

CH. 10: IN THE BEGINNING WERE ONLY TWO LAYOUTS—ONE FOR THE TWO TEMPLES AND ANOTHER FOR THE *UPĀŚRAYAS*

IN RECENT YEARS, the present researcher carried out a prolonged on-site study of the plans of the caves. During the study the observations and analysis of earlier scholars, right from Burgess to Spink were closely examined and checked with on-site data. No doubt, the studies of Spink are most remarkable in the sense that document a mine of data whose analysis has brought forth revealing facets of Ajantā's inception and developments. However, during the study it also came to light that there were certain on-site features that escaped the attention of Spink in spite of his very detailed and remarkably well analysed constructions.

On the account of new notices, and the consequent reassessment with the entire material, there emerged a picture of Ajantā's initial years in the fifth century that is not contained in Spink's volumes. The same is presented here in a summarised format, but the details can be found in the chapters ahead under the discussion of individual caves.

It appears to the present scholar that several of the fifth-century *upāśrayas* (residential caves) were planned together on the drawing board in the crucial years between circa 460 and 461 CE. There seems to have been designed a

standard layout for as many as 17 caves. The layout had little variations, such as the larger caves were planned with pillars in the interior while the smaller caves were not provided with any such provisions. Some caves were exclusively provided with an open flight of steps from the riverbed while others had tunnelled staircases due to the steep scarp on their locations at the cliff. If Cave 7 was planned with double porticoes, Cave 1 and 19 had single and rather shallow porticoes. I admit, however, that I do not have a clear answer to why Cave 7 is the only cave that was provided with a double portico. Spink believes that it was probably meant to be function as the administrative unit of the bosses from the royal court in the capital. I suspect whether this is admissible, since in my construction, I give the control to the Saṅgha, and to the royal Vākāṭakas in the capital.

My opinion after the examination of the plans, especially their early stages, is that there was probably a set of two distinct architectural layout: one for the residential *upāśrayas* and the other for those that were planned from the very beginning as worship halls. Both Spink and the present researcher agree that it was only Caves 19 and 26 (the stupa temples) that were planned as worship halls right from the beginning. The remaining—all the other caves—were planned strictly as *upāśrayam*, or purely residential caves. It is

another matter, however, that a majority of the remaining caves were converted, or were meant to be converted, into worship-cum-dwelling halls, which incidence had its root in the year 466 CE. Just one year before, in circa 465 CE there was not a single *upāśrayam* on the site, no matter how well developed that had any plan for any type of shrine. This can be said with utmost conviction, which would not be surprising to the reader if he or she takes the trouble of examining the evidence on the site.

Evidence point out that the design of the worship halls—i.e. the halls with stupas in them—had little uniqueness. What is most revealing in our study is that the stupas of these worship halls (Caves 19 and 26) were never planned to be provided with frontal Buddha images carved on them. The other stupa temple, Cave 29, which could only be done halfway, was never planned at the early years of circa 460–461 CE. The layout of these planned worship halls displayed standard features, consisting of a decorated façade with a *caitya* window, a nave separated by an ambulatory, a *stūpa*, and a colonnade separating the nave from the ambulatory. The ceiling was vaulted, and sported carved and painted decorations. That is it. No special distinction was planned. This was very much like other stupa temples seen at other *saṅghārāmas* across India. The variation could be permitted during the paintings and decoration stage, and especially

after the beginning of worship. As far as the architectural components and designs were concerned, they do not seem to have had anything experimental.

Speaking of the other caves—the ones that were not planned as stupa temples—evidence point out that none of them had any provision of any shrine, image, painting or carving. This is because they were all designed for monastic dwelling and residential needs of the *saṅghārāma*. The basic plan of these *upāśrayas* consisted of a simple, unadorned façade, a pillared porch, a square hall, and an equal number of cells on the left, rear, and right sides of the hall. Square windows for lighting and ventilation were planned at the centre of the main door and sidewalls of the porch. The windows, their size, shapes, placements, and symmetry or asymmetries are very important to understand how things were planned and developed. This is something that has escaped the attention of Spink, and he seems therefore to have erred in explaining the initial stages of so many of the *upāśrayas*.

These *upāśrayas* or *maṇḍapas* consisted of a square hall, preferably as wide as the court and the porch. Even Cave 7's original layout must have had a hall. However, it was never excavated. The ceiling was around 10–12 feet high. The pillars were uniformly octagonal and had no adornments. The doorways had a few jambs but, like the pillars, they too were plain and minimal. All doorways, in fact, throughout the site

were planned without any carvings. This is not to suggest that no decorations were planned for them, for the plan was for the painted decorations, not the sculpted or carved one. It is only after a few years of developments in various caves that the idea of carved decorations came.

Equally, it can be found after a detailed analysis of on-site data, that there was no provision for any shrine, side-shrine, and pillared chamber. No cell or pillared chamber was planned in the forecourt areas. Even the side doors or the 'aisle doors' opening into the aisles were not planned.

As regards the walls on either side of the porchs, there is evidence that they were all blank on the drafting table. There was no plan whatsoever for any cells to be carved on them. The cells that we presently see on these sidewalls of the various porchs are all later additions. In short, the standard plan was very much like that of Cave 12 of the Sātavāhana period, which possibly had a pillared porch, but which did not survive the ravages of time.

There is no wonder why such a standard plan for several *upāśrayas* or *maṇḍapas* were designed originally. This was only keeping in mind the right ambience and basic needs of the monastics for whom such residential suits were planned. Everything was kept to the basic, to the most elementary level. Their sole purpose in life was to practice austerity, having renounced all worldly pleasures; so they did not need

embellished homes. This fact, and the intention, is testified by the on-site data relating to the earliest phase of the fifth-century caves.

UNIFICATION OF THE IDEA OF CAVE-DWELLING AND CAVE-TEMPLE

Historically, the two were never mixed up. Cave dwelling was one thing and cave temples were quite another. We have seen so much of fusion at Ajantā and Ellora that we might forget the fact that the two were once distinct affairs.

Originally, *śailagr̥has* were only for monastic dwelling, as the case of Lomas Ṛṣi and Paraśurām caves near Bodhagayā show. There are no temples there. Later, hundreds sites dotted the stretch of Western Ghāṭs and Andhra where residential caves were excavated without any temple in close vicinity. Gradually, there came a time when cave temples started to be made in the monolithic medium, and this had a gradual beginning and consistent development. The history of rock cut architecture from 3rd century BCE to the middle of fifth century CE displays an evolutionary process. It may however be observed that even at the sites where cave temples and cave dwelling chambers were excavated they were excavated separately. And, this was so in the earliest of the phase of rock cut architecture. Speedy change, however, seems to have emerged when we enter a phase when stupas were being created within the residential halls, as can be seen, for example, at

Shailarwadi, Kuda, Nasik, and Junnar (Table 9). This phase was very remarkable and experimental in the history of rock-cut *saṅghārāmas* and rock-cut architecture, which has been fruitfully studied by two important archaeologists: M. K. Dhavalikar and S. Nagaraju. In none of these sites or caves, however, do we see any trace of image shrines. The only place where image shrine was evidently there was the *maṇḍapa* at Kanheri where a wooden Buddha image was found, which is now housed at the Chatrapati Shivaji Museum, Mumbai. What was the date of the Kanheri example? We do not have the absolute date yet.

Even at Ajantā, none of the Sātavāhana-period residential caves shows any traces of worship activities in them. And, they remained like that even during the fifth-century phase of Ajantā. Massive changes were being made during the fifth-century phase of Ajantā, but none that could alter the 'rule' of the earlier caves. The matter assumes greater significance when we notice that the earliest *upāśrayas* of the fifth-century phase of Ajantā strictly adhered to the 'rule', i.e. *upāśrayas* were strictly for dwelling, and temples had separate edifices with stupas in them. The two had never mixed up in the original plan.

But, what we now see at Ajantā, Ellora, Aurangabad, and many other sites is that there are a great number of edifices that are worship halls as well as they are halls of monastic

dwelling. They have Buddha or stupa shrines as well as cells for monks to live. And, these are incidentally considered to be the best ones from a tourist's angle. These are the ones that were so profusely painted with various kinds of themes. These are the ones that were so richly decorated with various kinds of sculptures and decorations.

A change certainly took place at Ajantā; it was a shift from the austere and mere cave dwelling to the more inclusive one: cave-dwelling-cum-worship-halls. It was the fusion we are talking about. This fusion has to have a history. And, the history can be traced. This is the exercise which Spink and the present researcher is involved in. The exercise is not simply a chronological exploration. Our study shows that the shift, the transformation, the dramatic change happened all of a sudden at Ajantā. The idea struck the site in circa 465 CE, and it was being implemented since circa 466 CE, when all of the dwelling chambers or halls started to be converted as temples-cum-dwelling halls. Until this time, it was just the stupa hall, the temples that had or were intended to have decorations. None of the *upāśrayas* or dwelling halls had any such plans for decorations (Tables 6, 7, 9).

The interior of stupa temples demanded a nave with the stupa before which the monks could gather and offer prayers. The ambulatory round the stupa was necessitated for the ritual of circumambulation (Figures 28, 29, 152). The

ambulatory needed to be separated from the nave not only for its function but also for the aesthetics and conceptual planning. A colonnade separated the nave from the ambulatory not only demarcate the two spaces for two different functions, but also to support the ceiling.

Amid such a historical set up, the plans of Buddhabhadra for his temple (Cave 26) was amazingly innovative. The addition of dwelling halls to the temple, and integrating them, within one single plan, one architectural space, one unit of donation, was something that was rarely attempted before. We could call it a breakthrough in the history of planning the sacred spaces within the architectural layout of *saṅghārāmas*; it was also a breakthrough in integrating the sacred and votive symbolism with material and mundane cultural of monastic living. The two distinct objectives that of worshipping and living, were now united within the same architectural space. The same integration was not yet achieved for the dwelling chambers yet; they would have to wait for a couple of years to do the same; albeit in the reverse order. In the case of Buddhabhadra's plans, it was the temple that became the receptor of the dwelling halls. In circa 466 it was the dwelling halls that beame the receptors of the Buddha shrine. The synthetic arrangement, invented indeed at Ajantā, was going to be carried forward to all the

other contemporary and future *saṅghārāmas*; such was the impact of the experiments achieved at Ajantā.