

MAGAO GROTTOS, DUNHUANG

An Exhibition of Buddhist Cave Paintings from China

20th Dec 1991 - 3rd Feb. 1992

Matighar, IGNC



The murals of Dunhuang are a rare cultural heritage of mankind. Popularly called the "Mogao Grottoes", the 492 caves are covered with 45,000 sq. metres of mural paintings, 2,415 stucco images of the Buddha and Bodhisattva. Their antiquity ranges from the 4th century to the 14th century. The murals began with Northern Liang (421-439), and Northern Wei (439-534) down to the Yuan (Mongol) Dynasty (1127-1368). This unparalleled heritage of mankind symbolises a deep synthesis of several artistic traditions of Asia, particularly, India and Central Asia.

Anyone wishing to see the originals has to traverse the Gobi desert, go to Gansu Province. For many years, the caves were closed to public view.

These murals have been copied by great Chinese artists with patience, perseverance and rare fidelity. Prof. Duan Wenjie and Prof. Shi Weixiang, along with others, have been engaged in copying these mural paintings over the last 40 years. Today, these constitute a unique documentation of the original murals. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts is privileged to host this exhibition in collaboration with the Dunhuang Academy at the Mogao Grottoes.

The Exhibition comprises 55 copies of mural paintings. These have been divided into nine sections. The themes of the paintings range from Chinese version of the Jataka stories to the life of the Bodhisattvas specially Manjusri and Avalokitesvara and visual representations of other Chinese myths.

Stylistically, the murals reflect the affinities with the Indian and other Central Asian traditions as also some very distinctive Chinese features. Many motifs common to Asian traditions -- the Meru / Sumeru, the flying figures, the Nagas -- are in evidence. So also are the abstract designs of the Mandalas and geometrical patterns of the ceiling.

These copies will evoke associative memories of murals of the caves of India and the reminiscences of murals from Central Asia in the National Museum in New Delhi.

Period	Dates
--------	-------

1	Northern Liang	(421-439 A.D.)
2	Northern Wei	(439-534 A.D.)

3	Western Wei	(535-556 A.D.)
4	Northern Zhou	(557-581 A.D.)
5	Sui	(581-618 A.D.)
6	Tang	(618-907 A.D.)
7	Five Dynasties	(907-960 A.D.)
8	Western Xia	(1036-1227 A.D.)
9	Yuan	(1227-1368 A.D.)