

A MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS

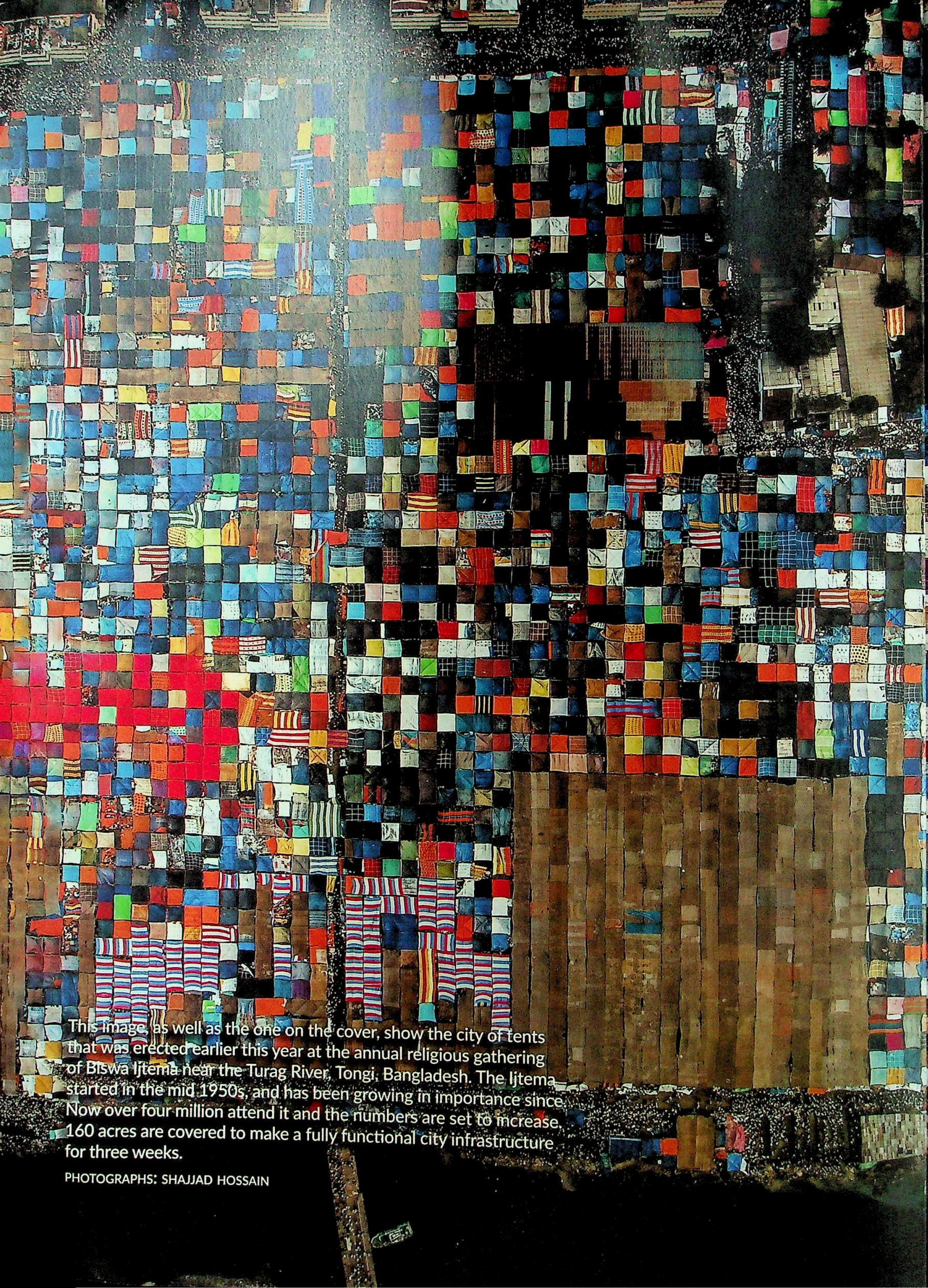
Märq

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# *Tents*

CITIES ON  
THE MOVE





This image, as well as the one on the cover, show the city of tents that was erected earlier this year at the annual religious gathering of Biswa Ijtema near the Turag River, Tongi, Bangladesh. The Ijtema started in the mid 1950s, and has been growing in importance since. Now over four million attend it and the numbers are set to increase. 160 acres are covered to make a fully functional city infrastructure for three weeks.

PHOTOGRAPHS: SHAJJAD HOSSAIN



An aerial photograph of a vast industrial site, likely a textile recycling or waste management facility. The foreground and middle ground are filled with hundreds of large, rectangular bales of fabric or textile waste, stacked in neat rows. These bales are a vibrant mix of colors, including red, blue, yellow, green, and white, creating a mosaic-like pattern from above. In the background, there are several large, dark industrial buildings with complex roof structures, including one with a prominent grid-like skylight. The entire scene is set against a backdrop of dark, dense trees and foliage, suggesting a rural or semi-rural location. The lighting is bright, casting shadows that emphasize the three-dimensional nature of the bales.

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# AJANTA AND DAMBULLA

## TENTS AND AWNINGS IN ANCIENT CAVE PAINTINGS

BY YASHADATTA S. ALONE AND PACKIYANATHAN AHILAN

1. Cave 17, *Sutasoma Jataka*, the bathing of the prince for consecration under the cloth pavilion, dated to late fifth century AD.

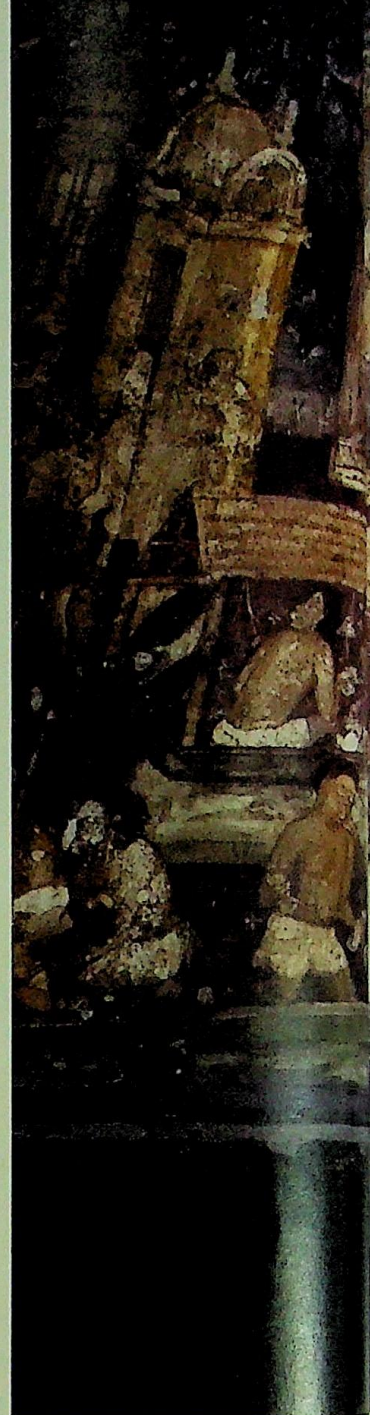
COURTESY Y.S. ALONE.

2. Cave 17, *Simhala Avadana*, showing demons in the company of merchants in houses and pavilions, dated to late fifth century AD.

COURTESY ROHIT UKEY.

Tents and pavilions make occasional appearances in the paintings of the Ajanta Caves near Aurangabad in Maharashtra, amid other architectural spaces such as chaityas and palaces that are distinctly depicted all over the walls. The tents and pavilions are placed in courtyards, gardens and other open spaces, or shown as extensions to buildings. The paintings of Cave 17 have an especially elaborate depiction of bamboo tents. Here, the narrative of *Indra Brahmana* features people taking shelter under a bamboo pavilion with a *jhallar* (a long strip of patterned fabric cut into a series of downward triangles and used as decoration). In the episode of the *Mriga Jataka*, a king listens to the sermon of the golden deer in a pavilion erected especially for this event. In the *Nalagiri* episode painted in the verandah of Cave 17, townspeople are shown peering out of their houses with shocked expressions, fearful of the elephant rampaging the street below. Some of them have raised the cloth or blinds used to cover their balconies, for a better view. In the *Hamsa Jataka*, the Hamsa Bodhisattva is accorded a place of honour under a special bamboo pavilion with a pyramidal cloth roof.

Y.S.A.





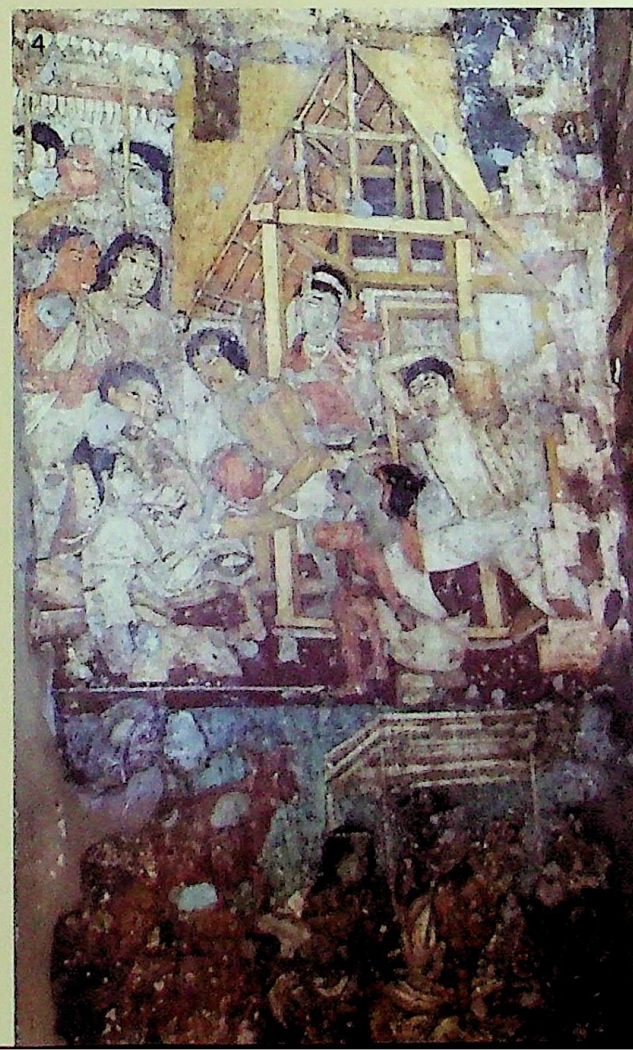


3. Cave 17, The subjugation of the elephant Nalagiri. People are shown raising the cloth blinds of their galleries and watching the scene, dated to late fifth century AD.

COURTESY DEBANJAN.

4. Cave 17, Shibi Jataka. People assembled for food under a cloth pavilion. In the lower cloth pavilion in the palace courtyard, the king is seated and removing his eye to offer in gift, dated to late fifth century AD.

COURTESY Y.S. ALONE.

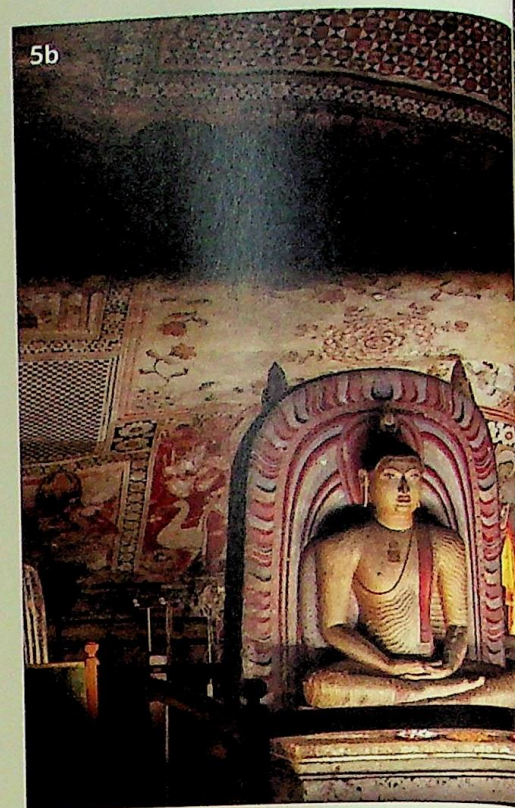
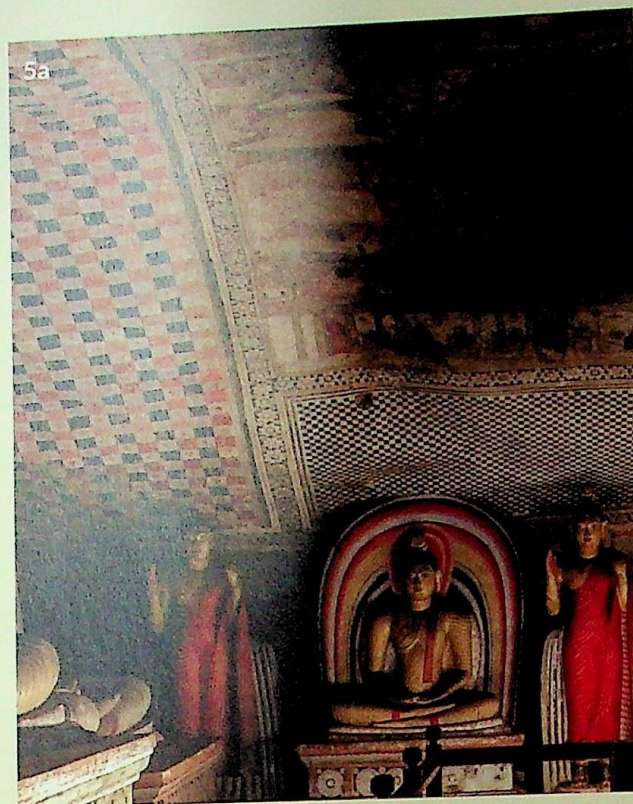




In the central province of Sri Lanka, the monolithic mass of Dambulla rises 600 feet above the surrounding plains. It covers roughly 2,000 square metres and comprises five major caves. The walls and ceilings of the Dambulla caves are painted to simulate textiles, producing, in the interior of the caves, the feeling of being inside a tented enclosure. This “textilisation” of rock surfaces probably sought to imitate a long tradition of impermanent structures like the *panthal* (Tamil; canopy, marquee) or *maduva* (Sinhala), which were built for various religious and ceremonial events and often utilised white or printed cloth.

The textile panels, called *vithanam* or *wiyana* in Tamil and Sinhala, used in these impermanent buildings sometimes carried paintings of episodes from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Similarly, the murals on the interior walls and roofs of the Dambulla caves narrate Jataka stories, tales of multiplying Buddhas, of gods and nobles, and folk legends. This vibrant display includes painted allegories about the tensions between the monastery and the monarchy that still continue to enthrall visitors. Dambulla provides evidence that makeshift, temporary structural forms informed and inspired permanent spaces. Today, the reverse is true and motifs from Dambulla are common in textile designs and represented in objects and sculptures.

P.A.



5a & 5b. Western Cave, Dambulla temple cluster.

COURTESY PACKIYANATHAN AHILAN.

6-8. Cave of the Great Kings, Dambulla temple cluster.

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