



## FRESCO AND TEMPERA IN INDIAN ART

In the previous lesson, we learnt about contemporary art. In this lesson, we will learn about Fresco and Tempera in Indian art. In prehistoric times man was very dependent on nature. Rock paintings from that period found world wide show human figures hunting a beast, at war with each other, carrying clubs and projectiles, and celebrating a victory with dance and animal figures in the movement. At that times, these paintings represent animals as Gods. In India, prehistoric rock paintings came to light when Archibald Carlleyle of the Archaeological Survey of India discovered rock paintings which he thought dated from the Stone Age at Sohagihat in the Mirzapur district of Uttar Pradesh in 1867 and 1868. These paintings today provide an insight into the life of the people who painted them. In 1881 J. Cockburn found fossilised rhinoceros bones in the valley of the Ken River in the Mirzapur region as well as a painting of a rhinoceros hunted by three men in a shelter near Roap Village. In 1924, Sir John Marshall, Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahni, Madho Sarup Vats, Rakhal Das Banerjee, and E. J. H. MacKay led excavations on the banks of the river Ravi and Indus, leading to the discovery of civilizaion thousands of years old. The seals, coins, statuettes, and terracottas found at these sites have animal figures painted or carved. The next set of ancient Indian cave paintings available today are the frescos of Jogimara, Bagh, Badami, Sittanvasal, Armamalai and Ajanta.

Dating from the 1st Century BCE to the 7th Century CE, the main theme of these frescos is the life of Buddha and Jataka narratives mainly in Ajanta caves which are related to Brahmanical-Hinduism at Badami and Jaina themes at sittanavasal and painted. These are representative works of the finest quality. Protrait faces are renowned world wide for their expressive faces, eyes and hand gestures. The most well known amongst the Indian painted caves, the Ajanta complex has 29 caves, including an unfinished one. Ajanta was a monastery where Buddhist monks lived,

## MODULE - 3

Method and Material  
used in Drawing and  
Painting



Notes

### Fresco and Tempera in Indian Art

studied and held learned discussions. The purpose behind painting the various lives of Buddha here was to remind the monks of their ideals and the hardships he faced on his journey towards enlightenment. Ajanta paintings show familiarity and interest in details of contemporary everyday life as well as mythology. They depict *Apsaras* and *Gandharvas*, Gods and Goddesses, royal personages and paupers, courtesans and monks, animals and birds, wild and pet animals, trees-vines-creepers-bushes. The colour scheme is sophisticated, and the lines masterful. The Ajanta painters followed the *Shadanga*, or six paramount rules of art, yet gave free rein to their imagination. Though all Ajanta frescoes are important pieces of art, Padmapani Bodhisattva, Yashodhara and Rahul, Chhadantajataka, The Cruel Brahmin, Shibijataka Vessantara, the Flight of Nanda are masterpieces which continue to surprise the world. The pigments, all derived from natural water-soluble substances kaolin chalk for white, lamp soot for black, glauconite for green, ochre for yellow, red and brown from local iron-rich clay and imported lapis lazuli for blue, were thickened with glue and added only after the undercoat was completely dry.



### OBJECTIVES

After studying the lesson, the learner will be able to:

- describe frescoes in Indian painting;
- learn the process of making frescoes;
- state the background of Ajanta paintings;
- explain the pigments used in Ajanta paintings;
- name the jataka stories;
- describe Shadanga.

### 12.1 FRESCO

First, you need to know about the fresco technique.

#### Basic Information

Fresco is a technique of mural painting in which the painting is executed upon freshly-laid or wet lime plaster. Water or water mixed with lime is used for the pigment to merge with the plaster. As the plaster sets, the moisture evaporates, and the Calcium in the lime turns into a fine layer of Calcium Carbonate on the surface of the painting. This protects the colours.

**Lime:** In a terracotta urn, lime is mixed with water and left to settle. This allows for the impurities to settle at the bottom. The longer lime is allowed to settle, the smoother the finish.

**Marble powder:** The high percentage of mica and earth in river sand can lead to cracks in the plaster. This makes marble powder a better option.

**Wall:** The wall is the base on which a fresco is executed. While selecting a wall for a fresco, the points to be kept in mind are:

1. It should be in an airy area.
2. It should have no damp patches.
3. It should have no cracks.
4. It should not be new.

If the fresco is to be executed on the ceiling, it should have ventilators close to the level of the ceiling for proper ventilation.



**Fig. 12.1: Dying Princess**

Since frescos are executed on surfaces rich in lime and the pigments also use lime as a binder, the colour palette becomes limited because chemicals present in pigments react to the calcium present in lime. Hence the Indian painter used *Ramraj*, *Hirmich*, *Hingul*, ochre, indigo, lamp soot or coal dust and various combinations for frescos.

The pigments were powdered in a pestle, sieved, mixed with water and kept as liquids. *Hingul*, *sindoor* etc. were ground with sheep's milk and clarified with lemon juice.

## MODULE - 3

Method and Material  
used in Drawing and  
Painting



Notes

## MODULE - 3

Method and Material  
used in Drawing and  
Painting



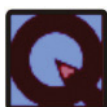
Notes

### Fresco and Tempera in Indian Art

Title	: Dying Princess
Medium	: Tempera
Period	: 5th century C.E.
Location	: Cave 16, Ajanta, Maharashtra, India.
Artist	: Unknown

#### General Description

One of the finest paintings at Ajanta, 'The 'Dying Princess' represents the last moments of Sundari, the heartbroken wife of Buddha's brother, Nanda, who left her to become a monk. Emotion and pathos are expressed here by the controlled turn and poise of the body, and the eloquent gestures of hands and eyes. The dying princess is reclining against a bolster, and a female attendant is holding her. The bent head of the princess, her lowered eyes, the drooping limbs and the sad, tense female attendants; all hint at imminent death. Though deserted by her husband, in her last moments, the dying princess is surrounded by deeply concerned attendants. One is fanning her while clutching her own heart in grief. In an attached chamber stand two other attendants, one with a Persian cap and another with a distinctly Afro-Asian face signalling someone to bring something. Her eyes are wide with fear. Yet another is checking the princess' pulse, sensing death inch closer.



#### INTEXT QUESTIONS 12.1

Choose the most appropriate option.

1. In which cave is the 'Dying Princess' painted?
  - (i) Cave No. 1
  - (ii) Cave No. 2
  - (iii) Cave No. 5
  - (iv) Cave No. 16
2. What is the medium of the painting Dyeing Princess?
  - (i) Tempera
  - (ii) Wash technique
  - (iii) Ink of paper
  - (iv) None of these

#### 12.2 THE PRINCE AND THE PRINCESS

Dear learner, let us understand a Mural painting in tempera medium.

##### Basic Information

This mural painting is one of the many depicting the story of the righteous prince Vessantara. In this panel, Visvantara is seen consoling his distraught wife in a palace pavilion. Nearby, a queen, with her attendants, stands in an attitude of





unmistakable dignity. And the window over them shows two women in meditative mood. The architectural detail, the facial expressions of the secondary figures; in fact, the total composition make it a singularly beautiful depiction of love. The fine balance of facial features, the expressive glance and hand gestures, the rich ornaments and the drape of luxurious fabrics are typical of the Ajanta school.



**Fig. 12.2: The Prince and the Princess**

Title	:	<b>The Prince and The Princess</b>
Medium	:	Natural colours on mud plaster
Period	:	6th century C. E.
Location	:	Cave 17, Ajanta, Maharashtra, India.
Artist	:	Unknown

### General Description

The seventeenth cave has a fresco depicting a momentous scene from the life of Prince Vessantara where he is telling his wife that he has been banished from the kingdom for giving away the auspicious white elephant. In one of his previous life, Buddha had been the generous Prince Vessantara, who was married to a beautiful princess called Madri. He had a white elephant which was considered to be auspicious for the kingdom. One day, when a delegation from a neighbouring kingdom came to seek his help because they were facing a drought, Vessantara gave them the white elephant so it might bring rain to their kingdom.

This angered the people of Visvantara's kingdom, who asked his father to banish the prince from the kingdom.

## MODULE - 3

Method and Material  
used in Drawing and  
Painting



Notes



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 12.2

1. What is the theme of the Ajanta paintings?
2. Why was prince Visvantara banished from his kingdom?
3. Which cave is the 'Prince and Princess' located?
4. Which technique of painting was used to paint the 'Prince and Princess'?

### 12.3 MARA VIJAYA

You will learn about another mural art, Mara Vijaya.

#### Basic Information

In the Buddhist tradition, Mara is the deity of desire who tries to distract Buddha with the help of his horde of attendants. Mara's attendants include nubile young women and cruel and terrible goblins. He has magical powers, which he uses to frighten people. His aims to stop Buddha from achieving *Nirvana*, i.e. cessation of hate, anger and desire. Mara Vijaya symbolizes the determined mind's conquest over distraction.



Fig. 12.3: Mara Vijaya

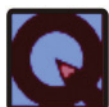
Title	: <b>Mara-Vijaya</b>
Medium	: Natural colours on mud plaster
Period	: 5th century AD
Finding site	: Cave 1, Ajanta,
Artist	: Unkown

### General Description

This large (12 × 8) mural depicts Buddha's conquest of Mara. As Buddha inches close to achieving *nirvana* Mara sets his attendants to distract Buddha from his path. In this panel, Buddha is sitting in the classic *Dhyan Mudra*. He is surrounded by the beautiful daughters of Mara trying to tempt him, a dwarf trying to scare him, a terrible person lunging at him with a sword in hand, and many other cruel figures add to the frightful army of Mara. Impervious to this terrible circus, Buddha sits in deep contemplation. One female figure sits in a pose of repentance. She has perhaps become aware of her sin.

The Buddha is shown with his left hand in his lap, palm facing upwards, and his right hand on his right knee. The fingers of his right hand touch the earth to call the earth his witness for defying Mara and achieving enlightenment.

In this mural, the Ajanta masters have created an unequalled assemblage of ugly figures. The stark contrast between the serenity of Buddha and the violent horde of Mara is stunning.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 12.3

1. What does Mara Vijaya symbolize?
2. Where is 'Mara Vijaya' located?
3. In 'Mara Vijaya' what posture is Buddha sitting in?



### ACTIVITY

Visit an art gallery and collect some information about the tempera medium and two illustrations or photographs in tempera medium. Now paste the photographs in A4 size paper and write briefly about the tempera medium.


## MODULE - 3

Method and Material  
used in Drawing and  
Painting



Notes

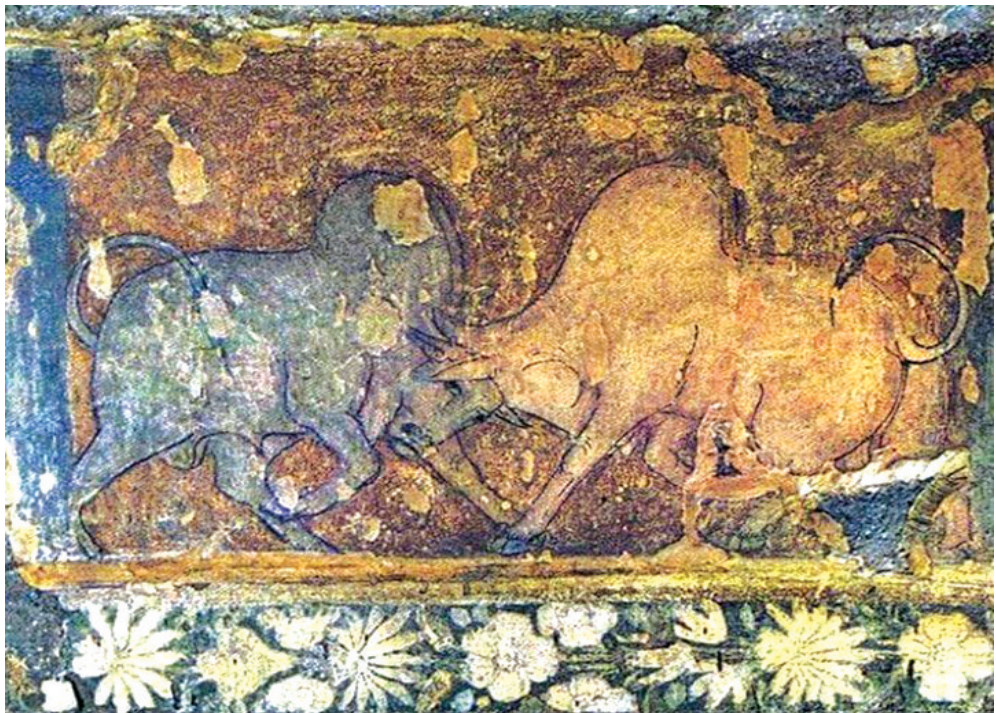


### 12.4 BULL FIGHT

You know that Ajanta frescoes are important pieces of art. Let us learn Bull Fight in tempera medium.

#### Basic Information

Ajanta is a veritable gold mine of artworks. The pillars, walls, ceilings, and brackets are all painted with scenes and motifs connected with Buddha. Keeping real-life ratios and proportions in view, human, animal, plant, divine figures have been painted in great detail. The Ajanta painters were familiar with all aspects of contemporary life; they have painted court scenes with the same finesse as the ones from pastoral life. They delighted in painting dynamic figures. The fighting bulls painted on a bracket in Cave 1 are an example of the Ajanta masters' craft.



**Fig. 12.4: Bull Fight**

Title	:	<b>Bull Fight</b>
Medium	:	Natural colours on mud plaster
Period	:	5th century AD
Findingsite	:	Cave 1, Ajanta, Maharashtra
Artist	:	Unkown





Notes

### General Description

This dynamic depiction projects the strength and force of the fighting bulls. Their handsome muscular bodies, pointed horns, raised tails, and large humps mark them as leaders of a herd. Their horns are locked, and their hooves tamping the ground, their nostrils flared aggressively. The artist has painted the opponents in different colours, and carrying the idea of contrast further, has painted their tails and legs in different postures. The viewer can sense the raw animal strength of the fighting bulls. The flow of lines is a remarkable feature of the composition.

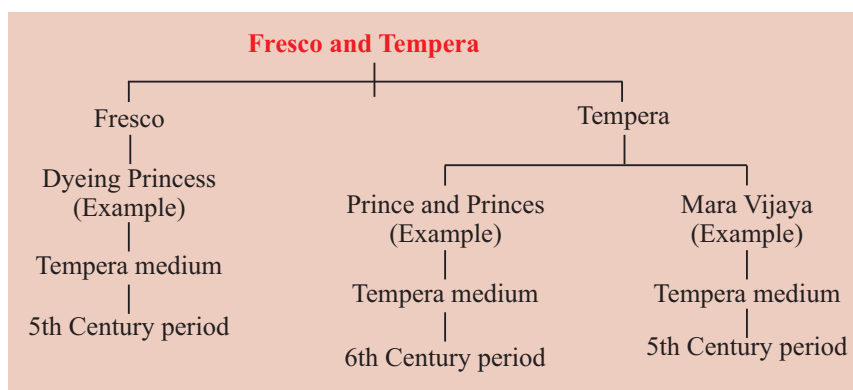


### INTEXT QUESTIONS 12.4

1. Where is the 'Bullfight' located?
2. How has the artist created contrast in the 'Bull fight'?
3. Why is the 'Bull fight' a significant mural?



### WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT



### LEARNING OUTCOMES

The learner can

- use the natural pigments in the drawing and painting;
- use fresco mural painting technique in any art objects available their own house.

## MODULE - 3

Method and Material  
used in Drawing and  
Painting



Notes



### TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Describe in detail fresco Indian Art?
2. Write a paragraph on the 'Dying Princess'.
3. Describe the 'Bull fight' in cave 1 in Ajanta cave.
4. Which are the main sites of Indian cave paintings executed between the 1st century BC and the 7th century AD? Write in detail.
5. Describe the 'Mara Vijaya' panel at Ajanta.
6. Describe the 'Prince and Princess' panel at Ajanta.
7. Explain the condition of the princess.
8. What are the important features of Ajanta figures?
9. What is the size of 'Mara Vijaya'?
10. What is the dwarf trying to do in 'Mara Vijaya'?



### ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

#### 12.1

1. (iv) Cave 16
2. (i) Tempera

#### 12.2

1. The theme of Ajanta paintings is the life of Buddha and his various incarnations.
2. Prince Visvantara was banished from his kingdom because he had given away the auspicious white elephant to the neighbouring kingdom.
3. The 'Prince and Princess' mural is located in Cave 17 at Ajanta.
4. The mural, the 'Prince and Princess' has been painted in tempera technique.

#### 12.3

1. 'Mara Vijaya' symbolizes the determined mind's conquest over distraction.
2. 'Mara Vijaya' is located in Cave 1 at Ajanta.
3. In 'Mara Vijaya' Buddha is sitting in the classic *Dhyana Mudra*.



## 12.4

1. The bullfight is painted on a bracket in Cave 1 at Ajanta.
2. The pillars, walls, ceilings, and brackets are all painted with scenes and motifs connected with Buddha.
3. The 'Bull fight' is a significant mural because it shows the Ajanta painters' mastery of line and their knowledge of ratio and proportion in animal bodies.

## GLOSSARY

paupers	poor people
courtesans	court dancer
incarnations	rebirth
goblins	mischievous fairy