CHAPTER I

Buddhist Centres of Western India

Before we make a description of the Buddhist centres of W. India as revealed in the inscriptions it is necessary to first deal with the geographical and geological features of the region as they are the prime factors for the very existence of the Buddhist rock-cut caves. Other contributing factors such as the passes, trade-routes and climatic condition should also be seen as the flourish and prosperity of the Buddhist establishments depended upon them.

A. Geographical Features

The centres of rock-cut architecture with inscriptions under study are located in the western and south-western parts of the present State of Maharashtra, between 16 to 21 N and 73 to 76 E. This region consists of two major relief divisions, the plateau and the coastal strip. The two are intervened by the Sahyadrian chain of mountains, and crossed by several parallel hilly ranges emitting almost perpendicularly on either side of that chain.

The coastal strip in Maharashtra comprises of the districts of Ratnagiri in the south, Raigad in the middle and Thana in the north. These districts are flanked by the Arabian sea in the west and the Sahyadrian wall in the east. Konkan is an undulating land characterized by low level plateaus of laterite, estuarine plains of rivers, transverse ridges having medium to low heights and some isolated hills. The characteristics of the coastal areas are the alternating bays and headlands providing a number of natural harbours. The north Konkan has a flat surface of loam and alluvial soils which prompt easy exploitation by man. The central Konkan
is covered more by low transverse hills, laterite levels and parallel flowing seasonal rivers with stilled estuaries. The south Konkan is a very narrow strip experiencing heavy rainfall. The plateau is a drier climatic region and consists of wide river basins and hill ranges. Several hill ranges stretch across the transitional belt and the Desh plateau in an east-west orientation. In the north is Ajanta range, and south of this is the Balaghat range and south of this is the Mahadev range and Purandhar range. The valleys in between these ranges are fertile and drained by the Godavari and the Krishna rivers. These river valleys form vast irrigational belts.

The major rivers of Maharashtra are Tapi, Godavari and Krishna. The different direction to which these rivers and their tributaries flow also have influence on the people who were settling along the banks. Most of the early human settlements have been found along the banks of these rivers. Besides the rivers, the Arabian sea also plays an important role by providing many a thriving ports with natural beauty and convenience along her coastal line. The then seaports and river ports, from which traders and merchants made their donations to the Buddhist establishments, are Dahanuka, Sopara, Kalyan, Thana, Chaula, Dabhol, Chiplun and Broach.

B. Geological influence

The very nature of geological structure has also decided the form of the monuments in several places and the nature of rock formation determined the dimensions of the caves. The caves are generally cut half way up the hill where the living rock is most suitable. In order to facilitate easy approach to these, another geological feature of trappean hills is exploited by the architects.
The second, third or the succeeding flat ledges of lava beds serve as approach paths as well as natural platforms from which the workers could operate the cutting. Examples: Nasik, Bhaja, Bedea, etc. The Deccan trap has been particularly beneficial for the existence of the excavated Buddhist monuments. Almost 70% of the excavated rock monuments in India is located in Western India, mostly in Maharashtra. These rock monuments contain the history of Buddhism in Western India for a period of 1200 years, i.e. from 200 B.C. to the tenth century A.D.

C. Passes, Trade-routes and Climatic conditions.

The rock-cut monasteries were located along ancient trade-routes, particularly along those connecting the ports to important inland towns.

1. Passes and Trade-routes

There are three main sets of passes through the western ghats leading to the interior, and caves are situated at the heads of all three. The sher and Tal ghats connect Sopara with Nasik. The Nanaghat links Kalyan to Junnar and from there to Paithan, and the Bhor ghat connects Kalyan to Karle and then to Ter. In addition, there are smaller passes near the Bhor ghat which lead to the port of Chaula.

It appears that there was a major route along with the Maval transitional belt running from Kolhapur up via Karad, Wai, Fune, Junnar and Nasik. This was not only fed by the routes coming from Konkan but also linked with other roads connecting major towns on the plateau like Ter, Nevasa and Paithan and in turn many other cities in the Peninsula and northern India. Several groups in the Maval transitional belt appear to have been located near this route, particularly at places where the feeder routes from Konkan joined.
2. **Climatic Conditions**

Water supplies from underground springs were abundant as the result of seasonal heavy rainfall. This in particular must have proved extremely useful to the rock-cutters as the choice of a site was not necessarily determined by access to surface water. Most of the known centres of rock-cut architecture are situated in areas with comparatively heavier rainfall. The areas were comparatively rich in timber and there was good scope for the development of wooden architecture locally, and this appears to have been copied in the early rock-cut caves.

The cutting of innumerable cisterns near the caves themselves might have been necessitated by the seasonal rainfall from June to September only, and in the rest of the period there will be dearth in water supply. The cisterns were meant particularly for the storage of water during the summer season.

Unlike other parts of the country, Western India has a rock formation which is very suitable for rock shelters. Though the rocks are hard they are excavatable with primitive rock-cutting tools. The rocks are situated not too near to the towns nor too far from them, so are easily accessible. They are not too low nor too high from the plains. They are surrounded by fertile fields and lands. Though water is not obtained abundantly throughout the year it is not a severe problem either. The seasonal rainfalls provide underground water springs here and there even on the tops of the hills and mountains. The climate is an ideal one, it is neither too hot nor cold but just temperate. So the early Indian Buddhists found Western India more suitable for permanent settlement than any other part of the country. That is why this region has 70% of the total rock-cut monuments of India.
D. Buddhist centres as revealed in the inscriptions

Out of about 80 Buddhist centres as estimated, only those sites or places which have inscriptions or referred to in the inscriptions will be dealt with in this chapter. The centres are listed and dealt with in an alphabetical order.

1. Ajanta

The world famous Ajanta caves (lat. 20° 32' N, long. 75° 45' E) are located in the Aurangabad district, about 96 kms north of the district headquarters. This group happens to be the northernmost of the early rock-cut centres of Deccan. The caves are located at the head of a pass that links the plateau with the vast stretch of the Tapti plain below. Possibly one of the ancient highways, connecting Ujjayini in the north with Pratishthana, ran along this pass. The river Waghora has cut a deep ravine amidst this, forming a large horseshoe shape glen at its head, with the scarp rising to a height of more than 100 metres on either side. Part of this vertical scarp has been selected for hewing the caves. Yuan Chwang referred to Ajanta as "storey above storey, they are backed by the crag and face the valley".

Ajanta is important for many respects. In this, architectural, sculptural and artistical activities continued for more than half a millennium. As A. Ghosh puts it, "over seven hundred years of innumerable hours (Ajanta) heard the striking of chisels, the murmur of prayers and saw the pilgrimage of the brushes on the wall before the caves came to be what they are. Sculpture and painting grew simultaneously closer, lending their essentials to each other".

Architecturally, the Ajanta caves are one of the most neatly and smoothly rock-cut groups in Western India. From utility point
of view, they are spacious and from the aesthetic view point they are exquisite. There are altogether 30 caves at Ajanta. Six of them are Hinayana caves viz., VIII, IX, X, XII, XIII and XVa. The rest are all Mahayana caves. Ten of the Ajanta caves bear inscriptions in them. They are II, IV, IX, X, XI, XII, XVI, XVII, XXII and XXVI. Cave nos. IX, X, XIX, XXVI and XXII are Chaityagrihas of which the inscriptions referred to IX, X, and XXVI. The number of cells in Ajanta is over 100 and some of them have two bunks in each. The number of occupants, at the peak period, could have been between 150 to 175. There are some 18 viharas in Ajanta of which some are left unfinished.

Sculpturally, Ajanta yields us a variety of sculptural pieces ranging from divine to human figures. The chief object of worship was the Buddha figure followed by those of the Bodhisattvas. Figures of the Nāgas, Yakshas and other celestial beings are also noteworthy. A yaksha is specifically mentioned by name in cave XXII as "Manibhadhra". There are as many as 27 Buddha (Bodhisattvas) images referred to in the inscriptions as the gifts of devout Buddhists. These figures also serve as one of the principal attractions of Ajanta.

Ajanta is famous for its murals though its sculptures are no less important. The establishment, when in use, must have had an air of luxury and elegance about it. Some one-half of the total caves were once covered with paintings; the best preserved occur in only six now. These murals depict scenes from the past lives of the Buddha, of the world of the gods, yakshas, nāgas, kinnaras and apsaras and offer a rare view into the contemporary lifestyle and ideas. The scenes taken from various Jātakas and Avadanas in the Ajanta caves are the Sibi, the Samkhapala, Mahājanaka, Shyama,
Mahāhamsa, Vidhura Fandita, Furnavada, Khantivadi, Chchhaddanta, Hatthi, Mahāumagga, Vessantara, Mahākapi, Hamsa, Sutasoma, Sarabhā, Matuposaka, Mahisā, Sihalavadana, Miga and Nigrodhamiga. These are in caves I, II, X, XVI and XVII. These must have been the most popular elements from the Buddhist repertoire and their contents must have been common knowledge at that time. The Ajanta style of painting is unique, a poetic dynamism set in motion.

Above all, Ajanta is important for the epigraphs that it has. The epigraphs are like blood while the rest are like flesh. So the existence of both is a necessity for reviving the past. The epigraphs have been very useful in ascertaining the identification of architectural pieces, the sculptures and the paintings. There are altogether 42 inscriptions, including the short and mutilated ones, in Ajanta caves. And it is through these epigraphs that we know more about the Ajanta monastic establishment: the patrons, the socio-economic life and the religious practices and doctrines.

Analysis of the inscriptions reveals that there are about 39 donors of which names of 6 have been effaced. So basing our analysis on the remaining 31 donors with name we know that 20 are monks, 3 are lay-devotees, 2 are ministers and 6 are ordinary people. The donation also goes in proportion to the above classification. Thus we have 27 gifts by religious people, 6 by royals and 10 by the ordinary people. Out of the total donations of 43 pieces 27 are Buddha images. Except 2 donors from Faithān and Bahada towns the rest are from Ajanta itself. The comparatively large number of the monks among the donors and the different categories within themselves also seems to suggest that Ajanta was not only a flourishing Buddhist establishment but also a centre of monastic education.
2. Ambivale

There is only one cave at this place which is a lena. Ambivale cave is about half a mile from the village of Ambivale near Jambrug, north from Karjat, under Kotaligadh, and to the east of it. It is cut in a long low hill forming the concave side of a curve in the bank of the river Ulhas. It is also on a trade-route leading from Kalyan-Thana ports to the plateau above.

The Ambivale cave consists of a large square hall 42x39x10 feet having four cells off each of three sides, 12 cells in all. Both architectural style and palaeography indicate that this cave belong to the transitional period about 300-330 A.D. There are five pieces of inscriptions but not even one has been read satisfactorily. No sense can be made out of them. The last three seem to be names of the donors (probably of the cells or pillars): Jivasiva, Pusyasiva and Gri(tri)susiva.

3. Bedsa

The Bedsa caves (lat. 18 43 N, Long. 73 32 E) are on the south side of the range of hill in which those of Bhaja and Patan are, and a few miles south-west from the Khadkale railway station. It overlooks the broad valley of the river Pauna, at about 100 metres above the plain.

The architectural activity at Bedsa commenced about 100 B.C. at which time only four or five monks could live. But by the end of the first century B.C. it had the capacity to accommodate about 30 monks and from this time that it became a holy place.

Bedsa is a small monastic establishment with only 15 excavations in all. There are only three inscriptions. They are found in caves III, V, and VII. One of the inscriptions refers to the place as Marakuda. The maximum capacity of accommodation is about
40 monks at the peak time.

4. Bhaja

Bhaja (lat. 18° 44' N long. 73° 29' E) in the Maval taluk of Pune district is located about five kilometres south of Malavli, a railway station on the Pune-Bombay line, about 10 kms south of Lonavala. It was one of the important monastic establishments on the trade-route passing via Bhorghat and is in the transitional strip between the Sahyadris and the Desh plain.

Bhaja is probably one of the oldest Buddhist religious centres in the Deccan and its importance is further enhanced by the fact that it is one centre which flourished only in the early (Hinayana) period. All the excavations at Bhaja belong to this period. The Bhaja centre, due to some cause or the other, appears not have attracted any patronage during the Mahayana time.

Either due to the idea of holiness that may have been associated with the place or more possibly due to the commanding influence of a line of venerable monks, lay devotees appear to have been attracted. Their zealous patronage began with the making of very small and simple chaityagrihas, dedicated in honour of such monks.

The architectural works of Bhaja are to be assigned to the beginning stages of spread of Buddhism in Deccan somewhere in the early part of the latter half of the third century B.C. The period of prosperity marked by extensive architectural activity followed first with the great chaityagriha, an excavation of unprecedented dimension in the whole of Western India at that time. It's likely that Bhaja played a great role in the dissemination of the Buddhist creed from early times, and such a centre needed an impressive temple. The Bhaja chaityagriha, covering an area of nearly 60 sq. metres in the nave in front of the stupa, can easily accommodate...
more than 80 worshippers at a time.

By the early half of second century BC the monastery had grown to a capacity to accommodate nearly twentyfive monks at a time. Upto about 100 BC, there was continuous creative architectural activity. Hence forward, Bhaja ceased to remain in importance. But continuation of patronage was given till about the third century AD. It is likely that the monk community here diverted the patronage available to that monastery to raise institutions nearby at Bedsa and Karle which are very closely located. All the three monastic units may have been under the control of this monastery itself. It may be noted that almost immediately after the cessation of major architectural activity at Bhaja, very fine monuments came up first at Bedsa and then at Karle.

The group of stupas (14) in cave XX probably indicates the importance that the Ehaja monastery enjoyed. Bhaja may have been an important political seat, playing a prominent role in the dissemination of Buddhism in Western India. It is likely that Buddhist monasteries of the time had developed an organizational set up of the type seen commonly in Buddhist, Hindu and Jaina monasteries of the later historical period. It is the practice in these monasteries to have a chief who is normally considered as the head of a particular sect, and he is held in the highest reverence. Usually a cemetery is set apart for these pontiffs and monuments are raised in their memory.

There are 28 excavations at Bhaja. At the peak, i.e. in the end of second century AD, Bhaja could have accommodated about 60 monks. There are 55 finished cells, most of them having stone-beds in them. Six of these have double stone-beds in them.
The Bhaja inscriptions, numbering twelve, are very short. The period under which the inscriptions fall is over three centuries. The inscriptions, carved on the wooden ribs in the chaitya-hall, appear to be the earliest inscriptions on wood so far found in India. The known royal patrons of Bhaja were the Maharathis.

5. Broach

Its ancient names are Bharukachchha, Bhrigukachchha, and Barygaza. Broach (lat. 21° 42' N, long. 73° 2' E) is situated at the mouth of Narmada, and it was from ancient times a rich and prosperous city, thickly populated. The name signifying sea-march or a high coast land enjoyed the position of a central mart for trade with the western world. In early Buddhist literature and in that of the Christian era, particularly the periplus and Ptolemy's Geography, it was the seat of sea-faring merchants. Every commodity of local consumption was brought here from Ujjayini. Precious stones were imported here. As the greatest seat of commerce in Western India, ships full of merchandise sailed in different directions from this place. The Jātakas also relate tales connected with the merchants visiting this place from far-off cities like Banaras. Some merchants sailed to Suvarnadvipa from here.

Broach was not only a great port, but also was the terminus of the main road which ran from west to east across India by Ujjain and Vidisa to Kosambi on the Jumna, and so to the Ganges and Falahiputra. An inscription at Junnar says that Asasama's two sons Buddhamita and Buddharamita from Broach donated a two-celled cave. The donors seem to be Buddhists as their names would suggest. So it can be inferred that Buddhist establishment was there at Broach by the beginning of the second century A.D. Usavadatta's inscription also refers to Broach as one of the places where he built shelter
of quadrangular rest-house. Yuan Chwang in in the seventh century visited the place and reported that there were some ten Sangharamas (Buddhist monasteries) with 300 monks who were adherents of the Mahāyāna school.35

6. Junnar

Junnar, (lat. 19° 10' N., long. 73° 53' E.) is the chief town of the taluk of the same name and lies about 96 kms north of Pune. It is the most northerly sub-division. Geographically, it is located in the transitional belt between the chain of the Sahyadris. The town is a cup-shaped valley surrounded by the Sivaner and the Tulja hills to the west, the Sulaimanto the north and east, and the Manmodi hill to the south. It is on the southern bank of the river Kukdi. The Mina and the Kukdi are both feeders of the Ghod river. They pass south-east in nearly parallel lines and hold water in pools throughout the year. The climate is dry and healthy and free from hot winds. Great heat and total failure of rain are very rare.36

Due to the favourable conditions prevailing at Junnar, it has the largest number of rock excavations, about 324 in all, in the whole of Western India. Junnar was perhaps the largest Buddhist establishment in the early centuries of the Christian era.37 This great number of excavations indicates the existence of a large and prosperous city supporting the monastic community residing in the caves. The location of Junnar has all the geo-economic aspects favourable for the growth of such a city. It is just on the plain not far from Nanaghat, a pass which was a vital link between the ports of Sopara, Kalyan, and Thana and the big inland cities like Nasik, Tagara and Faithan. Trade-routes from these big cities
might have converged on this town before passing through the Nana pass towards the ports. This strategic position, coupled with the natural protection provided by the hills around this valley and also the salubrious climate and availability of plenty of water in the perennial rivers Kukdi and Mina appear to have contributed to the growth of the city and its prosperity and the consequent rise of the large monastic complex around.\(^\text{38}\)

It is interesting to note that each of the six groups faces towards a particular direction where the early historic settlements are located. The southern group of Sivneri faces towards Kusur, the western of Sivneri towards Nirgude, the Tulja Leni towards Fadli and the eastern group of Sivneri, Ganesh Leni and Manmodi hill face towards Junnar.\(^\text{39}\) The monks residing in the caves during the rain-retreat in the rainy season might have been visiting these places for alms and grants of fields from these villages.

Junnar was one of the most important centres of Hinayâna Buddhism. This is clearly indicated by the fact that the monastic establishment here was the largest in Western India. There are in all 324 rock-cut excavations: 10 chaityagrihas, 174 viharas and other chambers, 115 cisterns and 25 unfinished excavations.\(^\text{40}\) The architectural activity continued for over 300 years, i.e. from 50 B.C. to 280 A.D. The occupational capacity of Junnar during the peak period could have numbered several hundreds, probably between 200 and 300 monks.

The 39 inscriptions in 24 caves give us a wealth of information on the economy, society and the religion of the region and those surrounding it. The Junnar caves, with the exception of one vihara and a cistern by a minister of the Ashatrapa ruler Nahapana,\(^\text{41}\)
owed their existence to the lay community of merchants and other occupational groups. There are 38 donors but names of 10 donors are either not given or effaced. Out of the remaining 28 donors by name 3 are Yavanas of which two are from Gata and one from Junnar itself. Two brothers from Broach and two donors from Kalyan also made their donations at Junnar. These people are joined by a trader from Damanadesa and a nun from Aparanta in making gifts at Junnar. Thus it becomes crystal clear that Junnar was a trade-centre accessible from the four directions and that the Buddhist establishment here enjoyed patronage from various types of people.

Out of the 49 pieces of gifts 9 are from outside Junnar, 16 are from the villages nearby and 24 are from Junnar itself. Junnar is the only site in Western India where we get land donations by private individuals. The land grants at Nasik and Karle are by the royal donors. Land measured in nivartanas was donated 12 times amounting to 125 nivartanas in total. These were donated within the period of 30 years, i.e. from 150 to 180 A.D. This also suggests the rise of the Junnar cave-inhabitants by that time. It was during this period that the brotherhood was growing rapidly at Junnar, so that the lay-adherents were not very well able to cope with all the needs of the Sangha. As a result, certain lands were set aside for the use and welfare of the Sangha. And it was the responsibility of the Sangha to make the most out of the lands.

The Buddhist community of Junnar did not consist only of the monks but the nuns as well. There was a Nunnery of Dhammutariya sect to which a cave and a cistern were donated. Junnar was also a centre of Buddhist education. There is a mention of a venerable monk, Thera Bheṣaṭṭa Tevija Sulasa, who was the Acharya of Gana and
the teacher of Thera Bhadanta Tevija Chetiya. As Junnar has the largest number of excavated caves for worshipping and dwelling in the whole of Western India, it must have been indispensable for it to have monastic education imparted. Junnar was the place where different Buddhist sects met together and lived. The Dhammutariya, the Sammitiya and the Aparajita sects have been referred to in the inscriptions.

One of the caves in Manmodi group (cave no XXVI) is referred to as Gridhravihara. That particular cave was considered to be as holy as the mount Gridhrakuta at Rajagriha, where the Exalted One stayed for a long time teaching devas and men.

7. Kalyan

Kalyan, (lat. 19 14' N, long. 73 12' E) is the chief town and port in the Kalyan sub-division. It lies at the junction of the north-east and south-east lines of the Peninsula railway 33 miles north-east of Bombay.

There is no inscription found at Kalyan but a number of inscriptions referred to it. The inscriptions testify that there was, at least, a vihara at Kalyan where the Buddhist Sangha was living. The vihara is known as Abalikavihara. Donations such as Chaityagriha, upathanasala, ovaraka, pothi, saranapothi and 300 karshapanas of endowment were made to the Chatudisabhikshusangha at Kalyan. Judging from the nature of donations one can say that there was a strong Buddhist establishment at Kalyan and the Buddhist community there practiced the oposatha ceremony at Kalyan itself. The monks at Kalyan did not belong to one sect alone, but to the four directions. Another record mentions the gifts of a vihara with two cells and a quadrangular dining-room (bhojanachatusala) in the vihara at
The existence of a bhikshusangha at Kalyan is very clear from another inscription at Kanheri. It says that Samidatta the goldsmith from Kalyan, along with the bhikshusangha and lay-brethren, donated a paniyaka at Kanheri. Still another record confirms this fact. It says that a man who was both a householder and a merchant, with his father, mother, brother and an assembly of all co-religionists, donated a cave at Kanheri. Kalyan did not only have the bhikshusangha but the bhikshunisangha also. This is indicated by the fact that the donor of Kanheri cave XCVIII and a cistern was Bhikshuni Damila from Kalyan. Kalyan was also a centre of Buddhist education as suggested by the presence of Thera Bhadanta Halaka and his pupil Kanha. The latter donated a cave, a cistern and a niche at Kanheri.

As many as 15 donors from Kalyan alone made 21 gifts to the Kanheri Buddhist Community. The gifts include: caves XXI, XXXII, LIX, LXIV, XCVIII, XXXVI, 5 cisterns, paniyapodhi, 2 kodhis, asana, sananapodhi, mandapa, pedhiko, vihara, paniyaka and a field. Sulasadata (120 A.D.) and Sanghaka (160 A.D.) from Kalyan also donated a chaityagriha and a cistern respectively to the Buddhist Sangha at Junnar.

The fact that donors from Kalyan were of varied professions such as traders, goldsmith and royal treasurer is a clear indication that Kalyan was indeed a commercial town. As many as 7 merchants and 2 goldsmiths from this place are recorded to have donated certain gifts to the Buddhist Sangha at Kanheri and Junnar.

8. Kanheri

Kanheri, otherwise known as kṣṇagiri or kṣṇasaila in ancient
inscriptions, is 10 km to the southeast of Borivli, a suburb of metropolitan Bombay. The name might have been derived from a Nāga king, Krishna, at Sopara. Kanheri seems to have been popularly known as Kṛṣṇagiri from its first occupation till the end of the ninth century.

Kanheri, (lat. 19° 12' N. long. 72° 54' E) in Thana district, begins to flourish as a Buddhist centre only from the time of Yajñasiri Satakarni or slightly earlier in latter half of the second century A.D. (163-185), and there is no cave at the site which belongs to the first century A.D. The site has 128 Buddhist caves located in lonely but picturesque surroundings. It has the largest Buddhist establishment, apart from Junnar, in Western India. It remained as a Buddhist centre for over a thousand years. The main reason appears to be its proximity to the ancient ports of Sopara, Kalyan and Chaula. The inscriptions also refer to these ports.

A vast majority of Kanheri caves consist of a squarish hall with a pillared verandah and a cell excavated randomly in the side wall, in some cases there are two cells, one each in either side wall. It is the only rock-cut monastic settlement in Western India where the cells, water cisterns, dining hall and lecture hall are joined by now worn out flights of rock-cut steps of which the inscriptions refer to.

As in the case of Ajanta and Junnar, the Kanheri inscriptions are very important and informative. The all-round aspects of life is presented in the inscriptions. There are about 52 of them thus far published or made known to the public. There are a few more inscriptions which need satisfactory reading and publication.

A little over a hundred personal names have been mentioned
in the Kanheri inscriptions of which 66 are donors and the rest are people related to the donors. Out of the 55 donors by name 25 of them are from outside of Kanheri. They made a total of 35 donations. They hail from Kalyan (14), Sopara (3), Chaula (2), Dhenukataka (2), Nasik (1), Kanaka in Sind (1), and West Bengal (1). Out of the 55 donors by name 36 of them are people from religious offices particularly the Buddhist religion.

Buddhist population as suggested by names and designations is about 43. Many of the rest might still be Buddhists. Therefore, it appears that the majority of the people mentioned in the Kanheri inscriptions are of the Buddhist community.

Among the various social classes mentioned in the inscriptions, the largest number is represented by merchant (9), treasurer (2), jeweller (1), goldsmith (2), blacksmith (1), physician, monks and nuns.

It is interesting to note that the inscriptions mention 17 caves, 15 cisterns, 11 stupas, 2 Buddha images, a field and a dam besides many other architectural pieces.

The records, further, furnish us with the doctrines and practices of the Buddhist Sangha as a whole. Stupas were erected in honour and remembrance of some Buddhist saints (either alive or dead). Sivapalitianika is recorded to have made a stupa for Thera Bhadanta Dhammapala and the cave "sagara-palogana" was particularly made for Thera Bhadanta Mitrabhuti. The rain-retreat was in practice as evident in the inscriptions.

The Bhadrayaniya sect got its foothold at Kanheri right from the beginning till the middle of the fourth century A.D. And the Aparaseliya sect came into view from c. 300 A.D. or so.
Kanheri was both a religious and educational centre. The mention of nine Arhats in the stupa-inscriptions reveals the secrecy of the place and the height of spiritual attainment by its occupants. Kanheri must have stood with dazzling glory at its height and peak periods. It produced many a saint who had attained the highest spiritual attainment with mortal body. It must have been highly esteemed and sacredly regarded in its heydays. It is the only place in the whole of Western India where we get reference to Arhats and a nun who had attained the venerable stage. She was Theri Ponakiasana, the donor of Kanheri cave LIV.

The records have two monks and two nuns as the pupils of more qualified and senior monks. The teachers have invariably been referred to as Thera Bhadanta. From this, it can be inferred that the other five Bhadantas and five Thera Bhadantas must have also been teachers though their pupils have not been mentioned. It may be that their pupils have not made any gift whereby their names got absent in the inscriptions. The number of monks and nuns residing at Kanheri during the Hinayana phase could have been in the neighbourhood of 300-400 and in the Mahayana phase a hundred or so more. It is quite obvious from the above fact that imparting of Buddhist education by the senior monks and nuns to the junior ones was indispensable. It should ever be borne in mind that what the inscriptions yield us is only the tip of an ice berg. But inexpressible thanks are due to those scribes who took time to engrave on the hard surface of those eternal basaltic rocks.
9. Karle

Karle (lat. 18 46 N, long. 73 93 E) is situated in the Maval taluk of Pune district on the Pune-Bombay highway, about 60 kms northwest of Pune. It is just about 8 kms north of Bhaja, and this too was on the ancient Bhorghat road that stretch from the seaports of Kalyan and Sopara up the Sahyadris and on to the cities of the interior like Ter.

The Karle caves are located at a height of about a hundred metres above a high spur of the chain of hills on the north flank of the Indrayani valley. The caves face west generally. They are in a line with the Chaityagriha in the centre and have a sufficiently wide flat area in front of them.

Karle is a small monastic unit consisting of only 16 independent excavations. But this is the most famous of the centres of early rock-cut architecture and possibly among them no other place in Western India has received so much attention by art historians as this one. Its place of pride is due to the existence of the Great Chaitya Hall, 'the best rock-mansion in the whole of Jambudvipa.'

Fah-Hien often referred to India as Jambudvipa. The name is derived from a mythical Jambu tree which is said to have its trunk fifteen yojanas in girth, out-spreading branches fifty yojanas in length, shade one hundred yojanas in extent and the height of one hundred yojanas.

The Chaitya Hall is a neatly executed monument endowed with beauty and majesty. This is one of the best examples of Chaitya Hall consisting of an apsidal hall with a front verandah. There are fifteen pillars on each side, running parallel to each other.
It is the biggest of its type in the whole of India. It is 37.87 metres deep from door to back, 13.87 metres wide and 14.02 metres high from the floor to the apex in the interior.\(^7\)

There are altogether 35 inscriptions at Karle, 32 of which are in the Chaitya Hall and the other three are in caves II, XII, and XV. The first inscription in the Chaitya Hall is interesting for two reasons: firstly, it is the only inscription in the hall which refers to the whole cave, selaghara (house in stone). The other 31 inscriptions just refer to parts of the cave only, mostly the pillars. Secondly, the inscription is the only epigraphic record in the whole of western India which refers to India as a whole, while the other inscriptions mention only parts of India.

Karle seems to have flourished from early first century B.C. to the middle of third century A.D. During the Mahayana phase, it was re-occupied but not much additions were made except a few caves viz., IV, VI, and XIV which have images of the Buddha in them.

There are altogether 33 donors who made 33 pieces of donations. Out of 16 caves, the inscriptions refer to three, viz., caves VIII, XII, and XV. Out of 4 cisterns the inscription refers to one and 17 pillars from 30 have been mentioned in the records. of the 33 donors, 20 are from outside of Karle, 14 from Dhenukataka, 1 from Sopara, 1 from Umebanakataka, 1 from Gonekaka, 1 from Abulama and another from Vaijayanti.

The inscriptions also provide us with the information that Karle was under the patronages of the Kshatrapas, the Satavahanas,\(^8\) and the Mahārathis.\(^9\) But the period of the royal patronages is only a century or so.

Karle was the seat of the Mahāsanghika sect, yet donors from
other sects such as Dhammuṭariya and Kasyapiya made their donations to the Buddhist monks of the four horizons at Karle. Donations were handed to the Mahāsanghikas for the use and welfare of the Chatudisabhikshusangha.

The Karle inscriptions, though short and donative, are very significant from religious point of view. One of the Buddhist practices, i.e. the keeping of relic, is referred to in the inscription. One of the pillars in the Chaitya Hall is said to have contained relics (sasariro) of ash or bones of some saint. The Karle caves were also used during the rainy season for vassa. One of the donor is particularly mentioned as a Bhadanta as well as a preacher (bhanakasa) from Sopara. This is the only occurrence of the word in our study. It appears that some of the monks were extensively engaged in preaching the doctrine so much so that they were known as preachers. Satimita was such a preacher from Sopara.

Karle had a larger community than any other places in the ghat area and its number may have been around 100 at the peak times. If the Buddhist community of both monks and nuns, together about a hundred were living there, then there bound to be the impartation of sacred knowledge. The mention of two Thera Bhadantas and a Phadanta also adds more weight to this fact as they are the qualified teachers of the Sangha. Thus, Karle was, as a Buddhist centre, not without monastic education.

10. Karad

Karad, 30 miles south of Satara on the Krishna river, is a town of great antiquity. Though a small town now, it was a very important trading and religious centre in the centuries
around the Christian era in the Satavahana period as evident from
the donative records of the merchants of Karahataka (ancient name
of Karadh) at such far off places as Bharhut in Madhya Pradesh. There
are three groups of caves located about 5 to 7 kms south
west of the town. They are Jakhinwadi, Agashiv and Chachegaon.
These three groups, comprising about 65 caves, are scattered in
the hills. Of these, five are chaityagrihas, viz., VI, VII, XII,
XVII and XLVIII and the rest are viharas. The caves are plain
and many are unfinished.

Architectural activity seems to have continued there for a
period of more than a century and half, i.e. from 90 A.D. to 250
A.D. A solitary inscription refers to the gift of cave no. XLVII
by Sanghamitra, son of Gopala. A Kuda record reports that Mahika,
an iron-monger from Karadh, made a donation of cave no. XIV at
Kuda. This record with the Bharhut record seem to suggest that
there was a considerably large Buddhist community at Karadh, who
made donations for the excavation of the caves there and at other
places.

11. Kol

Kol is a small village about 3 kms south east of Mahad in the
Raigad district. The caves are located on a hill, across the river
Savitri, in two groups, one to the south east of the village and
the other to the north east. There are altogether 9 excavations, 6
in the south east group and 3 in the other group. They are very
much dilapidated.

A few inscriptions have been found there. Sethi Sangharakhita,
Dhamasiri and her husband Sivadatta are mentioned to have donated
a cave each. The last two donors hailed from Aghaakasa village,
which must have been lying close to Kol. It seems that kol and its neighbouring villages were inhabited by people with Buddhist faith. Dhamasiri's father is mentioned as a Buddhist lay-devotee.

12. Kondane

Kondane in Karjat taluk, Raigad district, is one of the well-known centres of rock-cut architecture. It is about 6 kms south east of Karjat. The cave group appears to be one of the main religious establishments along the Bhorghat route leading from Kalyan-Sopara ports towards, Bhaja, Karle and further on to Ter, etc. The location of Kondane caves probably indicates that the highway between the ports and the inland towns might have been running along the river Ulhas.

Kondane is a small group consisting of one Chaityagriha and seven caves, all belonging to the early period-Hinayana phase, and are untampered by later activities of the Mahayana period. It has a capacity to accommodate 54 monks. It is more likely that this place was serving as caravanserai along the main trade route in which the people, particularly the monks, moving along could have just spent a day or night on their way, up or down the ghats. The trading community frequenting this place could have provided the necessities for the few monks permanently residing there.

A solitary inscription records the name of a person called Balaka who was the student of Kanha. What he donated is not exactly known as the inscription is mutilated.

13. Kuda

Kuda (lat. 18 17' N, long. 73 8' E) is a small village. It is 13 miles north west of Mangaon, and about 2 miles east of the north east arm of the Rajpuri creek. It is remarkable for a group
of 31 Buddhist caves and 11 cisterns, cut in the side of a hill which is about 250 feet high. The caves command a beautiful view. The caves are plain, cave VI being the only one with sculptures. The rest are much alike except in size. The caves at Kuda have perhaps the most picturesque location. They lie on the shore of the creek of Rajpuri, some 45 miles to the south of Bombay.

The Kuda caves are highly interesting as almost every cave is bestowed with an inscription. The inscriptions themselves display somewhat an individualistic character in palaeographical style compared with others.

Architectural and palaeographical evidences ascertain that there was a continuous activity at Kuda stretching for a period of two and half centuries from the early part of the second century A.D. to the later part of the fourth century A.D. A few of the caves were reoccupied by the Mahāyānists in the ending part of the fifth century. The dwelling caves, in the peak period, could have accommodated a fraternity of some 60 monks and nuns.

There are altogether 31 independent excavations at Kuda and 31 inscriptions including the damaged ones. All the caves except caves II, IV, VIII, XIX, XX, XXII and XXV to XXXI have inscriptions in them. Out of 31 excavations:

- 4 are chaityagrihas and inscriptions referred to 2,
- 21 are lenas and inscriptions referred to 15,
- 11 are cisterns and inscriptions mentioned 6 and there are 2 matapas and 4 kochis for which there is no inscriptiveal reference.

The Mahābhōjjas, the feudal lords under the Satavahanas, were ruling the Kuda region for about two centuries, i.e. from 120 A.D. to 310 A.D. They were responsible for the excavation of a number
of caves at Kuda. We have no information about other political powers at Kuda.

Out of the 44 donors mentioned by name only one is from outside of Kuda, i.e. Karadn. It is interesting to note that Kuda is the only site in Western India where we obtain the largest number of female donors, as many as 24.

Among the various social classes of the donors as furnished by the records, captain of the caravan (sathavaha) occurs most frequently. There are four sathavahas, two bankers (sethis), three gardeners, an iron-monger, a physician and a writer.

Kuda was a seat of Buddhist learning. The inscriptions refer to six female pupils studying under three Therā Bhadantas. It is interesting, again here, to note that all the pupils mentioned in the inscriptions are females. This is a clear indication that during the Kuda period, female folks of the society enjoyed the privilege of learning, and that they were allowed to join the Bhikshunisangha besides enjoying the privilege of making gifts to the Buddhist church.

14. Mahad

Mahad (lat. 18° 6' N, and long. 73° 29' E) is the headquarters of the Mahad sub-division. The town lies on the right bank of the Savitri river, 34 miles east of Bankot, just above its meeting with the Gandhari. At high water spring tides vessels and canoes can pass a mile above Mahad. Its situation at the head of the main channel of the Savitri and the group of early Buddhist caves in Pale hill about two miles to the north west of the town and two groups equally old at Kol about a mile to the south, mark Mahad as an early trade centre. The caves are considered to date
from the first to the third century A.D.  

There are 28 caves in all at Mahad. Only cave XXI is of Mahāyāna faith. However, the rest were occupied in the fifth-sixth century by the Mahāyānists who carved a few images here and there. Out of the two inscriptions, one is that of Venhupalita, prince of Kanabhoja royal family, who donated a cave, a chaityagrīha, 8 cells, 2 cisterns and a path. The other inscription is that of Vadasiri, who donated a cave and a chaityagrīha too.

15. **Nadsur**

Nadsur is a village in the pant of Bhor's territory, 5 miles east of Pali, the headquarters village of this district, and 10 miles east of Nagothna, a well-known town on the river Amba, and the terminus of the Harbour Ferry Boat line. The caves are cut in a long line of trap cliff which faces nearly west, and are 18 in number.

Cave VII seems to have been donated by Gana's son Krittika-datta. The cave is certainly the most important one in the whole group and it is also the largest, measuring 48.9 x 39 x 11 feet. The cave has no pillars. The whole cave, with the cells, have been plastered and painted but very little of which remains now. Cave VIII was donated by a man whose name ends with "mitra". He was a stūpasaka and probably the son of Sangharakhita.

16. **Nanaghat**

Nanaghat is in the Sahyādri hills about halfway between the north eastern and the south eastern lines of the Peninsular railway. It was the old highway of trade between Paithan and Sopara.

The Nanaghat inscriptions belong to the oldest historical
documents of Western India, and in some respects are more interest-
ing than all the other cave inscriptions taken together. But from Buddhist point of view, the inscriptions have almost nothing to offer as they are entirely Brahmancial in nature.

17. Nasik

The caves (lat. 19° 59' N, long. 73° 47' E) are situated on a hillock by the side of Nasik-Bombay Road, about 8 kms south west of Nasik town. The caves are locally called Pandu lena. They are located about 60 to 70 metres up the hill on a vast stretch of rock scarp. The hill was known in ancient times as "Trirasmi" in Sanskrit and "Tiranhu" in Pali. Probably the name is derived from the three independent hilly outcrops marking the end of the Trimbak-Anjaneri range of the Sahyadris. The location of the caves follows the well-known pattern. These command a beautiful view of the queen gardens on the bank of the Godavari, the winding river and the hill beyond, and are in such a place not too far or too near the ancient town.

There are 24 main caves, of which 2 are later works of the Mahāyāna period, and 5 are early caves altered later by the Mahā-
yānistas. Their functional distribution consists of three chaitya-
halls, 14 viharas and some 78 cells with possible occupational capacity of over 100 monks at peak period. The excavational activity may have begun sometimes between 50 and 30 B.C. and continued with certain interruptions until about 300 A.D.

There are 27 inscriptions in Nasik caves. The span of period covered by the inscriptions is about three and half centuries. More than half of the inscriptions were engraved in the second century A.D. Nasik inscriptions are extremely important for the recon-
struction of political events in the early historic period. The
succession of kings, under three dynasties, at Nasik is of great
importance. On the basis of palaeographical analysis, the kings
mentioned in the records come in the following order:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the King</th>
<th>Dynasty</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>In Cave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kanha</td>
<td>Satavahana</td>
<td>45-40 BC</td>
<td>XIX, XXI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahapana</td>
<td>Kshatrapa</td>
<td>78-124 AD</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gautamiputra Satakarni</td>
<td>Satavahana</td>
<td>106-130 AD</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vasisthiputra Pulumāvi</td>
<td>Satavahana</td>
<td>130-159 AD</td>
<td>XXIII, II, IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yajña Siri Satakarni</td>
<td>Satavahana</td>
<td>174-202 AD</td>
<td>XX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isvarasena</td>
<td>Abhira</td>
<td>248-258 AD</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear from the epigraphic evidence that Nasik enjoyed
the largest number and longest period of royal patronage. The
royal donations at Nasik include: Caves II, III, X, XVIII, XIX,
XX, 3 cells and 3 monks' lands.

Out of 23 donors by name only 4 are from out side of Nasik.
They are from Chalisilana, Dasapu, Chakalopa and Dattamriti.
The name of Nasik must have been heard in a very remote place such
as Dattamriti in Sind. Donations made at Nasik range from caves,
chaityagrihas, cisterns, cells, Yakshas, fields, monks' lands and
karshapanas. Monetary donations were made in the form of amounts
invested in the guilds of weavers, potters, oil-millers and hydrau-
lic engineers.

The Buddhist community at Nasik must have been generally sup-
ported by the villages surrounding the settlement as those of Pisa-
jipadaka, Samalipada, Sudisana, Kakhadi, Kanhabini, Chikhalapadra,
Chalisilana and Dambhikā. These villages could have easily sup-
ported the Buddhist Sangha even at the peak time with about a hundred
monks and nuns.
The various social classes of the donors are writers, merchants, husbandmen, fishermen, ministers and army commanders. The women-folk of this region too enjoyed a great freedom to make gifts to religious establishments. So we have as many as 7 women donors at Nasik. That is more than half of the men.

With such a liberal royal patronage and generous supports from the local inhabitants and villages around it, Nasik stood as one of the leading Buddhist centres in Western India during its hey days. It flourished for almost four centuries. Members of different sects harmoniously lived together at Nasik. The three sects present at Nasik are the Bhadrayaniya, the Kasyapiya, and the Chaityaka sects.

The congregation of the "charaka" mentioned in Usavadata's inscription is no other than the Buddhist monks at Nasik. It is clear from the inscription itself that the Charakas were the monks dwelling in the cave, cave X. The Charakas were visiting scholars who were also monks. They went from place to place in search of knowledge and at the same time taught dhamma to others. The reference to this group of monks indicates that monks were living also in villages because the inscription says that Usavadata gave 8000 stems of cocoanut tress each to the congregation of Charakas at Pimditakavada, Govardhana, Suvarnamukha and Ramatirtha in Soparaga.

The absence of reference to the Therav Bhadantas, the Bhadantas and the bhikshus in such a big centre as Nasik does not mean that there was no monastic school at Nasik. On the contrary, the existence of monastic school at Nasik is evidenced by an inscription which records the gift of pavajitikaya Tapasini who was a pupil of Bhadanta Savasa or a venerable monk from the Kasyapiya sect, i.e., Sovasaka.
18. **Paithan**

Paithan (lat. 19°39' N, long. 75°26' E) on the northern bank of the river Godavari in the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra, represents the ancient Pratishthana which was the capital of the Satavahana kings. The city could trace its antiquity to a few centuries before the Christian era, being an important link in communication with the south.\(^1\)

Paithan must have been an important town as early as the second century BC. An inscription at Ajanta records that Dharmadeva from Paithan made a donation of a (pasada) at Ajanta for the use of the pavajitas.\(^2\) Half a century later in c. 100 BC, some donors from the same town made two pillars at Pitalkhora as their gifts to the Buddhist Order. We have no idea about these donors whether they were Buddhists or not. We also do not know whether the Buddhist Order have started to establish there by then or later. But we do know that the Mahāyāna community was there at Paithan. This fact is evidenced by a Kanheri inscription which says that a chaityagriha and 13 cells were made at Paithan and a perpetual endowment was given. It further mentions that in the pargana of Paithan called Rajatalaka, a small temple (kuti) was erected.\(^3\)

19. **Pale**

Pale village, almost a suburb of Mahad about 2 miles north-west, has a group of 29 Buddhist caves of about the first or second century after Christ. The caves are cut in almost perpendicular scarp of the hill and face east. They were reoccupied by the Mahāyānists who made Buddha images, the fly-whisk bearers, the vidyādharas and figures of the demigods.

There are three inscriptions in the Pale caves. One in cave
IV, another in IX and the last in XXVIII. The first two records are very much mutilated that reading is not possible. The last record is a very short one mentioning the cave, wherein the inscription is, as a meritorious gift of Bhadanta Indrarakhitā. The occupational capacity at the peak period is about 40.

20. Pitalkhora

Like Ajanta, Pitalkhora (lat. 20° 20' N, long. 75° 00' E) is an isolated monastic complex situated away from the Sahyadrian clusters. It is about 70 kms west of Ajanta. The Pitalkhora cave are located at the head of a ravine wherein a picturesque view of the gushing water and the green trees is presented in the rainy season. It lay on the ancient trade route used by the caravans from Sopara and Nasik crossing the Indhyadri hill on their way to Paithan.

Next to Bhaja, Pitalkhora was perhaps the earliest Buddhist establishment in western India. All the caves belong to the Hinayāna period. But they were reused by the Mahāyānists. The latter made a few paintings of the Buddha on the pillars in the great chaitya hall. There are 6 chaityagrihas, 17 lenas and 1 cistern. The architectural activity started from c. 200 BC and continued up to around 200 AD. Pitalkhora's popularity may have been due to its location along a busy trade route and its development of a pontifical seat. A group of stupas at Pitalkhora testifies that it was indeed a pontifical seat.

There are seven inscriptions which belong to c. 100 BC. The inscriptions are very short and much damaged. However, a careful investigation of them reveals that Pitalkhora was an important Buddhist center in the Hinayāna period. Donors like Mitadeva and Sanghaka's sons from Paithan made their donations here in the form
of pillars while the royal physician, Magila donated a five-celled cave. A bhikshuni also donated a pillar in cave IV while a man, son of Sama from Dhenukataka, made some horse sculptures. A Yaksha image was gifted by a royal treasurer, Kaphadasena. At the peak, Pitalkhora could have accommodated no less than 120 monks and nuns. The presence of a nunnery is confirmed by the mention of a bhikshuni.

21. Shelarwadi

This group of caves is on the Garodi hill about 3 kms southwest of Talegaon, a railway station on the Pune-Bombay line. Shelarwadi was probably located near the trade route from Kalyan to Ter passing via the Bhorghat along Kondane and Bhaja-Karle. No ancient town, however, that supported the Buddhist Community here has so far been discovered nearby.

The monastery here consisted of about 11 caves in two groups. There are 16 cells which could have accommodated up to 30 members.

The extant inscriptions, though only two, are of great significance as they shed some lights about Shelarwadi which is otherwise obscure. Both the inscriptions are engraved in the Chaitya-hall. One of them says that the Chaitya-hall was donated by Buddha and her partner Sangha while the cells in the cave were donated by Usabhanaka and his family as the other record has it.

Though not very big, the Shelarwadi establishment was also an educational centre. This is suggested by the reference to bhikshuni Ghapara who was a pupil of (Thera) Bhadanta Sinha and also to a phrase in the inscription which says, "...the community of teachers". Thera Bhadanta Sinha was just one of the teachers and there were many other teachers whose names got no mention in the inscriptions.
22. **Sopara**

Sopara (lat. 19° 25' N, long. 72° 47' E) is a large village in the Bassein sub-division of the Thana district. It lies about 37 miles north of Bombay and about 4 miles south-west of the Virar station on the Baroda railway. It appears as a holy city in Buddhist, Brahmanical and Jain books, and as a wealthy city and emporium in Aparânta from c. 250 BC to about 1500 AD. About the middle of the third century BC Asoka sent to Aparânta one of his missionaries, Dhammarâkhita. This missionary is said to have preached the Buddhist faith to 70,000 hearers. Sopara was then the capital of Aparânta. Probably the missionary made Sopara the centre of his missionary efforts and that it was from Sopara that Buddhism spread over Western India.

Sopara as a flourishing Buddhist centre since the time of Asoka is evidenced by literary sources, archaeological remains, and epigraphical records. Sopara is often referred to in Buddhist literary works. The Mahâvamsa and Dipavamsa narrate the story of Vijaya, the eldest son of King Sihabahu of Ceylon. Both narrate that Vijaya was very violent and wicked along with his followers. So at the request of the people, Vijaya and his followers, 700 men with their families, were put on a ship and sent them forth upon the sea by the king. The people landed separately. Vijaya landed at the heaven called Sopara. The Mahâvamsa called Sopara as heaven probably due to the fact that it was regarded as a holy city where many saints lived.

Sopara as a Buddhist centre is further evidenced by the discovery of the eight small seated copper images in the coffer of the Sopara tope. The eight images are identified as the six former Buddhas, Sakyamuni and Maitreya. As it was in Ajanta and Kanheri, the eight Buddhas appear to have been the common knowledge of the Sopara Buddhists.
Besides the literary and archaeological evidences the epigraphic records also testify the fact that Sopara was a Buddhist centre from very early time. Our first inscriptive evidence is obtained from Karle Chaitya Hall where the record says that a pillar was donated by Sātimita, both a Bhadanta and a preacher from Sopara. He was also a pupil of Thera Bhadanta. About seven decades later a Nasik inscription recorded some of the good deeds of Usavadata, the son-in-law of Nahapana. He is said to have given a rest house with four doors and four verandahs and an almshouse at Sopara besides the gift of 8000 stems of cocoanut trees to the congregation of Charakas at Ramatirtha in Sopara.

Then in the middle of second century AD, that is three decades after the above inscription, two donors from Sopara made their religious contributions at Kanheri. One of the donors, named Sāmika, was both a merchant and a lay-devotee. He donated a cistern and Kanheri cave VII. The other man was Puṇaka, leader of a guild, who made a dam (talaka) as his gift to the Kanheri Buddhist Congregation. Then in the last quarter of the second century AD, another donor from Sopara made a cistern as his meritorious gift at Nanaghat. Half a century later, Mudapala, a merchant from Sopara, donated an agricultural land (chheta) with endowments to the Kanheri Buddhist Order. This is another clear evidence that Buddhism was still having its foothold at Sopara in the third century AD. Then what about the centuries after this? Buddhism was not only still existing at Sopara in the fifth century AD, but it was very strong. This is suggested by another inscription in Kanheri cave III. It says that 3 viharas were added to some building at Sopara. This is our last epigraphic reference to Sopara. Thus, all these references to Sopara go
to prove that Buddhism not merely existed as a religion at Sopara but flourished from Asoka's time to the fifth century AD.

23. **Visapur**

Rising from the same plateau as Lohagad, about half a mile to the north, the rocky scarp of Visapur is crowned by a smooth bare hilltop. About three and a half miles south of the Karle caves, in the district of Poona, Visapur stood as a small monastery. There are five inscriptions engraved on five cisterns. They are the latest discovered cave inscriptions in Western India. They are important from political point of view, though they are very short. They furnish us with the names of two political powers. One is that of the suzerain power, i.e., the Satavahana king Vasishthiputra Pulumavi and the other is that of the provincial governor, i.e., the Mahārathī Vinhudata. Three of the inscriptions are the records of the latter power. One record is by his writer, Mugadapalita and the last one by a sethi named Kasa. One of the inscriptions bear the date, i.e., the 25th year of Vasishthiputra Pulumavi. It corresponds to 155 AD.

The foregoing 22 Buddhist centres are not the only ones in Western India. There are many more which are not included in the present work as they lack inscriptions. However, a few of them should be mentioned here as they provide us with a clear evidence whereby one can definitely say that they were indeed the shelters for the monks and nuns of remote past. Some of them are: Kondivite (20 excavations), Nenavali, Pohale (6 excavations), Pauni, Shirwal (7 caves), Wai (8 caves), and Yerphal.
### Buddhist Centres of Western India as Revealed in the Inscriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Inscr.</th>
<th>Caves</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ajanta</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>Paintings and images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivale</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedsa</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>The Maharathis ruled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhaja</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>A group of stupas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broach</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>A sea-port.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junnar</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>The largest settlement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalyan</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>A port, 15 donors to Kanheri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanheri</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Chief seat of learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karad</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karle</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Chaitya Hall best in India.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kol</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kondane</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuda</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahad</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadsur</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasik</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faithan</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pale</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitalkhora</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Second earliest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelarwadi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sopara</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visapur</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Maharathis ruled the region.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total:** 261 * 670 1785

*With the Nanaghat inscriptions (10) and the Ghatotkacha inscription (1), the grand total is 272 inscriptions.*
E. The Extent of Buddhism

Before 250 BC, the Buddhist communities in western India must have been small, possibly scattered monastic settlement housed in buildings of brick, wattle, and daub, supported by a small lay community. With the reign and patronage of Asoka and the missionary efforts made by the Theravada Sangha after the Pataliputra Council, Buddhism must have spread rather extensively and by 200 BC, the Buddhist communities began to use excavated dwellings and shrines in the Bhoghat, Nasik and Ajanta regions. From that time on these excavated dwellings and shrines give us a more or less connected history of Buddhism in western India until about the eleventh century AD.

As said earlier, the Buddhist monks and nuns did not live only in the rock-cut viharas but in other types of shelters which are allowed by the Buddha. Vihara is one of the five lodgings allowed by the Master. So it should be kept in mind that before and during the excavations were being done other types of lodgings were used by the monks and nuns. Buddhism in its hey days did not have the rock-cut caves alone as its centres but the nearby towns and villages as well. Sopara, Broach, Paithan and Kalyan are the most outstanding Buddhist centres in western India without much rock-cut caves but structural buildings. The places where monks and nuns in hundreds and thousands lived as referred to by the Chinese traveller, Yuan Chwang, did not have rock-cut caves. In the seventh century AD, according to Yuan Chwang's estimation, there were about 15,000 Buddhist monks in Western India. And the Buddhist centres estimated on the basis of rock-cut monuments is about 80, of which only a quarter is important. The average occu-
pational capacity of the 80 centres would be around 50 or 60 members which means the caves of Western India could have been able to accomodate about 5000 members of the Sangha. One has to note again that all the rock-cut caves were not occupied in the Mahayana phase, so the occupants of the caves would go much below 5000. This means that by Yuan Chwang's time, over 10,000 were living in villages and towns. The big number of the mendicants also suggests that the Buddhist religion was not only blooming but there must have also been a large number of the lay-devotees without whose generous support the Sangha would collapse.

The presence of Buddhist monks in villages and towns is confirmed by Usavadatta's inscription at Kusik. It says that the congregation of the Charakas were at Pimiditakavada, Govardhana, Suvarnamukha and Ramatirtha in Soparagad.

The presence of Buddhism in other besides Western India can be inferred from their mention in the inscriptions. Dhenukataka, which is identified with Dharnikot in Andhra Pradesh is referred to in the inscriptions for about 17 times. It is the most frequently mentioned place in the whole of the inscriptions. It was the chief centre of the Chaityakas, the Purvas and Aparasailas. From early second century BC, Dhenukataka continued to be a Buddhist centre till the seventh century AD, when Yuan Chwang visited the place and reported that there were a thousand monks and nuns. The chief donor of Karle Chaitya Hall, Sethi Bhutapala, was from Vaijayanti which is identified with Nagarjunikonada in A. P. His co-donors were from Dhenukataka, which is not far from his town. Probably they spoke one language and belonged to the same faith.

A donor from Kanka village in Sind made a stupa-chaitya at
Kanheri in AD 493. His name suggests that he was born in a Buddhist family and the way he addressed the Buddha shows that he was quite well acquainted with the Buddhist scriptures. Yuan Chwang reports that there were as many as 10,000 monks in North Sind. Buddhism did not confine itself to Western India and North India alone, but it was also flourishing in the east. A Kanheri inscription discloses that Gomin Avighnakara, a devout worshipper of Sugata, from Gauda country donated a hundred drarnmas as a permanent endowment for meditation rooms and clothing at Kanheri. This is an indication that Buddhism was still having a good place by AD 851 in West Bengal. Two centuries earlier, Yuan Chwang reported that there were about 2000 monks and nuns in Bengal, and about 10,000 in Orissa.

It appears that Buddhism was at its climax in India during Yuan Chwang’s visit. Though his estimations cannot be taken as absolutely true, they give us an idea of the proportional distribution of the Buddhist population in the country. According to his reports, the Hinayana monks and nuns outnumbered that of the Mahayana by three times: 96,430:32,000. The overall priesthood in India was 182,930. This suggests that the Buddhist religion must have been still very strong in India at that time though it declined so much to such an extent, by half a millennium later, that its footprints were almost untraceable except in the case of the undestructible rock-cut caves of Western India and their contents.
References


2. Ibid., p. 11.

3. Ibid., p. 11.


11. Ibid., p. 98.


20. Ambivala cave, CTI, p. 66.


27. Ibid., p. 30.
29. Phaja inscriptions (16:11), ASWI-IV, p. 83.
32. Tarn, W.W., 1951, Greeks in Bactria and India, pp. 149ff.
34. Nasik inscription (10:10), EI-VIII, p. 78.
41. Junnar inscription (Man. 7:17), ASWI-IV, p. 103.
42. Junnar inscription (Siv.33:6), Ibid., p. 93.
43. Junnar inscription (Man.29:37), Ibid., p. 95.
44. Junnar inscription, see note no. 42.
45. Junnar inscription, (Man. 26:30), see appendix.
47. Junnar inscription, see no. 45.
50. Kanheri inscriptions, ASWI-V, pp. 76-77, DCRI-XLI, p. 78.
51. Ibid.
52. Kanheri inscription (3:6), ASWI-V, 80-81.
53. Kanheri inscription (2:3), Ibid., p. 75.
55. Kanheri inscription (98:38,39), Ibid., p. 84.
56. Kanheri inscription (59:26), Ibid., p. 83.
57. Junnar inscription (Gan. 6:3), ASWI-IV, 94.
58. Junnar inscription (Gan. 20:5), Ibid.
59. JBBRAS, XV, p. 275n
61. Kanheri inscription (78:34), CII-VI, 6-8.
63. Kanheri inscription, BAWI, p. 334.
64. Kanheri inscription (34:21), ASWI-V, 86.
65. Kanheri inscription (4:11), Ibid., p. 77.
70. Kanheri inscription (54:25), ASWI-V, 83.
71. Kanheri inscriptions (3:5, 7), Ibid., 75-77.
72. Kanheri inscriptions (54:25), Ibid., 83; (65:28), Ibid., 85.
74. Nagaraju, S., op. cit., p. 221.
75. Karle inscription (8:1), EI-VII, 49.
76. Legge, J., (Tr.), 1886, Fah-Hian's Travel in India and Ceylon, p. 34 n.
77. Beal, S., (Tr.), 1869, Travels of Fah-Hian and Sung Yun, elsewhere in the book.
78. Chaudhury, B.N., 1969, Buddhist centres in Ancient India, p. 1
81. Karle inscription (8:19), Ibid., 64-66.
82. Karle inscription (8:14), Ibid., 61. (8:2), Ibid., 49-50.
84. Karle inscription (8:8), Ibid., 54.
86. Karle inscription (8:9), Ibid., 54.
87. Karle inscription (8:13), Ibid., 57-58.
88. Karle inscription (8:8), Ibid., 54.
91. Ibid.
92. Karad inscription (47:1), ASWI-IV, 89.
93. Kuda inscription (14:20), CTI, 15-16.
94. Kol inscription (5:3), ASWI-IV, 89.
95. Kol inscriptions (3:1, 4:2), Ibid.
96. Ibid.
98. Ibid.
103. Ibid., p. 249.
106. Kuda inscription (14:20), Ibid., 15-16.
110. Kuda inscription (14:20), Ibid., 15-16.
112. Kuda inscriptions (1:1, 6:9), 4, 9-10.
114. Mahad inscription (8:1), ASWI-IV, 88.
115. Mahad inscription (8:2), LL 1073.
117. Ibid., 6-7. 118. Ibid., 4-7. 119. Ibid., 7.
120. Buhler, G., Nanaghat inscriptions, ASWI-V, 59.
123. Nasik inscription (24:26), Ibid., 95. Dasapura is modern Man-Dasor in Gwalior State.
124. Nasik Inscription (12:17), Ibid., 90.
125. Nasik inscription (17:18), Ibid. Demetrius in Sind.
128. Nasik inscriptions, Ibid., 90, 95, 77-78, 93, 94.
130. Nasik inscription, Ibid., 76.
131. Nasik Inscription, Ibid., 77-78.
132. Nasik inscription (10:10), Ibid., 78.
133. Nasik inscription (7:7), Ibid., 76.
135. Ajanta inscription (10:11), AO-VII, 149.
136. Pitalkhora inscription (3:1,2), ASWI-IV, 83.
137. Kanheri inscription (3:6), ASWI-V, 76-77.
142. Nagaraju, S., op. cit., p. 293.
143. Pitalkhora inscription, ASWI-IV, 83.
144. Pitalkhora inscription, Ibid., 84.
146. Pitalkhora inscription, Ibid.
147. Pitalkhora inscription, Ibid., AI-XV, 82.
149. Shelarwadi inscription (8:1), EI-XXVIII, 76-77.
150. Shelarwadi inscription, CTI, 82.
153. JBBRAS-XV, 296-301.
156. Kanheri inscription (7:13), ASWI-V, 78.
158. Talaka is a pond or a pool or a lake. It is a dam or water collected from catchment for use. Childers, R.C., 1875, A Dictionary of Tali Language, p. 494.
164. Ibid., p. 33.
Also, EI-XXXVIII, 169. There are four inscriptions at Pauni.
167. Ibid., pp. 33-34.
168. Ibid., p. 33. Yerphal was discovered by Dr. Dhavalikar and Dr. S. Yadhav on the 9th of December, 1979. The group consists of a small chaitya cave, two cells and an unfinished excavation.
170. JRAS, 1891, pp. 414ff.
171. Ibid.
175. 14 times in Karle, one each in Shelarwadi, Kanheri and Pitalkho
177. JRAS, 1891, pp. 414ff.
179. Kanheri Copper Plate inscription, ASW-I-V, 59.
Gauda implies the whole area inhabited by the Bengali speaking people. But in particular, it is the West Bengal, where Buddhism flourished until the 12th century AD.
181. JRAS, 1891, pp. 414ff.