

*Dedicated to*  
S. R. RAO  
*and his staff at Ajanta*

PRINCE SUDHANA AND THE KINNARĪ  
An Indian Love-story in Ajanta

The tale of Prince Sudhana and his love to the *kinnara*-princess was widely spread in Buddhism. The story is included in the *Vinayas* of two Buddhist schools, viz. that of the Mahāsāṃghikas represented by the *Mahāvastu*<sup>1</sup> and that of the Mūlasarvāstivādins represented by the *Divyāvadāna*<sup>2</sup>. The version of the Mūlasarvāstivādins was of greater importance, as it became the starting-point of the diffusion of the story in Central and East Asia as well as in South-East Asia. The two extant poetical versions of the story, the *Sudhanakinnaryavadāna* of Kṣemendra<sup>3</sup> and the (Khotanese) Sudhana Poem of Rddhiprabhāva<sup>4</sup> are in close connection with the *Divyāvadāna*, though they do not relate to the *Divyāvadāna* story directly, but to some older

---

1. *Le Mahāvastu*, éd. E. Sénart, Paris, 1882-97, t. II, p. 94-105; transl. J. J. Jones, London 1952, Vol. II, p. 91-111. The Chinese version of the story in the *Liu-tu-chi-ching* (*Taishō Tripitaka* III, p. 1-52), which is in close connection with the *Mahāvastu*-story, is translated by É. Chavannes, *Cinq cents contes et apologues*, Paris 1910-34, t. I, p. 292-304.

2. *The Divyāvadāna*, ed. by E. B. Cowell and R. A. Neil, Cambridge 1886, p. 435-61. The text of the *Divyāvadāna* version is extracted from the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* of the *Vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivādin, the Gilgit manuscripts of which are published by N. Dutt, *Mūlasarvāstivāda-Vinayavastu* (= *Gilgit Mss.* III, 1), p. 123-49. The Tibetan version in the Kanjur is translated into German by A. Schiefner, *Mem. Acad. St. Petersburg*, XIX, 1873, p. 26-45, from this into English by W. R. S. RALSTON, *Tibetan Tales*, London 1882, p. 44-74. The Chinese version by I-ching is published in the *Taishō Tripitaka* XVII, 4, p. 50-54.

3. *Avadānakalpalatā* of Kṣemendra, ed. S. C. Das and S. C. Vidyābhūṣaṇa, (Bibl. Ind.), Calcutta 1888-1919, II, p. 319-413; new edition by P. L. Vaidya, *Darbhanga* 1959, II, p. 386-410; partly (verse 1-75) translated by J. Bhattacharya in: "Journal of the Buddhist Text Society of India", Vol. VI, pt. 4, Calcutta 1896, p. 15-18.

4. *The Sudhana Poem of Rddhiprabhāva*, by H. W. BAILEY, "Bull. of the School of Oriental and African Studies", Vol. 29, London, 1966, p. 506-32.

version now lost<sup>5</sup>. The story is told in the *Divyāvadāna* with the usual clichés and stock-phrases of Buddhist Sanskrit; its contents are as follows:

1. *The salvation of the nāga-youth by the huntsman*<sup>6</sup>.

Once upon a time the country of Pāñcāla was divided into two kingdoms. The king of North Pāñcāla was righteous, while the king of South Pāñcāla was wicked. Moreover, in a lake near the capital of North Pāñcāla there lived a *nāga*<sup>7</sup>, who caused the vital rain, while the kingdom of South Pāñcāla was droughty and famine-stricken. Consequently many people emigrated from South Pāñcāla and the kingdom became deserted. In order to counteract the drought and desertion of his realm, the king of South Pāñcāla resolved to take hold of the *nāga*. A snake-charmer (*abitundīka*), who was ordered to capture the *nāga*, explored the lake near the capital of North Pāñcāla. He spied out the abode of the *nāga* and resolved to catch him seven days later, after having procured the utensils. However, the *nāga* himself had perceived the snake-charmer. Foreseeing the imminent danger, he took his refuge to a huntsman (*lubdhaka*), who lived near the lake. The huntsman, out of pity and patriotism, promised to help him. Seven days later, when the snake-charmer had come to the lake and was about to violate the *nāga* by his charms,

---

5. A comparative analysis of the different versions of the story is given by PADMANABH S. JAINI, *The Story of Sudhana and Manoharā: An Analysis of the Texts and the Borobudur Reliefs*, Bull. of the School of Oriental and African Studies, Vol. 29, London 1966, p. 533-58. Additional versions not taken into consideration by Jaini are to be found in the *Bhadrakalpāvadāna*, No. 29 (cf. C. BENDALL, *Catalogue of Buddhist Sanskrit Mss. in the University Library*, Cambridge 1883, p. 91 (Add. 1411); *Sudhanakinnarajātakāvadāna*) and in Haribhatta's *Jātakamālā* (cf. F. W. THOMAS, *Notes from the Tanjur*, 6. *The Jātakamālā of Haribhatta*, JRAS 1904, p. 733).

6. *Divy.* p. 435-38; *Tib. Tales* p. 44-49; *Gilgit Mss.* III, 1, p. 123-28. In the *Mahāvastu* version the antecedents, viz. the salvation of the *nāga*-youth and the donation of the unfailling noose to the huntsman are missing; the story begins in *Mhv.* II, p. 94 with the capture of the *kinnarī*.

7. The *nāga* in our story is a kind of water-dragon, who is capable to cause rain and liable to be raised by the exorcism of a snake-charmer. However, he is able to assume human shape, so that the huntsman does not recognise his true nature. The *nāgas* in the paintings of cave I in Ajanta are depicted either as big serpents or as human-like beings with a crest of one or several snake-hoods, or even just as men. For a comprehensive study on the *nāgas* in literature and art see J. PH. VOGEL, *Indian Serpent-lore*, London, 1926.

the hunter sprang up, threatened the snake-charmer and compelled him to reverse his spell and finally killed him.

### 2. *The donation of the unfailing noose*<sup>8</sup>.

The *nāga*, being exceedingly grateful to the huntsman, invited him to his parents' palace. His parents showed every respect to the huntsman, dressed him according to his wishes and presented him with various gems. Later on, the huntsman met a hermit (*ṛṣi*), who advised him to ask the *nāgas* for the unfailing noose (*amoghapāśa*). The huntsman returned to the palace of the *nāgas*. At the entrance of their abode he perceived the unfailing noose, which, after some objections, was presented to him.

[After inserting the story of the birth and growth of prince Sudhana, son of king Dhana of North Pāñcāla<sup>9</sup>, reported in the conventional manner, the narration continues:].

### 3. *The capture of the kinnarī*<sup>10</sup>.

The huntsman, roaming to and fro, once met a hermit<sup>11</sup>, who lived near a beautiful lake since forty years. This hermit told him a marvellous story: every fortnight a *kinnara*-princess<sup>12</sup> appears at the lake together with her attendants; when they bathe, dance and sing, all the animals are enchanted by the sweetness of the spectacle. The huntsman decided to catch this princess. When she came again to her bathing-place, the huntsman layed an ambush for her and

8. *Divy.* p. 438-39; *Tib. Tales* p. 49-50; *Gilgit Mss.* III, 1, p. 128-30.

9. *Divy.* p. 439-42; *Tib. Tales* p. 50-53; *Gilgit Mss.* III, 1, p. 130-33.

10. *Divy.* p. 442-43; *Tib. Tales* p. 53-55; *Gilgit Mss.* III, 1, p. 133-35. In *Mhv.* II, p. 96-97 the hint to the capture of the *kinnarī* is given by the hermit; the capture is due, however, to the order of the king, who wants to perform a sacrifice of all beings.

11. The later Pāli version states, that this hermit is the same person as the above mentioned *ṛṣi*, who has given the advice concerning the unfailing noose.

12. The *kinnaras* and *kinnaris* in the paintings of Ajanta are sometimes depicted like semi-human beings with human head and trunk, but with tail feathers and legs of a bird. In our story, however, it is clearly stated that the *kinnarī* is of human shape, as in *Divy.* p. 444. She is described as being endowed with all signs of beauty of womanhood.

gined her by means of his unfailing noose. Hearing her anxious shrieks, the other *kinnarīs* fled away terrified. The huntsman was about to lay hands upon the princess, but she implored him not to touch her. As a guarantee not to fly away she pledged her crest-jewel (*cūḍāmaṇi*) to the huntsman; she always would be in the power of the person, who keeps this jewel.

#### 4. *The delivery of the kinnarī to prince Sudhana*<sup>13</sup>

About this time, prince Sudhana was out hunting. The huntsman, perceiving the prince and recognising that he was of equal rank with his captive, presented the *kinnarī* to Sudhana. Enchanted by her superhuman charm and beauty, the prince fell in love with her and took her with him.

#### 5. *The adventures of the kinnarī at the residence in Hastināpura*<sup>14</sup>.

Sudhana took the *kinnarī* to his father's residence and spent his time with her in mutual love and happiness. The good fortune, however, did not last forever: a court-intrigue caused the separation of the amorous couple. The king's private *brāhmaṇa*, being the court-chaplain (*purohita*), feared that prince Sudhana should invest his own private priest with the chaplainship of the court after his father's death. Consequently he searched for a chance to exterminate the young prince. The rebellion of some provincial town (*kārvatika*) seemed to give him an opportunity: the wicked chaplain advised the king, as several expeditionary armies were annihilated by the rebels, to send the prince personally on the fatal expedition. The king agreed, and prince Sudhana took leave of his family, after having given the crest-jewel of the *kinnarī* in charge of his mother. However, the malicious plan of the chaplain was crossed by some gods, which helped the prince to subdue the rebels without any fight. This fa-

---

13. *Divy.* p. 443-45; *Tib. Tales* p. 55-56; *Gilgit Mss.* III, 1, p. 135-37. In *Mhv.* II, p. 98-99 the prince, who is the son of a neighbour king attending the sacrifice, falls in love with the *kinnarī* and rescues her by persuading the king not to perform the sacrifice.

14. *Divy.* p. 445-49; *Tib. Tales* p. 56-62; *Gilgit Mss.* III, 1, p. 137-43. In *Mhv.* II, p. 100-01 the prince is compelled to abandon the *kinnarī*, as he neglects his duties while amusing with her.

vourable turn was indicated to the king by an auspicious dream. The *brāhmaṇa*, however, misinterpreted this dream as inauspicious: the calamity indicated by the dream, he pretended, could only be averted by a ghastly sacrifice, in which the *kinnarī* was the main victim. The malicious chaplain calculated, that the returning prince would die by grief when he heard that his beloved one was immolated. The king hesitated to yield to the priest, but in fear of his own life he finally agreed and gave order to arrange the sacrifice. The *kinnarī* became aware of the conspiracy and took refuge to Sudhana's mother. The queen, considering the danger to the *kinnarī*'s life, gave her back her crest-jewel. When the priest was about to seize the *kinnarī*, she soared up and fled away.

#### 6. *Flight and home-journey of the kinnarī*<sup>15</sup>.

On her way home, the *kinnarī* turned to the hermit who once had betrayed her into the hands of the huntsman, entertaining the vague hope, that, whenever the prince would search after her, he would investigate this hermit. She pledged her seal-ring to the hermit and asked him to advise the prince of her journey. The hermit should give her seal-ring to the prince, but dissuade him from following her, as the travel to her home would be too dangerous. However, if his longing for her would be so great that he would disregard the dangers, the hermit should describe him the way to the *kinnara*-land. Now the *kinnarī* delineated this way, enumerating the mountains and torrents to be crossed and the strange and ferocious beings to be subdued. Then she paid homage to the hermit and flew to her father's palace.

#### 7. *Prince Sudhana's adventurous travel to the kinnara-land*<sup>16</sup>.

With his army the victorious prince returned to the residence at Hastināpura. After having saluted his father, he looked in vain for his mistress, and little by little he acknowledged what had hap-

---

15. *Divy.* p. 449-51; *Tib. Tales* p. 62-64; *Gilgit Mss.* III 1, p. 143-46. In *Mbv.* II, p. 102 the *kinnarī* pledges her seal-ring to two huntsmen.

16. *Divy.* p. 451-57; *Tib. Tales* p. 64-71; *Gilgit Mss.* III, 1, p. 146-54.

pened. Overwhelmed by grief and yearning, the prince was absorbed in reflections how to get back his beloved one. At first he turned to the huntsman, who once had dedicated the princess to him. This huntsman rightly directed him to the hermit. Now the prince, determined to undertake the pilgrimage, left his home under the cover of night. In lyrical stanzas he queried the moon, a gazelle, a bee, a snake, a cuckoo and an Aśoka tree whether they had seen his sweetheart<sup>17</sup>. Finally he reached the lake and the hermitage, where the *kinnarī* once was captured. The hermit informed him on the visit of the *kinnarī* and handed him over her seal-ring. According to the description of the princess the hermit depicted the way to the *kinnara*-land, the dangers of the travel and the means to surmount these dangers. Prince Sudhana took into consideration the words of the hermit and set out on his journey. As the *kinnarī* had told, he passed the great mountains of the Himālaya, killed dreadful and weird beasts, crossed torrential streams filled with strange and dangerous monsters, and finally, having met with many adventures, he reached the homeland of the *kinnarī*.

#### 8. *Sudhana's meeting with the water-fetching maid-servants*<sup>18</sup>.

The *kinnara*-palace was surrounded by beautiful parks with ponds and tanks. Prince Sudhana perceived some maid-servants fetching water; he came to know that they were going to bathe the princess. He dropped her seal-ring in one of the jars and asked the jar-bearer to pour the water of this jar first of all over the princess.

#### 9. *Sudhana's recognition and concealment by the kinnarī*<sup>19</sup>.

The maid-servant poured the water over the head of the princess and the seal-ring fell into her lap. Immediately she became aware

---

17. These stanzas remind us of a similar scene in act IV of Kālidāsa's *Vikramorvaśīyam*, where the king queries several non-human beings, whether they have seen his mistress. This similarity is discussed by A. GAWRÓŃSKI, *Notes sur le sources de quelques drames Indiens*, 1921, p. 18-39.

18. *Divy.* p. 457-58, *Tib. Tales* p. 71; *Gilgit Mss.* III, 1, p. 154-55; *Mahāvastu* II, p. 109-10.

19. *Divy.* p. 458; *Tib. Tales* p. 71; *Gilgit Mss.* III, 1, p. 155. In *Mhv.* II, p. 110-11 the *kinnarī*, having recognised her seal-ring, reports the arrival of the prince to her father, who agrees that the lovers become reunited.

that her lover had arrived and she asked the servant whether any man had come. The maid affirmed this and the princess ordered her to let him enter by stealth. So the prince was introduced into the palace and placed at a concealed spot.

10. *The kinnarī's petition to her father*<sup>20</sup>.

Now the princess called on her father and asked him in cautious words, how he would deal with the man who had raped her. At first the king seemed to be very angry; he affirmed, that he would cut this man into a hundred pieces. However, as the princess left it to his consideration, that it would be nearly impossible for a human being to reach the *kinnara*-land, the king gave in and confirmed, that he would be disposed to legalise the liaison.

11. *Prince Sudhana's trial and his marriage to the kinnarī*<sup>21</sup>.

Now the princess presented Sudhana to her father, who was pleased by his gentle ways. However, the prince had to pass a number of trials before the *kinnarī* was given in marriage to him: He cut to pieces with his sword golden pillars, he pierced with his arrow seven cymbals, seven drums and seven tympan and finally he recognised his beloved one out of a group of maidens looking exactly like her<sup>22</sup>. Having passed this examinations, the prince got the *kinnarī* out of the hands of her father, who implored him to leave her never and never. Then the couple lived together at the residence of the *kinnara*-king in mutual love and happiness.

12. *The return of Sudhana and the kinnarī to Hastināpura*<sup>23</sup>.

After some time had passed, Sudhana was overcome by longing for his parents and for his home-country. The *kinnarī* informed her father, and the king allowed her to follow her husband to his native land. Through the air they went to Hastināpura. Great was the joy

20. *Divy.* p. 458; *Tib. Tales* p. 71-72; *Gilgit Mss.* III, 1, p. 155-56.

21. *Divy.* p. 458-60; *Tib. Tales* p. 72-73; *Gilgit Mss.* III, 1, p. 156-58.

22. Trials of this kind are typical for the ideal world of the epic noblemen.

23. *Divy.* p. 460; *Tib. Tales* p. 73-74; *Gilgit Mss.* III, 1, p. 158-59; *Mhv.* III, 1, p. 158-59; *Mhv.* II, p. 111-13.

at their arrival, and Sudhana's father, seeing that his son was in possession of all virtues, bestowed him with the royal power. Sudhana ruled the kingdom with piety and righteousness.

Whoever reads this story may be captivated by the poetical charm and ethical spirit of the narration. The romantic motive of the affection of a man to a superhuman being, the mutual love of the couple confirmed by their separation, their fidelity in the dangers of life, all these subjects effect a composition equal in rank to the other great love-stories of India. On no account this composition is of Buddhist origin. The hero, who endures all dangers with the only aim to become reunited with his beloved one does not in any case represent the ideal of a Buddhist moralist. Consequently, as the hero has to be identified with the Bodhisatva, the only Buddhist virtue (*pāramitā*) which may be ascribed to him is the courage (*vīrya*) which he discloses to gain back his mistress<sup>24</sup>. Nevertheless, we must be grateful to the Buddhists for having handed down this story and for having inspired its artistic representations.

Three figurative representations of the Sudhana story were known hitherto: four panels of a relief-frieze at Nāgārjunikoṇḍa<sup>25</sup> are showing four scenes relating to the *Mahāvastu*-version; a wall-painting in a Central-Asian cave<sup>26</sup>, only partly preserved, depicts three scenes from the beginning of the story on the basis of the *Divyāvadāna* version; the reliefs at the Borobudur in Java<sup>27</sup> represent the story in 20 scenes in accordance with a post-canonical Pāli text belonging to the *Divyāvadāna* tradition.

24. *Divy.* p. 435; *mayānuttarasamyaksambodhiprāptaye dānāni dattāni puṇyāni kṛtāni vīryapāramitā ca paṭipūritā*.

25. Identified by J. PH. VOGEL, *The Man in the Well and some other Subjects illustrated at Nāgārjunikoṇḍa*, *Revue des Arts Asiatiques*, Vol. XI, Paris, 1937, p. 119-21.

26. Identified by J. CHARPENTIER, *Rev. of A.v. Le Coq, Die Buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien*, 3. u. 4. Teil, *Bull. of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 3, London, 1925, p. 817f.; cf. E. WALDSCHMIDT in *Die Buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien*, 6. Teil, Berlin, 1928, p. 38.

27. Identified by S. F. OLDENBURG, *Zametki o buddijskom iskusstve*, *Vost. Zap.*, p. 337-65, St. Petersburg 1895, (transl. from the Russian by L. Wiener, *Journ. of the Americ. Or. Soc.* XVIII, Pt. 1, p. 183-201). Cf. A. FOUCHER, *Notes d'archéologie bouddhique*, *Bull de l'Ecole Franc. d'Extrême-Orient* IX, Hanoi 1909, p. 12-18, fig. 6-9; N. J. KROM + T. VAN ERP, *Beschrijving van Barabudur*, 's-Gravenhage 1920-31, p. 219-35; P.S. Jaini, *op. cit.*, p. 553f.



Visiting the caves of Ajanta in October 1969, I had the pleasure to identify another artistic representation of the Sudhana story. On the wall of the front aisle of cave I (fig. 1), to the left of the main entrance, in the first place the story of King Śibi and the pigeon is painted. Further to the right, on the upper part of the wall from the window to the small door right of it, the representation of a vast palace is visible (fig. 2). A mountain-range and clouds behind this palace seem to indicate that it is situated in the highlands. 90 years ago, John Griffiths had copied parts of this painting in two pictures (fig. 3)<sup>28</sup>, which represent the painting in a far better state of preservation than the modern photographs. The left picture (fig. 4) shows an elevated terrace outside the palace, where a lady is reclining on a couch, surrounded by six maid-servants. Two of these servants, the one behind the lady's head and the other above her legs, are pouring water on her body<sup>29</sup>. A servant sitting at the feet of the lady and the lady herself are gazing to a point downwards, where the water poured over the lady's head must have run. Something should have been visible at this point, but unfortunately is no longer traceable. Remembering the narration of the Sudhana story, the coincidence with the scene in which the *kinnarī* recognises the seal-ring in the water poured over her head (9.) seems obvious. The scene depicts just the moment, when the *kinnarī* in perceiving the seal-ring becomes aware that her lover has arrived. Further down

---

28. J. GRIFFITHS, *The Paintings in the Buddhist Cave-Temples of Ajanta*, Vol. I, London, 1896, Plate 10 and 11. The retracing of carbon copy of a small detail is published by Lady CH. J. HERRINGHAM, *Ajanta Frescoes*, London, 1915, Pl XLI (53). A line drawing of the left part of the palace is given in A. GHOSH, *Ajanta Murals, An Album of 85 reproductions in colour, Archaeological Survey of India*, New Delhi, 1967, Fig. 2. Photographs of details are published in the following publications: V. GOLOUBEV, *Documents pour servir à l'étude d'Ajanta*, Ars Asiatica X, Paris, 1927, Pl. XIV; G. YAZDANI, *Ajanta, The Colour and Monochrome Reproductions of the Ajanta Frescoes based on Photography*, Part I, Plates VI-IX; A. GHOSH, *Ajanta Murals*, Pl. VI-III. Our description and delineation is based on the publication of Griffiths, completed by photographs taken by the author.

29. The oldest extant description of this scene is given by Mr. Ralph in his vivid record on the Ajanta paintings to J. Prinsep in JASB V, 1836, p. 558: "Here is a woman on a chārpāe or some stage with legs: See, they are bathing her: do you observe the ghara of water in the woman's hand above? How well executed that figure is; the fore-shortening of the arms; the waist — are not her haunches too full? No. Go farther off, and you will see the figure in a better light: it is correct. This beauty has delicate drapery — nearly falling to the knee: it is transparent, like sky-coloured gauze".

to the right, in the door leading to the elevated terrace, we notice the maid-servant bearing on her shoulder the water-jar containing the seal-ring.

In the palace further to the right (fig. 5) we again perceive the *kinnarī* engaged in conversation with a maid-servant. The contents of this conversation are indicated by the pose of her left hand, stretching out the little finger, bending the two next fingers and making a loop with forefinger and thumb. The meaning of this sign becomes evident by comparing decorative paintings of loving couples, in which one of the lovers makes just the same sign<sup>30</sup>. Consequently in our painting the *kinnarī* talking with her attendant expresses her affection for her lover. Separated from this group by two pillars two more figures are painted, a sitting male person and a standing female servant carrying a tray<sup>31</sup>. In the centre of the palace-area, yet concealed in a door-like structure, we perceive prince Sudhana, dressed in the white robe of a pilgrim and still holding the walking-staff in his left hand<sup>32</sup>. With his right hand he makes the same sign of affection as the *kinnarī* does with her left hand. The right part of the palace represents the throne-room of the *kinnara*-king. The king is sitting on his throne, surrounded by female attendants. The upper part of his body is lost now, but we may imagine that the king is engaged in discussion with his daughter, who is standing behind the throne. The theme of their conversation seems to be evident: The *kinnarī* is trying to familiarise her father with the fact of her lover's arrival (10.). In this way the painter has produced a logical arrangement of the palace-area: On the left side he has depicted the domain of the princess, on the right side that of the king, and in the centre, —

---

30. Cf. the loving couple in the fourth compartment of the panel over the entrance of cave 17 (YAZDANI, Part III, 1946, Pl. LXIX; GHOSH, Pl. LXIII) or the flying *kinnara*-couple from the ceiling-decoration of cave 17 (GHOSH, Pl. LXXVII).

31. These persons have no special relations to the story depicted; they represent the typical attendants of the palace-scenes in the Ajanta paintings. The tray of the female servant seems to contain two seal-rings, which may refer to the recognition-ring or to the statement of the text, that the prince, before being introduced to the *kinnara*-king, was provided with celestial ornaments.

32. YAZDANI, *Ajanta I*, p. 8f. calls this scene "A Bhikshu at the Palace-door", ignoring the fact, that the Buddhist monks depicted in Ajanta in conformity with the Vinaya rules never wear ornaments. Ghosh, *Ajanta Murals* Fig. 2, explains the person as Nanda, taking off his ornaments in renunciation. Ghosh overlooks the exact pose of the man, who does not take off his ornaments with his left hand, but who holds a walking staff.

directed to the left, yet invisible from both sides, — Prince Sudhana, the hero of the scene.

The other events of the story taking place in the realm of the *kinnara*-king are laid in a region outside the palace-building: Sudhana's meeting with the maid-servants at the tank (8.), later on his trial and marriage (11.) and finally his leaving of the fairy-land with his wife (12.). This region once was painted to the right of the palace, in the very corner of the front aisle. Unfortunately the fragments now left are so scanty, that it seems rather difficult to explain the details of the scene. Beyond a banana-tree at the palace-wall a rectangular pond may be seen; a lady is sitting at its right rim. This lady is looking up attentively to some other persons above the pond. We may suppose that these persons should be Prince Sudhana and the water-fetching maidens (8.), but there is no proof of it.

The events at the palace of the *kinnara*-king, in particular Sudhana's recognition by means of the seal-ring poured in the bathing-water of the *kinnarī*, are common to all versions of the Sudhana story. Consequently the scenes painted on the wall of the front aisle are not suitable to determine the exact version used by the painter as a basis of the pictures. The main difference between the two principal versions of the story in the *Mahāvastu* and in the *Divyāvadāna* may be found in the very beginning: the antecedents which caused the capture of the *kinnarī*, viz. the salvation of the *nāga* by the huntsman (1.) and the donation of the unfailing noose to the huntsman in the *nāga*-palace (2.) are peculiarities of the *Divyāvadāna* version missing in the *Mahāvastu*. If these scenes of the beginning were ever painted in the Ajanta representation of the story, we have to suppose that they were painted not on the wall of the front aisle, but on the side-wall further to the right (fig. 6). Indeed on this side-wall we perceive a palace and in it a king, who, — characterised as *nāga*-king by a halo of seven hoods over his head, — is sitting on a throne-cushion together with his queen<sup>33</sup>. We remember the events narrated in connection with the donation of the unfailing

---

33. Copy by J. GRIFFITHS, Pl. 12; Photograph by V. GOLOUBEV, Pl. XLVI; M. SINGH, *Ajanta*, New York, 1965, Pl. 21 (detail). Line-drawing by Syed Ahmad in YAZDANI, *Ajanta* I, Pl. Xa.

noose: The huntsman, having been presented by the *nāgas* with clothes and gems, at the advice of the hermit had come back to the *nāga*-palace to ask for the unfailing noose. Perceiving the noose at the entrance and entering the palace, he again was respectfully greeted by the *nāga* youth and by the other *nāgas*, which waited on him and presented him with gems. The huntsman, however, refused the gems and asked the *nāga* for the unfailing noose. The *nāga* youth made some objections, but finally, out of gratitude, he asked his parents for permission. With their consent he presented the noose to the untsman.

The painted scene (fig. 6 and 8) seems to reproduct this event exactly. As already mentioned, the *nāga*-king is sitting on the right side of the throne-hall with his wife, attended by a chauri-bearer, a *brāhmaṇa* and a tray-carrying lady behind the pillar. On the left side of the throne-hall, separated from the main room by a pillar, the huntsman is standing, dressed with the beautiful robe presented to him by the *nāgas* and attended by two ladies. He is expressing his application by the sign of his hands. The object of his application, the unfailing noose, is hanging in the form of a spiral snare at the pillar before him. Between the huntsman and the *nāga*-king the *nāga* youth is sitting, still in human fashion without snake-hood<sup>34</sup>. He demonstrates his intervening position by turning his body slightly towards his parents, whilst his face is turned to the huntsman. The other persons in the room are a dwarf-servant sitting at the feet of the *nāga*-king, a waitress with a tray in her left and two sticks in her right hand and finally a group of three musicians, one male and two female.

The scene to the right of the *nāga*-palace is partly damaged; however, sufficient fragments are preserved to reveal its contents (fig. 8). On the right side of the painting, in the midst of a blooming meadow, a pond is visible. A bathing lady in this pond is looking eagerly up to the left. As the story tells us, the huntsman, after having gained the unfailing noose, caught the *kinnara* princess at the lake, while the other *kinnarīs* fled away terrified (3.). Accordingly, in the centre of the picture, at the bank of the lake, a stool is traceable, which may have served as a seat for the princess. This seat seems to be vacated. Under the stool lies a cloth-fan,

34. Cf. Divy. p. 437: *Janmacitro nāgapotaḥ ... manuṣyaveśam āsthāya halakasya lubdhakasya sakāśam gataḥ.*

as used by attendants to fan persons of noble birth. Evidently the attendant had disappeared and, making her escape, had left the fan. To the left of the stool a lady may be traced. Her body is slanting towards the left, as it were drawn from the stool and falling. The head of the lady is no longer preserved, but there is little doubt that she is the *kinnarī* just in the moment of her capture. Below the princess we notice the head of a male person looking up to her with great excitement: the huntsman. Little remains to appreciate the artistic value of this highly dramatic scene; the identification, however, seems to be free from doubt.

Below this scene, on the right side of the cell-door, the uppermost part of another picture is preserved, indicating a palace-court. We may suppose that this picture once presented the events at the residence of Sudhana's father in Hastināpura (5.), to which the captured *kinnarī* was led, after being delivered by the huntsman to the prince (4.). On the left side of this cell-door, below the *nāga*-palace, the events of the very beginning of the story, viz. the salvation of the *nāga*-youth by the huntsman (1.) may have been painted. The wall of the front aisle to the right and to the left of the side-door below the *kinnara*-palace may have presented the later events of the story, in particular the *kinnarī*'s flight (6.) and Sudhana's adventurous travel (7.) to the *kinnara*-palace. Though we may regret the loss of all these scenes, we may console ourselves with the charm and beauty of the paintings preserved.

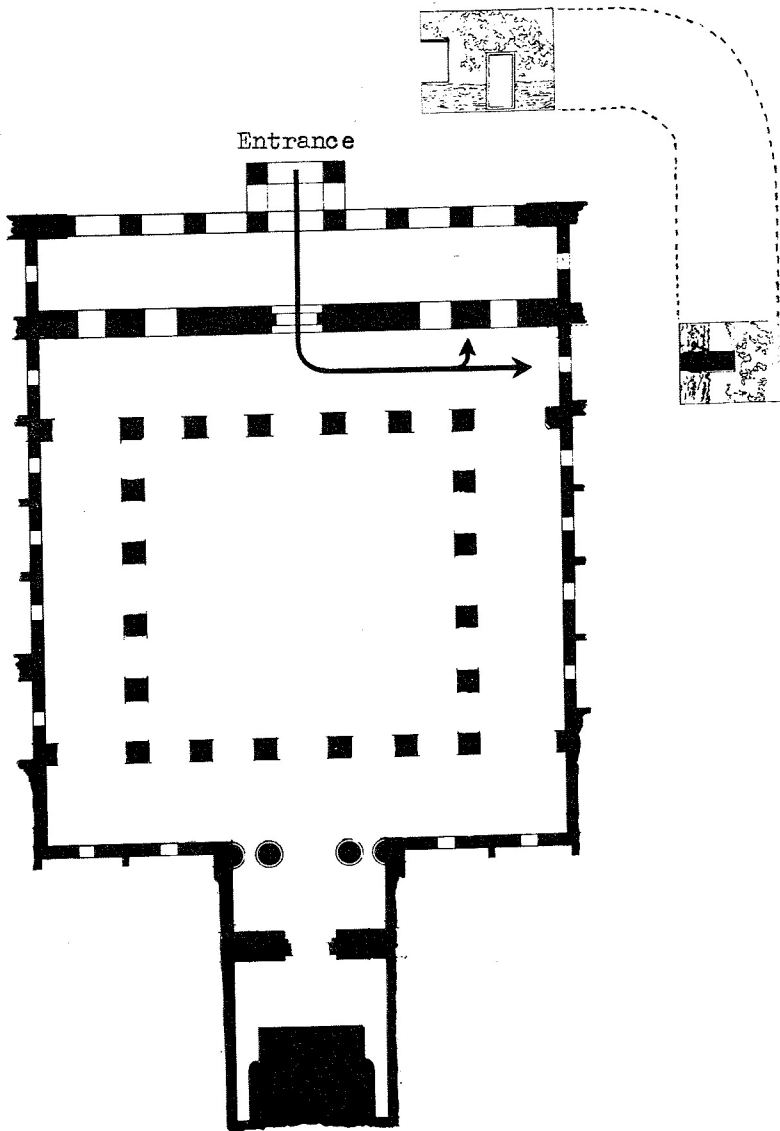


Fig. 1: Ajanta, Cave I  
Position of the Sudhana-Kinnari story

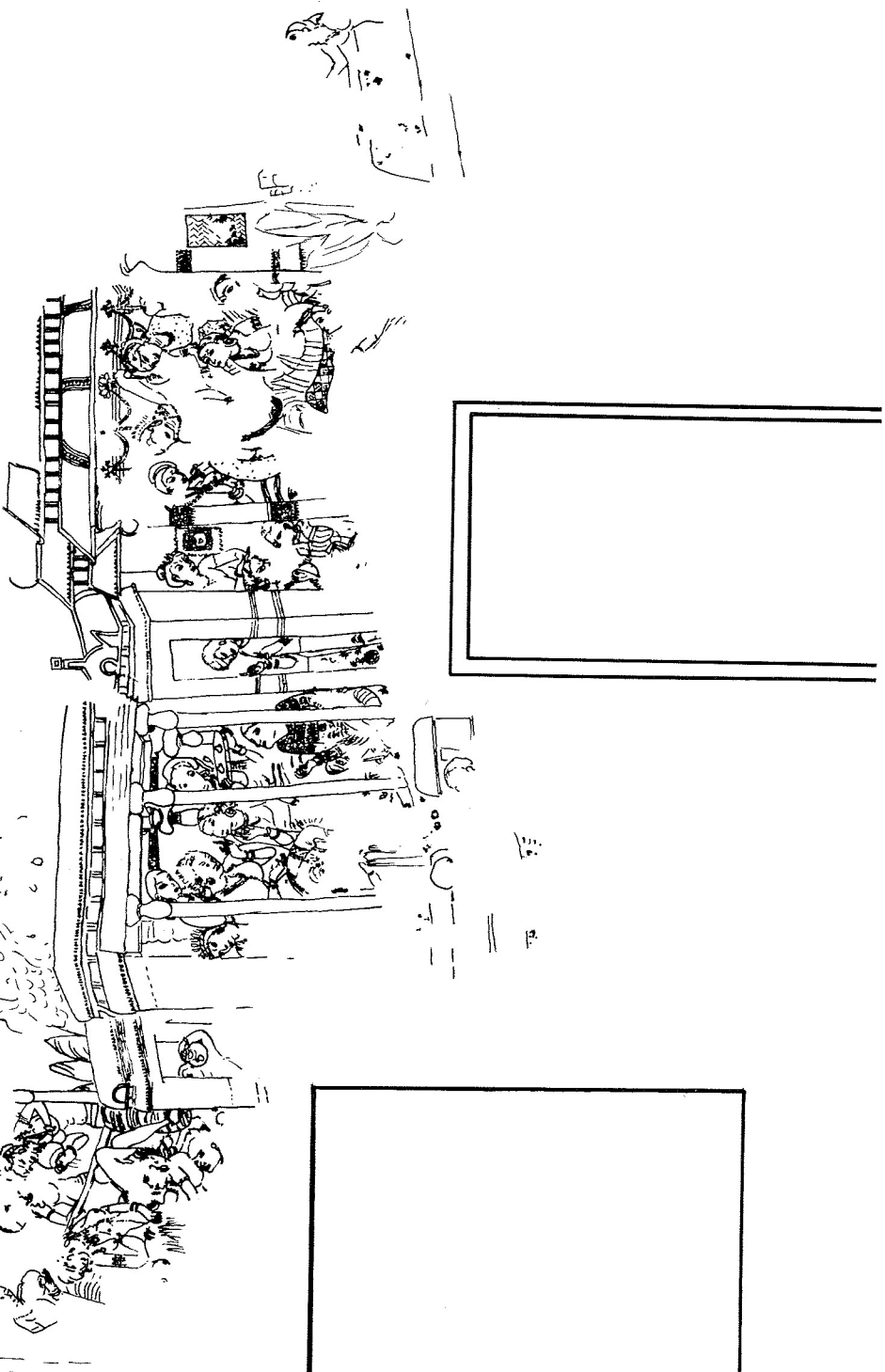


Fig. 2: The Kinnara-Palace

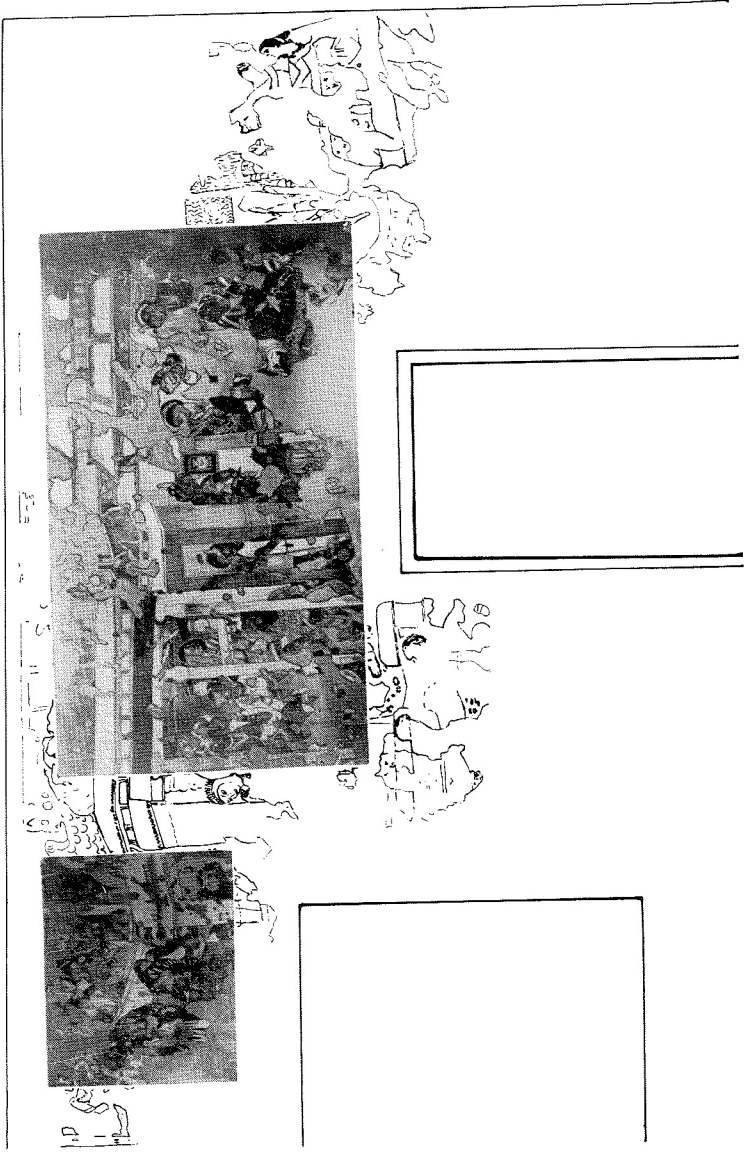


Fig. 3: Position of Griffiths' copies Pl. 10 b and Pl. 11





Fig. 4: The bathing Kinnarī (Griffiths Pl. 10 b)

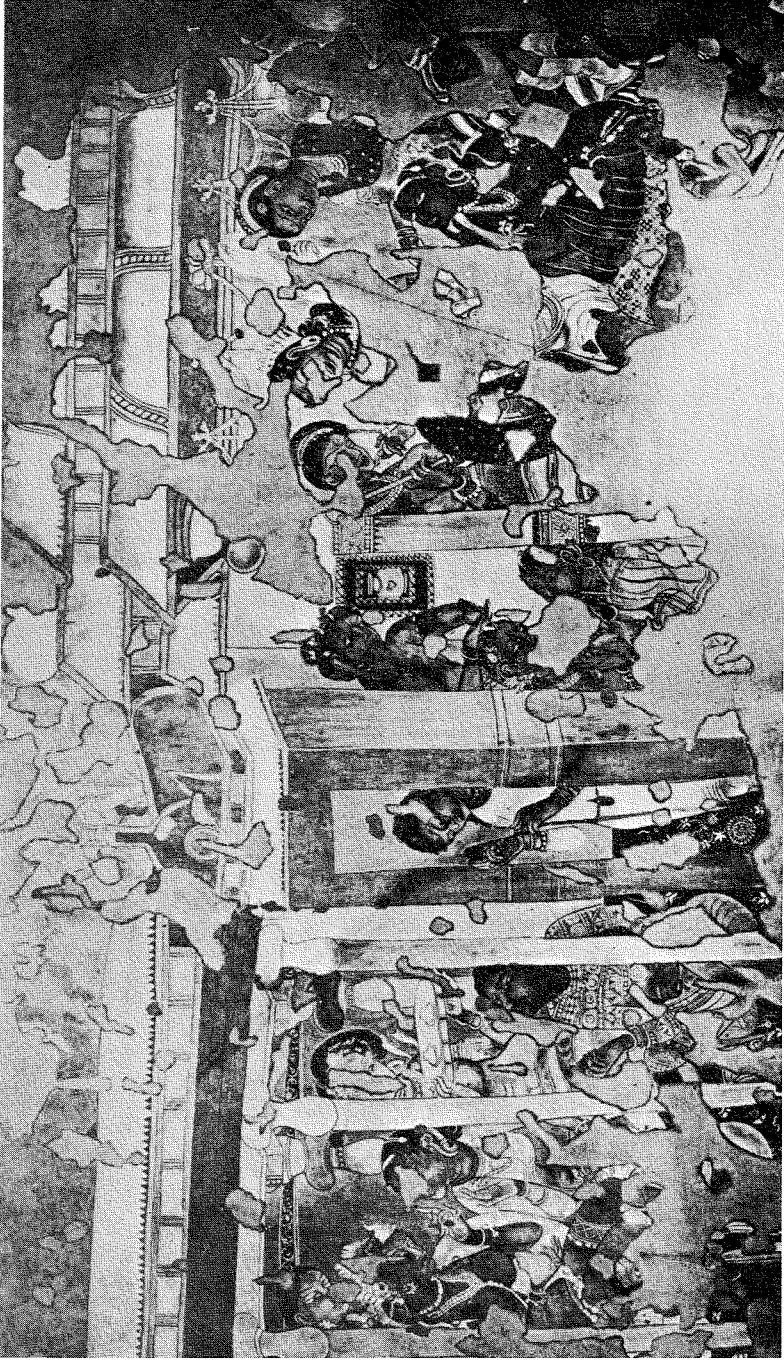


Fig. 5: The events in the Kinnara-palace (Griffiths Pl. 11)

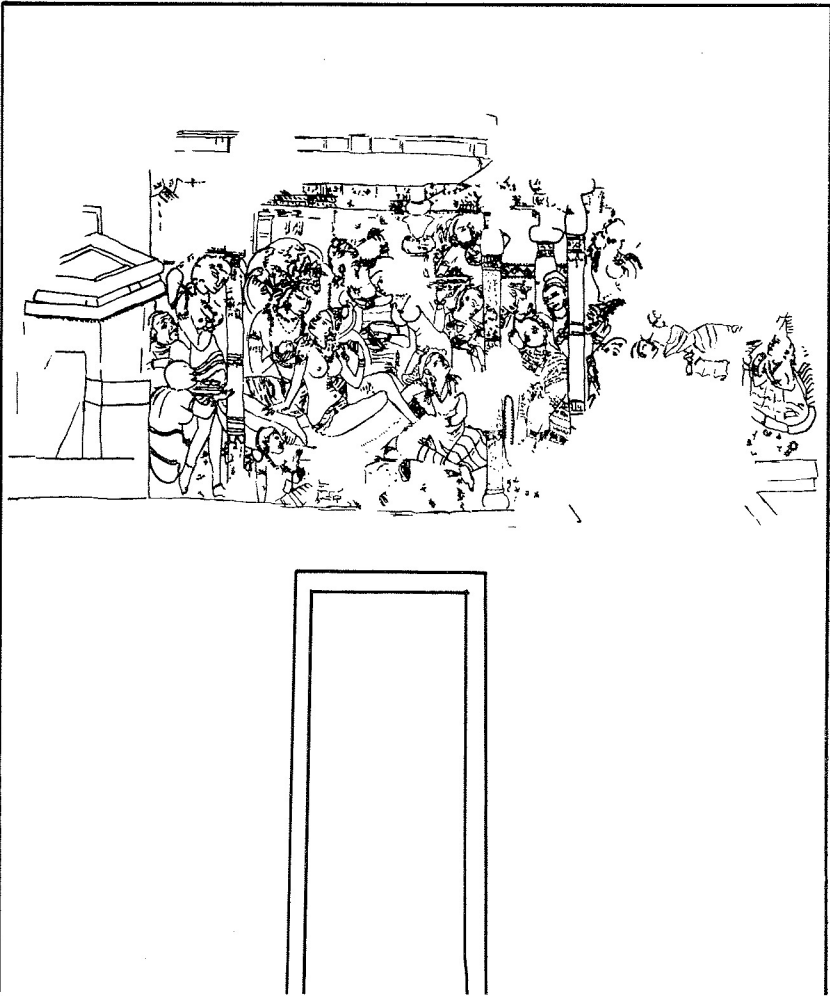


Fig. 6: The Nāga-palace



Fig. 7: Position of Griffiths' copy Pl. 12



Fig. 8: The events in the Nāga-palace (Griffiths Pl. 12)