

Shad-Danta Jataka- Depicted In Ajanta Caves

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ABSTRACT

In 1972, the General Conference of UNESCO adopted a resolution regarding protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The List of recorded sites on the World Heritage now stands at 981. There are 32 World Heritage Properties in India out of which 25 are Cultural Properties and 7 are Natural Properties. Ajanta Caves are also included in the World Heritage as recognized by the U.N.O. and is placed at 153 in the list. These Caves had been discovered in 1819 A.D. by a tiger hunting British officer from Madras Army, John Smith. The existence of the Ajanta Caves dated back from 2nd century BC to 7th century AD, the 30 cave temples are situated at Ajanta, in the Indian state of Maharashtra. These Caves are carved at the height of 76 meters straight into a semicircular mountainside from the bank of river *Waghora*. There are paintings on the walls, pillars and ceilings of Cave No. 1, 2, 9, 10, 16, 17, 19 and 21 and sculptures all over in the 30 caves.

At Ajanta, the story of *Shad-danta Jataka* is painted on the right hand side wall of Cave No. 10, as well as on the inner side of the left hand side wall adjacent to the entrance gate of Cave No. 17. *Shad-danta Jataka* story exemplifies the effort that the Bodhisattva made to develop virtues- *Parmitas*. In this *Jataka*, the Bodhisattva who was incarnation (Yoni) of an elephant, the *Shad-danta* and who worshipped '*Prachchek Buddha*' acquired all *Parmitas* and became Buddha. The Paintings of this *Jataka* lead the future generation from the darkness of material life to the light of spiritual life and special reference to salvation (Nirvana).

Keywords: Ajanta Caves, Jataka, Bodhisattva, Parmita, Nirvana