat' sect.

1. Do-wang

Entered from the hall known as Zelama and facing east, one enters a dark corridor known as gozha, the walls of which are covered with paintings, miniature Buddha figures. The main gompha beyond the corridor has two rows of octagonal wooden pillars, four in each row, having carved stone bases of inverted lotus. The top of each pillar has a carving of pani-pushpa supporting a torana capital. Besides these
Plate XVII. Tabo monastery: close up of the gomphas

pillars, a few more round pillars have been added in later times to support the falling roof. At the end of the hall is the sanctum with a circumambulatory path. It contains an image of Buddha kept on a loton throne. A four-faced image of Vairocana is kept on a high seat in front of a wooden platform erected against the last set of pillars. The hall measures 63' x 34' (19.2 x 10.46 m) approximately.

Paintings and sculptures on the wall

The wall surface is divided into two parts by a row of thirty-two projecting stucco figures at a height of about 6 feet (1.82 m.) each held in position by a peg driven in the wall from the body of the sculpture. The sculptures represent male and female deities each with a tiara and seated on a lotus seat. These fine sculptures form the divinities of the Vajrakīśaugamukha, the central divinity of which is Vairocana set on
Plate XVIII. Tabo. Du-wang: unidentified scene from the story of Nor-Sang

Plate XIX. Tabo. Du-wang: unidentified scene from the story of Nor-Sang with label inscriptions
the altar and already referred to above. Let against the wall are four Buddha images of different sizes, each of them flanked by Bodhisattvas, two to the left and two to the right. Among the divinities are eight divinities: Vajra-gaitya, Vajra-gurdan, Vajra-sang, Vajra-dance, Vajra-perfume, Vajra-flower, Vajra-lamp and Vajra-incense. The four large male divinity are: Vajra-kunja (Vajra-bhodhi Vajra-pata (Vajra-mahendra), Vajrapanha (Vajra-bhuta), Vajraveya (Vajra-fury). The portion above the sculptures is covered by the paintings of large and small Buddha and Bodhisattva figures. The portion has not suffered much, but could not be photographed for want of light. The lower portion has suffered the most, but a continuous Säka story is depicted on the southern wall surface while the northern wall depicts the story of Buddha from his birth to parinirvana, though portions have been subsequently been relined extensively. Some of the renovation work has been done by a competent restorer who has understood his limitations and executed only the line-work. While in recent times, all damaged portions have been indifferently plastered and covered over with incongruous colour patches showing trees in blue and green. Among the paintings on the southern wall, it was possible to identify a scene from the Vaisnavamata Jataka, where the children of Vessantara are delivered to Vessantara's father by the greedy Brahmin Jutilaka. The other paintings deal with the story of a benevolent young prince Nara-Sing and the different scenes yet remain to be identified with the help of the label inscriptions appearing at several places (plates XVII-XX).

The wall surface of the pradakshina-patha is employed for the depiction of the theme of the Thousand Buddhas. Among the paintings depicting the story of Buddha on the northern wall, the procession showing Mäya in a chariot proceeding to Kapilavastu is remarkable for its vigour and rich imagery (plate XXI). The conception of Mäya and the birth of Buddha are also very beautifully depicted. The part on north-east corner showing Buddha addressing the assembly of Sakhyas is also remarkable. The Mahaparinirvana of Buddha is depicted on the wall facing west.

The paintings on the walls of this hall are by far the most ancient at Tabo (circa eleventh century A.D) and stylistically one their inspiration to the classical tradition practised in India, though it has developed its regional peculiarities. We have already seen that the Tibetans not only invited religious teachers from India but craftsmen who transmitted the Indian tradition of painting to this region. The recent excavation at the Vikramasāhi site has also brought to light murals and this university played an important role in the spread of Buddhism in Tibet.

2. The Zhalánā

The structure which is square on plan, is centrally supported by four pillars with central opening in the roof for the light. The paintings on
the walls are very recent, having been executed by the Head Lama, Sanden Dorje, about five years ago. The old painting of Zelum on the wall facing east at the north-western corner has also been retouched by him. The room has as such lost much of its importance.

3. The Gon-khang

A small room used for taru mana (religious worship) contains a wooden stool on which are kept a few images made of autu, the main object of worship being Kali whose wooden image is kept on the pedestal.

The paintings on the walls

The paintings on the western wall consist of three figures of Kââs on horse-back. Brandishing a sword, he rides a horse and wears a skull-decked head-dress and a flowing costume. Below are depicted eight auspicious symbols and miniature Bodhisattva figures above and along the sides.

4. The Chamba Chhoro

It is called Chamtâ Chhoro on account of the large chambu image of Buddha in prataghâs in the sanctum sanctorum. Facing east, the hall has a small postico with an ornate wooden door-frame with Gomela on the kalaa-bimba. Above the kalaa-bimba are seven wooden panels in relief of which 3e alternate ones contain figures of Buddha, while the other four are standing figures in tribhangha, the exact identification of which is not possible in their present damaged condition. Above the central panel is carved a Kinara couple while on the door jambs is carved a beautiful floral pattern and a row of standing Buddhas on either side. At present only six figures can be made out, but there may be a few more in the portions now buried in the ground. The wooden door-frame is a work of artistic execution and may compare with the wooden temples of Chamba. It is not unlikely that the workmen came from the Chamba region.

The main hall, together with the sanctum containing the large image of Buddha in the Dhotamehakra-panoration-marâ has a very high ceiling (about 6 metres). The ceiling is supported by six pillars, three in each row all resting on sculptured stone pedestals carved with tiger and elephant figures. The huge figure of Buddha has undergone repairs in recent years when the surface was painted in red and yellow colours. The paintings on the walls in the sanctum sanctorum except a portion on the northern wall containing old paintings have been retouched and varnished. The paintings in the main hall are of a later period and may hardly be 100 years old. The old paintings referred to above deserve to be cleaned and preserved.

40
Plate XV. *Tabo, Ssu-wang*: scene from the story of *Nor-sang* depicting tortures in the hell
The ceiling was also painted with geometric designs of which traces are still extant.

5. Dom-lang

Provided with an ornate wooden door-frame having Buddha in dharmachakra pravartanamudra on the lotus throne the Dom-lang shrine has a narrow entrance passage leading to a mere or less square hall centrally supported by one tall wooden pillar set on a stone pedestal. The paintings on the walls are of special note on account of the unified compositions. The paintings belong to the last period of Guge style. On the back wall is a large-sized figure of Buddha in dharmachakra-pravartanamudra holding a begging bowl in one hand with an attendant on either side holding a begging bowl. The figure of standing Bodhisattvas, Manjusri and Maitreya, with drapery distinctive on account of decorative design are painted on either side of the central composition.

The side walls have the compositions separated by miniature figures of which one large-sized figure composition with the principal figure of Vairochana having four heads in dharmachakra mudra attracts attention on account of delicate line-work. The paintings have suffered damage by profuse leakage of water from the roof but can be retrieved by chemical treatment and structural conservation. The wooden ceiling is painted with floral figures, celestials with scarfs in hands and animal figures.

6. Lang Chekho

This octagonal hall with a sanctuary of slightly smaller width is noteworthy on account of the beautifully decorated ceiling supported by brackets resting on the six octagonal pillars, three on each row. The ceiling decoration on the wooden planks set between the rafter is a distinctive feature of this gompha. Celestial beings, lotus medallions, floral patterns, religious symbols like the kankha, geometrical patterns, make the ceiling extremely variegated and colourful.

Paintings on the walls are of large size like those in Dom-lang. The central figure on the back wall of the sanctuary has been removed in recent years. But the figure on the side walls of the hall are older though later than the earliest paintings in the Dzong. The paintings usually depict Buddha in various mudras with attendant figures in frontal poses.

7. Ser-lang

Provided with a porch and a plain wooden door which may be a later addition, the rectangular hall has a definite indication of a sanctuary. The hall is supported by four pillars square in section and has a ceiling
equally colourful like that of Lang-chubho. The paintings on the wall are similarly large-sized and, therefore, suggest that the gompha 6 and 7 belong to the same period. The paintings here, however, are untouched by later renovations and they are fringed at the lower end by running vajra pattern and decorative writings.

In the back wall the central figure is a Buddha in bhaisajyaguru-mudra, with attendant figures on either side. On the proper left of the figure is a Bodhisattva Maitreya carrying sword and a book or lotus. The most distinguishing feature of this figure is the very intricate design on the garment worn by it. The paintings are remarkable for the minute workmanship of drapery and ornamentation.

The other walls also have large-sized compositions. In this hall masks are kept on stools and tied to the pillars. There appears to be some special ritual significance for such display of masks in this gompha.

8. Chil-kang

Known as Chil-kang or the middle gompha, this small hall is remarkable for a different pattern of paintings of ritualistic intent. Here, for the first time, we come across mandolas (plate XXII) the worship in which the thangkas gained currency in later times.

The southern wall depicts a mandala with Buddha in dharmachakra-pravartana-mudra in a circle in the centre with eight small Bodhisattva figures around him. Outside the circle and set within a rectangle are twenty-four figures of Bodhisattvas, six in each corner. The rectangle is again circumscribed by a circle with three figures of Bodhisattvas in the outer quadrant. Correspondingly, there is another mandala on the northern wall with nine figures in a circle and twenty-eight figures in the enclosing square which is again set within a circle at the four ends of which two deer with dharmachakra are painted suggesting the first sermon of Buddha in the deer park at Benaras. The back wall also has a large mandala set around a three-faced deity enclosed in a circle.

The gompha is considered to be one of the earliest structures and is interesting as it provides an idea of the prevalent mode of worship.

The ceiling is decorated with variegated paintings of birds, animals and floral patterns etc.

9. Lankar Chong

Used for the initiation of nuns, this small oblong hall, centrally supported by four round wooden pillars, faces east and has a low wooden entrence. The paintings on the walls are described below:
Plate XIX. Tabo, Du-wang: scene depicting royal procession and the birth of Buddha in Lumbini grove

Plate XXII. Tabo, Chil-kung: Budshah mandala
Western wall

On this wall is depicted a panel showing Buddha figure on lotus in bhaisajyaguru mudra. To the proper left is seated Bodhisattva Maitreya carrying a sweet and book on lotus on either side.

On the southern wall are also three principal largest seated figures with rows of miniature figures on either side. Of the two rows of figures, seven in each row, one set has been completely damaged by leakage of water.

On the walls looking out either side of the entrance are figures of Kali wearing a skull-encrusted vajra.

Bronze images and other objects at Tabo

The monastery has a small but an interesting collection of bronze images showing Buddha seated in vajrasana with hands in bhaisajyaguru mudra. In one case, he also holds the vajra in his left hand. There is also an image of Vajrasattva holding a vajra near the heart. The images are of both Indian and Nepalese origin.

The collection of masks used in the performance of the Cham dance is equally interesting.

The hillside monastery at Tabo

The remains of a deserted and dilapidated monastery establishment are noticeable on the mountain side about two furlongs to the north of the Tabo monastery and about 200 feet (60.96 m) above the ground level. This monastery was used in winter by the Lamas of the lower monastery, but in view of its extremely bad state of preservation, it now serves only the purpose of a fair held in the winter and lasting for a week or so.

The monastery consists of caves partly excavated in the conglomerate formation and partly built in rubble masonry.

Of the many gompas, the one that is in a tolerably good state of preservation is known as Du-wang. It is partly rock-cut and partly constructed with auxiliary structures forming a kitchen (chumling) store (chok) and latrine (chort). The central room of Du-wang contains a number of paintings of fairly good workmanship. They are, however, later than the paintings in the Du-wang gompha of the lower group. The figure of an eleven-headed Mahasiddha Avalokiteshvara on the western wall is worthy of mention.

Beside Du-wang, there are six rocky-cave caves on the eastern side, either circular or oval in plan. The facades of these caves are almost completely hidden and the cells are full of debris. These caves are known as Stonghri-pa (eastern side residential town). In the western half, there are also about nine cells in a very damaged condition including quarters, for the head Lama. The monastery group on the hillside also
The technique of paintings

The paintings have been executed in tempera on mud plaster. Generally, the mud-plaster serves as the ‘carrier’. We came to know from the local Lamas that the binding medium was glue derived from the sheep-skin. In most cases, the mud plaster was found and reinforced with bits of straw, husk and other fibrous material. The plaster is powdery and friable. On the plastered surface is a very thin coat of white ground and has been laid directly over the mud plaster after smoothing the prime coat of plaster. It appears that lime and clay were used for giving this white wash. The mud plaster is being examined in the Survey’s laboratory to determine the contents and also to find out the contents of the material of which the pigments were made.

The oldest paintings at Tabo are contained in the Du-wang monastery and can be attributed to the tenth-eleventh century A.D. The paintings in the Geng Khang, where angry deities are represented, belong to the fifteenth-sixteenth century A.D. and those of Lar Khang to a still later period. The paintings in Chikhang belong to a class by themselves and contain mandalas, the worship of which gained importance in the middle period. It will thus be seen that the Tabo paintings present a stylistic amalgam where the Kadampa style and the Pala style (of illustrated manuscripts) have been fused together with Tibetan influence. All these together form what we may call the Geng style.

The paintings have another importance in the matter of study of costumes and the way of life in the bygone centuries and would call for a detailed study.