

Kanheri: A Prominent Buddhist Center of Early India

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Abstract

The scattered references to Kanheri can be found in various works by scholars related to the study of art, history and Buddhist monasticism. This study is a survey of the inscriptions focusing on the patronage patterns at the Buddhist monastic establishment of Kanheri. Matters of importance like the life of monastics at Kanheri would be discussed. The work tries to convey what the Buddhist monastic site of Kanheri wants to tell its visitors about itself through its monuments, sculptures, inscriptions, and archaeological space. The inscriptional study conducted suggests that donors from different sections of society made donations together; corporate gifts, as well as individual contributions, existed. The analysis of the inscriptions also raises the possibility that the contributors occasionally came from distinct nearby and distant locations rather than from the same area. Kanheri has its peculiarities like its water management system, its role as a religious, and educational center, and the existence of different practices affiliated to different Buddhist schools.

[Keywords: Buddhism, Inscriptions, caves, archeology, deities]

Introduction

The Kanheri caves, 19°13' N and 72°59' E lie in a wild picturesque valley in the heart of the former island of Salsette, about eight kilometers west of Thane and 32km north of Bombay, a few kilometers away from the National Park at Borivali.¹ Kanheri represents a large ancient Buddhist establishment. In the network of nearly 1200 caves in western India, Kanheri occupies an important and distinctive place. The name Kanheri is derived from the Sanskrit 'Kṛṣṇagiri' which means black mountain; its Prākṛit name is 'Kaṇhagiri'. Kanheri is 10 km to the southeast of Borivali, the suburb of metropolitan Bombay, and has beautiful natural surroundings. The site of

the caves is not far from the rich ancient trade centers of Sopara, Kalyan, and Chaul and is well connected with the inland market towns like Nasik, Ter, and Pratisthāna (Paithan), the capital city of the Sātavāhanas. Most of the cave settlements of western India were long-lived, and Krishnagiri, commencing from the first century BCE or CE, continued to be a monk settlement for a very long period.

Among the various caves found at Kanheri are several that are residential and house monks' cells. The older caves are easily identified by the lack of Buddha figures and by the modest size and coarse pattern of their sculptures. The architecture of the later-built lenas is excellent. Several prehistoric caverns have been expanded and embellished with sculptures and pictures in the past, thanks to donations made by the donors (Sukumar Dutt, 1988).

At Kanheri there is the presence of stone representations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas while similar ones made in other materials such as wood, must have been widespread during the second century (Susan L., Huntington, 1985). Debala Mitra suggests that in the later period, caves 41, 67 and 89 at Kanheri have reliefs on their walls, mostly of the Buddha where he is generally shown as either standing with his right hand in vara-mudrā (offering blessings) or seated in the dharma-chakra-pravartana-mudrā. Seated in the pralambapāda-āsana with his feet resting on a lotus, he is flanked by two Bodhisattvas, the latter themselves in the company of female deities, their śaktis. Avalokiteśvara appears as one of the major Bodhisattvas depicted in these reliefs at Kanheri (cave 2, 41, 90) (Debala Mitra, 1971). Cave 41, from about the sixth century CE has representation of the four-armed eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara, the only known relief of this form in India. The sculpted figure of two donor couples at Kanheri according to Sukumar Dutt (Sukumar Dutt, 1988). Dehejia calls them the *mithuṇa* couples (Vidya Dehejia, 1972). According to Niharranjan Ray in the above figure, the man and woman stand close side by side: the two together are complementary to each other: the man, is proud and self-assured, the woman slightly erotic in pose and attitude. But it is wrong to call them *mithuṇa* couples since they hardly betray any conscious erotic suggestion (Niharranjan Ray, 1975).

Objectives and Methodology

Numerous academics have examined the inscriptional evidence from the Buddhist caves in the western Deccan, however there aren't many research on specific Buddhist cave locations. This piece attempts to evoke the essence of a Buddhist monastery within its walls. By examining archaeological survey reports from the time of the site's discovery by early European settlers to the present, it attempts to chart the evolution of Kanheri. One of the other aims of this work lies in the analysis of the inscriptional material to discuss the patronage patterns at the site. The *Kanheri Inscriptions* by Shobhana Gokhale have been utilized for the same. Apart from a discussion on the patronage patterns and some assertions made based on these trends in the donations made at the site. The present study also attempts to throw light on the monastics and related matters at the site. This also tries to bring in some of the recent approaches of the scholars concerning the study of Buddhist sites and discusses the peculiarities of the Kanheri. By discussing the issues referred to above I have tried to attempt to understand what these monuments try to communicate with us.

Kanheri from the sixteenth century to the recent times

Several studies provide a picture of the process of the establishment of Buddhist monasteries in India. Such studies are significant for anyone interested in the study of Buddhism and Buddhist monasteries.

The earliest mentions and descriptions of Indian monuments, architecture, and sculpture are found in the writings of European travelers and sailors, of various nationalities such as the Dutch, Italian, Portuguese, British, and French, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Copious references to Indian monuments, particularly the cave temples near Bombay and Goa, are found in the writings of these European travelers. Many of these travelers visited spectacular early monuments of western India, like Elephanta, Kanheri, and Ellora. Many important ancient Indian monuments were known to these European travelers and others, but most of their observations are limited to Kanheri, Elephanta, and Ellora, because of the convenient location of these sites from the traveler's point of view.

The Portuguese Garcia da Orta, for example, was a practicing doctor in India. He visited the caves near Bombay in 1534 and published his accounts. He first described the caves of Kanheri and Mandapeshwar on the island of Salsette and then described Elephanta. Another Portuguese, Dom Joao de Castro came to India in 1538 and visited Elephanta and Kanheri, attempting to convey in his writings, the plan of the complex at both these sites along with some measurements (Dilip K. Chakrabarti, 1947). In the late sixteenth century, both their accounts were copied by other travelers. In 1616, the Portuguese historian Diego do Couto described Kanheri and Elephanta. This was translated and published in the first volume of *The Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. He was the first to point out the Buddhist association of the rock-cut caves of Kanheri. The Englishman J. Fryer visited Kanheri and Elephanta in 1672. In 1689 Revd. J. Ovington coined the term 'pagoda' for the stupas found. Chakrabarti points out that the descriptions of these sites were not accurate or detailed in all cases. The last and most famous early description of Kanheri is found in the work of the Italian Gemelli-Careri. He was the first traveler who made a serious study of its dimensions (Debala Mitra, 1971).

Till 1830 few writings would qualify as 'archaeological' by present standards. The focus in Indian studies was not so much on field archaeology, as on editing ancient texts and deciphering ancient inscriptions. The term 'antiquary' was used for fields like the study of ancient texts, languages, coins, inscriptions, monuments, antiquities, chronologies, and history. It was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that the term "archaeology" was used as a branch of study dealing with the material remains of the past, artifacts, sites, and monuments (Upinder Singh, 2004). One notes the increase in the number of specifically archaeological writings in the period 1830-1861. Apart from the description of and observation of monuments, there is an increasing tendency to report and speculate on individual sites (Dilip K. Chakrabarti, 1988).

The first five or six volumes of *The Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Asiatic Society* featured a great number of essays by different researchers on the inscriptions from western India, particularly the early cave temple inscriptions from Kanheri, Karle, Nasik, and so on. In *The Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol II July 1844 to July 1847, James Bird gives an account of the leading tenets of Buddhism and Jainism as illustrated by the sculptures in the caves of Western India, with translations of the cave inscriptions from Kanheri, Ajanta, Ellora, Nasik, highlighting the similarities between these caves and the topes and caves of the Punjab and Afghanistan. West in *The Journal of the Bombay Branch of Royal Asiatic Society* vol VI, 1861 discusses the Jogeshwari, Mahakali, and Kanheri inscriptions. In 1909 the Kanheri caves were notified as a Protected Monument under Section 3 of the AMP Act 1904. Wheeler proposed proper conservation of the Kanheri caves and the construction of a chaukidar's hut on the site. Despite his efforts, as Ray has argued, the significance of the rich Indian textual tradition or a discussion of a methodology that could lead to innovative integration of text and archaeology is missing in Wheeler's lectures related to archaeology both in India and Britain (Himanshu Prabha Ray, 2008).

Minor measures of conservation and repairs were provided from the twentieth century onwards. The Kanheri caverns were regarded as private property by Mr. Chhabildas Lallubhai, the owner of Magathān village, which the caves were located within, according to the Archaeological Survey of Western India's Progress Report 1904-05. His claims were considered valid and the caves were included in the list of ancient monuments to be considered protected monuments, with the negotiation and consultation with the owner.ⁱⁱ These reports make the study of these cave sites more interesting for scholars. The *Archaeological Survey of India, Western Circle* report of the year 1906-09 brings to light the ordinary repairs carried out in different Buddhist cave sites. The *Archaeological Survey of India, Western Circle* 1910-11 mentions the construction of a road or a proper cart track from Borivali railway station to the foot of the hill of the location of the caves. It mentions that one cave had been converted into a modern Hindu shrine, ruining the sculptures with paint and charcoal lettering. The appointment of a residential custodian for the caves has also been mentioned.ⁱⁱⁱ The numbering of the caves according to the description in the Bombay Gazetteer, Thana District, Volume XIV, 1882 has also been noted, along with the discussion on the preservation works. *The Archaeological Survey of India, Western Circle* 1912-13 shows the concerns regarding safeguarding the caves and suggests that the custodians appointed by Mr. Chhabildas should stay closer to the caves. The 1918-19 Western Circle Report discusses the conservation works at Kuda, Kondivite, and Kanheri.^{iv}

The *Indian Archaeology A Review* 1961-62 states that during the process of debris clearance at Kanheri, brick stupas were found in caves nos. 2, 3, 4, and 38 and stone stupas in caves no. 2 and 33. In front of caves numbers 2, 3, and 4, there are five inscriptions of various dates, two of which are shattered and one of which is incomplete. In 1977–1978 Shobhana Gokhale found seventeen epitaphs listing teachers' names and highly qualified qualifications. Paleographically, they range from c. 600 to 700 CE.^v Two inscriptions, paleographically dateable to c. 500-650 CE were discovered in the year 1978-79. They throw light on the monastic institution there. It is for the first time that one gets evidence of the teacher's tradition in the Buddhist caves of western India.^{vi} Two commemorative stone inscriptions giving the names of monks belonging to c. 500-600 CE were found in the years 1980-81.^{vii} Two commemorative inscriptions were found at Kanheri in the year 1982-83.^{viii} Seven Prākṛit inscriptions belonging to the first century to sixth century CE in Kanheri cave no. 61, 22, 75, 16, 81, 93 and 101 were recovered from the site. Twenty-nine Prākṛit inscriptions dateable to the sixth century CE were discovered from the debris of the ruined brick stupas of Kanheri.^{ix} R.C.C. covers were provided to the rock-cut cisterns for different caves. A footbridge across the nālā to enable approaching the group of caves on the other side was constructed in the year 1995-96.^x Further repair and restoration works were conducted at the site in the following years. Debris was accumulated over the miniature stupas in the burial gallery. It was removed scientifically with proper documentation and screened to obtain antiquities or historical objects. After exposing the site, the miniature stupas were restored with specially molded bricks.^{xi} In recent times scholars like Suraj Pandit have brought to light features like the water management system at Kanheri and lesser-known and unknown caves at the site.

Monastics and Related Matters

It is accepted among scholars that the Second Buddhist Council led to the division of the *saṅgha* into Theravādīns, the orthodox, and Mahāsāṅghikas, the dissenters. The emergence of the schism resulted in the formation of several sub-sects among the Theravādīns and the Mahāsāṅghikas. Traditionally it is believed that Mahāsāṅghikas promoted Mahāyāna concepts. The term Mahāsāṅghikas is found in the Buddhist inscriptions at Kanheri to denote a particular group of schools, rather than an individual Mahāsāṅghika school. The cave site at Kanheri indicates the presence of the Bhadrāyāniya, a Sthaviravāda school. The Mahāsāṅghikas received patronage from the Sātavāhanas.

The lineage of teachers must have become important under the Mahāsāṅghikas because one of the points of dispute at the first schism was 'considering a teacher's word more authentic than the Vinaya'. This tradition existed at Kanheri as attested by the study of inscriptions and remains of votive stupas dedicated to teachers at the site. The Mahāsāṅghikas also introduced idol worship into the area; at Kanheri, Mahāsāṅghikas and Bhadrāyāniyas had to have influenced each other; it is hard to determine precisely when and how Mahāyāna Buddhism appeared at sites such as Kanheri; the Aparāśaila is mentioned in the Kanheri inscriptions. The Pūrvaśailas and Aparāśailas were the branches of the Chaityaka schools; the Aparāśaila is mentioned in the Kanheri inscriptions (Shobhana Gokhale, 1991).

If we talk about the process of entry of a new member to the saṅgha, he was admitted under a bhikkhu at least ten years senior, who was called an *upajjhāya* or *ācārya*. There was no clear distinction between these two categories except one that the *upajjhāya* permitted his disciple to go and meditate or study a doctrine under a special teacher (*ācārya*) skilled in those subjects. So the *ācārya* must have been a specialist. The main constituents of the monastic Order like *antevāsin-antevāsini*, bhikkhu-bhikkhuni, *upāsaka-upāsika* appear in the inscriptions. Other categories like *bhadanta*, *thera-therī* having attained some exceptional educational and meditational qualities are also present. It is to be noted that *upajjhāya* is not mentioned in these inscriptions but the term *ācārya* is found particularly at Kanheri.

Settled monasticism with its two major preoccupations suggests substantial scholarly training, which also implies more time spent in study and recitation. Ray points out significantly that the monastery works as a place of textual recitation and training younger monks when the texts are oral but once the texts are written they also provide a place to store documents that could be made readily available. Furthermore, written tradition demands a huge number of people with specialised skills to duplicate worn-out texts; organising, housing, and feeding this diverse group of experts and specialists implies a complicated administrative structure inside the monastic community. This in turn needed close and stable ties with the laity for the fulfillment of such economic needs (Ray, Reginald

A., 1999). At Kanheri Cave 11, there are two long stone slabs amid its hall. This cave must have been used for the recitation, studying, and copying of texts. We have an inscription at Kanheri that records the donation of the interest of the money granted for different purposes like worship, clothes, repairs books, etc. It is one of the few of its kind in the western Deccan. It belongs to the eighth century and is thus beyond the period of our study.

It is common knowledge that the monasteries were located along the main roads used for trade. Regarding the Buddhist monasteries' geographic configuration, Julia Shaw notes that it complies with canonical rules stating that monasteries should be placed close to towns, but not too close. This hypothesis also holds for the Buddhist establishment at Kanheri. They are 'outside' society but also depend upon society for financial support (Julia Shaw, 2013). Any monastic unit would have two distinct elements, which helps to further explain this canonical requirement. A more secluded region that would be somewhat harder to reach would include the inmates' cells. The first would be the outside, more accessible component, which typically also housed the stupa and chaitya that were frequented by the laity. The convents were so designed that they provided controlled access to the inner section of the monastic establishment. In architecture, we can gauge the *śīmā* of a Buddhist establishment with a stone boundary or natural boundaries like water bodies. The idea of a division of space shared by the laity and monastics can be seen at Kanheri. According to Suraj Pandit, during the field trip to Kanheri, there should have been a wooden fence next to Small cave 4 to separate the easily accessible area with Chaitya Cave 3 from the interior residential caverns beyond the wooden gate.

Patronage: Discussions and Assertions

In the early historical period, Indo-Roman maritime trade was at its peak. South of Bharuch was a series of ports-the major ones being at Sopara, Kalyan, and Chaul and continuing far south. This implies that during the study period, our region had a highly developed economy with robust trading networks. Because these port settlements were situated along or close to the trade routes, there would have been close ties between them and Buddhist monastic establishments. The maritime trade with Rome declined towards the end of the Sātavāhana rule. This decline had an impact on the prosperity of trade routes and centers. But the regional trade continued in the period afterward. Most of the Buddhist sites in the region came to an end but some like Kanheri continued to flourish. This can be explained by the fact that Kanheri was neither on an ancient trade route nor near any trade center. These Buddhist monasteries would have served as a safe and secure place for merchants to rest with their valuables during the night while on their trading ventures. This kind of elaborate external trade would not have been possible without a well-connected internal trade network. There were settlements and production sites with distinctive and specialized occupational groups as reflected in the inscriptions and literary sources like the *Periplus*. Every early historic settlement had probably specialized craftsmen and artisans. This can be ascertained by the archaeological evidence which points to the existence and practice of several types of crafts in the early historical period. Inscriptional evidence from the Buddhist caves in the western Deccan also gives a glimpse of the same.

We find mention of settings and *śreṇis* or guilds in the inscriptions from the Buddhist site of Kanheri. Although guilds were engaged in various activities, their main interest was to promote economic activities through mutual assistance. Richly decorated figures found in the Deccan's sculptures and paintings attest to the general fascination with ornaments, which had to be made of gold and by goldsmiths; the Deccan's many valuable stone sources led to the establishment of gem experts in the region's cities and market towns; the city of Kalyan presumably housed several goldsmiths, and inscriptions from Kanheri refer to gifts made by them (Dipakranjan Das, 1969). The painted and sculptured copies of houses, destroyed stupas, and chaitya halls imply the presence of labourers who are involved in construction. The need for cool pastes, aromatics, and fragrances propelled the perfumers, or *gāndhika*, to expand their business. There were many of skilled florists, or "*mālākāras*," and flowers went well with makeup. There is evidence from inscriptions that a different group of artisans called leatherworkers (*carmakāra*) exists. The carpenter was one of the most significant craftspeople. In addition to potters, there were oil-pressers (*tila-piṣaka*) present. The artisans who made hydraulic engines, known as *odayamītrika*, banded together into guilds. Large numbers of donors in the epigraphical records of the Buddhist cave sites were from Dhenukātaka including some Yavanas. Y. S. Alone argues that Dhenukātaka which is widely regarded as a colony of the Yavanas by many scholars was not an exclusive colony of the Yavanas because nine other patrons also hail from Dhenukātaka. He further says that the Yavanas must have been an important class of people, staying not exclusively at Dhenukātaka but elsewhere as well (Y.S. Alone, 2016). He goes on to claim that the Yavanas had to

have been a significant social group because they didn't just reside in Dhenukātaka but also in other places (Y.S. Alone, 2016).

The epigraphic evidence at Kanheri throughout the period between the second and fourth centuries CE shows that all social classes were patrons. While it is hard to imagine all of the lay benefactors were Buddhists, several of them said that they were upāsaka and upāsikā. We do not have any donations from women from the 4th century CE onwards; the majority of the donations are from resident monks of the Kanheri monastic organisation, with a small number coming from laypeople. Only monks who identify as śākyabhikṣu in the inscriptions donate Buddha figures. According to Schopen, 94% of the picture contributors were monks, and similar data from the other western Indian sites supports this claim. They were not part of the original plan, therefore they were invasive at Kanheri. They were given an overview of the website. In addition, a large number of the obtrusive images at Ajanta were added by monks.

Sometimes the donor is revealed to be a bhikkhuṇī's sister or daughter. In such cases, when three women donate, two of them identify as mendicants and the third as someone's sister or daughter. For example, in Kanheri, a female ascetic named Sāpā, who was raised by a lay worshipper and lived in Dhenukākāṭa, Kulapiya, Dhamaṇḍaka (dharma), and who studied under the reverend Bodhika, the Thera, along with her sister Ratinikā, gave a permanent endowment, a cave, and a cistern to the ascetic community of Aparasāila from all four quarters of the horizon, for the benefit of her parents as well as the well-being and happiness of all living things. Typically, parents are only brought up to highlight the virtues of the religious gift.

The donations by Buddhist monastics at Buddhist sites in the western Deccan are recorded with the donors mentioning religious titles and their place of origin or residence. Sometimes these monastic donors make individual donations while at other times they are in groups. For instance, bhikkhus/bhikkhuṇīs make donations together with their disciples or teachers. The references to the identification of these monastics in terms of their familial relations are also not absent. For instance, in one of the inscriptions at Kanheri, the donor Pavajitā Jamadevikā is identified as the daughter of Sivātana.

In the first century CE, the Sāntavaḥhana lived in opulence. At Kanheri, most donations take the form of enduring bequests (akshaya-nīvī), with amounts varying from 200 to 1600 kaḥāpa. Five of the forty inscriptions at Kanheri mention gifts in the form of perpetual endowments. The female ascetic, the therī Poṇakisaṇā, the therā's pupil, the reverend given the community of monks a perpetual endowment, specifically two hundred kāhāpaṇas. The sixteenth part was to be used for clothing and the equivalent of one kāhāpaṇa per month in the right, out of interest. It's the season. The grant was made for the welfare and happiness of the whole world. Dipakranjan Das has suggested that the *kārshāpaṇa* (*kāhāpanas*) referred to in these inscriptions are undoubtedly silver coins (Dipakranjan Das, 1969). After the downfall of the Sātavāhanas, local chiefs continued to be the patrons of Buddhism till the fifth century.

According to Schopen, there is a particular Buddhist school associated with the inscriptions that contain the phrase "may it be an act of pūjā for his deceased parents," which was previously explored. That school is a Theravāda school in every case. This line appears in a Kanheri inscription, where the donation is given with the Bhādrāyaṇīyas. Two Khatiya brothers, Gajasena and Gajamita, were merchants (vāṇijja) by trade. They started the Chaitya in memory of their parents, who passed away, and in recognition of the good deeds of other family members. The formula has never been found associated with the Mahāyāna or with the titles Paramopāsaka/-opāsika or Śākyabhikṣu/-bhikṣuṇī, which were initially employed by the Mahāyāna (Gregory Schopen, at all, 1997). The assertion that this practice was connected to Theravādins rather than Mahāyānists is persuasive as the formula linked to benefactors such as Śākyabhikkhus is "the supreme knowledge."

Schopen admits that the most common reason for religious donations stated in the inscriptions was to "benefit" parents, both alive and deceased. This intention of offering is mentioned in a total of eight inscriptions at Kanheri and two at Nasik. With the exception of two of the eight inscriptions at Kanheri, the majority of the benefactors in these inscriptions are laypeople. In a Kanheri inscription, a student gives a cave, a water cistern, and an everlasting endowment for the ascetic community (sage) from all four quarters for the benefit of his parents, the well-being of all living things, and the realisation of his own hope for ultimate liberation. This inscription is the only one at the Buddhist monuments in the western Deccan that documents such an objective.

The inscriptional records show that nuns were as active as monks at Buddhist sites and therefore must have had very considerable means to make donations. For instance, a perpetual endowment, viz. two hundred *kāṛṣāpaṇa*, was given to the community of monks. Out of the interest in this, one-sixteenth share was to be given for clothes and the value of one *kāṛṣāpaṇa* each month in the right season. A female ascetic named Therī Poṇakisaṇā, a student of the reverend Ghoṣa at Kanheri, made the donation. It also comes with a water cistern and a cave as gifts. The world's welfare and happiness were the reasons behind the grant's creation. Another example is the donation of a cave and a perpetual endowment (*akhayanivi*). Twenty thousand *kāṛṣāpaṇa* were to be donated for clothing out of the endowment's interest. The ascetic Aśnanda, the brother of the holy Vira, the instructor, donated the donation for the ascetic community (*saghe*). These illustrations highlight the monastics' authority over property even after they became members of the Saṅgha; without it, how could they have made such substantial donations? Aside from such cases, Buddhist monastics often provide stupas, pillars, cisterns, and caves. There would have been no significant financial outlay for these. Amazing Buddha pictures, *mithuṇa* figures, and elephant sculptures contributed by monks and nuns at Karle, Kanheri, and Ajanta.

There are multiple donors to the Chaitya Cave Kanheri. This would have been the case since excavating them would have required the pooling of resources due to their size and cost. Two Khattiya brothers (merchants), Gajasena and Gajamita, started the Chaitya in memory of their parents who passed away and in recognition of several family members' good deeds. The inscription is intriguing since it lists various professions that are involved in creating a Chaitya, including Uparakhita (overseer), Selavaddhaki (stonemason), *kadhichaka* (artisan), and *Mithika* (polisher). The Chaitya was for the sect of Bhadrāvāṇiya. The epigraphical documents also point to this exchange or gathering of laypeople and Buddhist monastics for charitable giving. A cistern is donated to Kanheri by Sāmidatta, a goldsmith from Kalyan, together with the ascetic society (*sagha*) and lay brothers. In another case, the Chaitya at Kanheri is completed by Pavajita-Thera Bhadanta-Achala, Bhadanta Gahala, Bhadanta Vijayamita, Bhadanta Bo(dhiko), Bhadanta Dhamapāla, and Anandaputa Aparrenēka.

At Kanheri, there is an inscription regarding the construction of a reservoir and another inscription refers to a field that was under cultivation for the maintenance of Buddhist monks. There must have been some governing body to look after these fields and the maintenance of the reservoir. Kanheri also has the largest number of donors from various places. This shows their attraction and popularity among the masses in the region. There is also the possibility of other donations being made by other patrons who could not record their donations. Besides, we have lost many records because of the poor quality of the rocks.

Peculiarities of Kanheri

Kanheri had its peculiarities such as a well-developed water system, agricultural land, satellite settlements, and resources for subsistence. Suraj A. Pandit in his article 'Water Management System at Kanheri' documents the presence of a water stream flowing from east to west between the northern and southern hills at Kanheri. It is one of the longest-occupied and among the largest sites in India, because of which it yields a lot of information on the development of Buddhism in western India. At the site of Kanheri in the western Deccan, we find evidence of water harvesting and water management in the form of a dam and an abundant number of cisterns. Suraj Pandit suggests that the early group of caves were near water streams while later caves were in the upper hillocks (Pandit, Suraj A., 2003). According to him, the ancient engineers converted the catchment area of the stream into a small reservoir by constructing two small walls between the northern and southern hills (Pandit, Suraj A., 2010). On the top of the southern hill, which is the main hill, there are five water tanks, suggesting a well-developed water system at Kanheri. Most of the cisterns and tanks at the site are well connected through a network of small channels. The channels are well connected to the tanks on the top of the southern hill. In summer the water stored in the tanks was allowed to flow and refill the water cisterns. He also suggests that this network of water collection was a part of the planning of the monastic establishment from the very early period of the second and third centuries CE. The probable reason given for the donations of so many cisterns is the storage of water for the teacher staying in a particular *vihāra* cave. He suggests so because of the presence of a teacher's tradition at Kanheri. *Āsanapeḍhikas* (sitting benches) must have been provided for the monks to sit and relax. They show an idea of comfort and are only known from Junnar and Kanheri, in or near the *leṇas* of the third century CE. They are made at such places where a beautiful view of nature can be enjoyed (S. Nagaraju, 1989). There are two

varieties of poḍhis- 1) pāniya-poḍhis meant for the storage of drinking water 2) sanānapoḍhis, with Kanheri having some very large poḍhis.

It should be noted that the commoners and lay followers are almost absent in the activity of donating water cisterns in the inscriptions. This shows that the monastics made use of donations according to their requirements and it was done through an administrative system.

The stupas and monasteries were constructed near one other; some of the stupas were encircled by ranks of smaller "votive" stupas, which appear to have contained the bodies or memorials of monks who had passed away (Handa, O.C., 2004). Buddhist monastic organisations, according to O. C. Handa, frequently served as the locations of death rites for their donors. The only place in the area with a cemetery is Kanheri. It is not certain if an area within or surrounding a monastic complex could be used by the laity for their death rituals. However, it can be ascertained from the presence of the cemetery at the Kanheri cave complex that these spaces could have been used for the mortuary rituals of the monastic community.

From the above discussion, it can be said that out of numerous Buddhist sites in the western Deccan Kanheri is one of the most important sites with characteristics of an educational center, religious center, and a significant economic center as well. Besides we have some striking features at Kanheri which are absent at other Buddhist sites in the Western Deccan particularly. For instance, at the entrance of main chaitya 3, the railing has a double-humped Bactrian camel, in the same complex at the top of one of the pillars we find a Mathura-style depiction of the Buddha. Inside the chaitya 3, in the capital of the eighth pillar on the right, there is an elephant rider with a Scythian cap. The standing Buddhas on either side of the entrance to the hall of the chaitya 3 are significant of their kind. The question arises how such features could have appeared here? Did Kanheri have its association with far-off places located around the silk-route, unlike any other Buddhist site of the period? Another striking feature of Kanheri is a Japanese record in cave no. 90, which states that a disciple has come to the place to pay homage to where his sect originated. How did a monk get to know about his association with Kanheri? These are such features of Kanheri that can be matters of their research and need specific attention from the scholars.

Conclusion

At the site of Kanheri in the western Deccan, we find evidence of water harvesting and water management in the form of a dam and an abundant number of cisterns. Kanheri is the only site in the region with a cemetery. It is not certain if an area within or surrounding a monastic complex could be used by the laity for their death rituals. However, it can be ascertained from the presence of the cemetery at the Kanheri cave complex that these spaces could have been used for the mortuary rituals of the monastic community. Out of numerous Buddhist sites in the western Deccan Kanheri is one of the most important sites with characteristics of an educational center, religious center, and a significant economic center as well. Through this article, one tries to see the life of the Buddhist community in the monastery and have a communication of the site with the viewer. It can be suggested that the social

ⁱ *Maharashtra State Gazetteers*, 'Greater Bombay district', Vol.3, Gazetteers Department, Bombay, Government of Maharashtra, 1986, p. 428.

ⁱⁱ *Progress Report of the Archaeological Survey of Western India*, 1904-05, p. 21.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Archaeological Survey of India, Western Circle*, 1910-11, p. 31.

^{iv} *Archaeological Survey of India, Western Circle*, 1919-20, p. 63.

^v *Indian Archaeology-A Review*, 1977-78, p. 65

^{vi} *Indian Archaeology-A Review*, 1978-79, p. 83.

^{vii} *Indian Archaeology-A Review*, 1980-81, p. 81.

^{viii} *Indian Archaeology-A Review*, 1982-83, p. 122.

^{ix} *Indian Archaeology-A Review*, 1983-84, pp. 153-54.

^x *Indian Archaeology-A Review*, 1995-96, p. 155.

^{xi} *Indian Archaeology-A Review*, 2011-12, p. 212.

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