

## **Ajanta and Sigiriya: A comparative study into mural paintings**

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Abstract

Ajanta paintings have often been compared with that of Sigiriya in Sri Lanka. The contemporariness of both paintings, their elegance, excellent preservation and some stylistic similarities are the factors behind this comparison. Accordingly, both sites have been considered as belonging to a same school of paintings which was nourished by Buddhism and spread over South and Southeast Asia during that period.

The present paper is meant for examining this popular belief of similarity between Ajanta and Sigiriya by comparing the subject matter, context, style and technique of paintings in both places with casual attention to other paintings and sculptures in India and Sri Lanka.

Ajanta is a cave temple complex and its paintings are essentially religious. Sigiriya is a palace complex and its paintings are in a secular context. Moreover, Sigiriya paintings are only female figures which are having a symbolic meaning than that of Ajanta where paintings are part of narrative scenes.

The study shows that Ajanta and Sigiriya are examples of two schools of paintings though there are some similarities in style which is common to both paintings and sculptures at Anuradhaura and Polonnaruva in general. Further, it is noted that Ajanta is closer in the subject matter, context and style to paintings in the Tivanka Image House at Polonnaruva than that of Sigiriya. The style and elegance of old sculptures at Dambulla cave indicate some resemblance to Ajanta though early paintings at the cave have been replaced by new paintings of Kandyan style in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and presently preserved as the largest painted cave of the island. One may surmise that Dambulla caves might be somewhat resemblance to Ajanta if it were preserved with its old paintings.

***Keywords: Ajanta, Sigiriya, Tivanka Image House, Dambulla caves, Sri Lanka, Mural paintings.***

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