ART AND ARCHITECTURE-II

After analysing the development of the Hinayāna cave excavations in the region in the previous chapter, the present chapter aims at recognising the early phase of Mahāyāna cave development in the region. The Mahāyāna cave sites in the regions are Ajanta, Ellora, Aurangabad, Ghatotkacha, Nasik, Kanheri and Lonad. These cave sites are represented by the Mahāyāna cave excavations whereas earlier sites like Bhaja, Karla, Junar, Pitalkhora, Kondivite, Kuda, Mahad have either painted or sculpted Buddha images in the caves. Therefore, in the present analysis the discussion is focused on a few significant cave excavations where early Mahāyāna cave activity and its further development can be recognised. As has been stated earlier, the Mahāyāna cave excavations in western Deccan has always been assigned to fifth century AD. This assumption is based on the inscriptional evidences that are found at three sites 1) Ajanta 2) Ghatotkacha 3) Kanheri. Ajanta cave 16, 17 and Ghatotkacha cave inscriptions refer to the Vākāṭaka king Hariśeṇa whereas the Kanheri copper-plate inscription refers to the Traikutaka rule. Hariśeṇa’s rule has been assigned to the last quarter of fifth century AD.¹ The Traikutaka inscription at Kanheri was assigned to the Kalachuri era.² These inscriptions so far determined the dates of the Mahāyāna excavations in the region and the Mahāyāna phase in western Deccan is hence assigned to the fifth century AD. Consequently, Nagaraju³ and Dhavalikar⁴ assigned several Hinayāna excavations to fourth century AD. Dhavalikar assigned cave No.8 of Ajanta as a phase of transition from the Hinayāna to the Mahāyāna and dated this cave to the late fourth century AD.⁵ Weiner⁶ while describing the sources for development of Ajanta’s sculptures and architecture, has tried to trace the sources from eastern Deccan mainly from sculptural relief of Amaravati as well as from sites like Bagh, and Hadda in Madhya Pradesh. She also considered the development at Kuda and Mahad in western Deccan. The Bagh caves have been one of the cardinal evidences for dating the Ajanta’s Mahāyāna phase for Walter Spink⁷, whose assumption is correct regarding the date of copper plate inscription of Maharaja Subendhu’s year 167 in the Gupta era. The same inscription was assigned to the Kalachuri era by Mirashi.⁸ On the basis of his dating and the content of the inscription, Spink observed that the Bagh caves were excavated before Ajanta.
However, M. N. Deshpande assigned the date of *Mahāyāna* excavation to the fourth century AD at Panhale-kaji on the basis of architectural design of cave No.2. Except M. N. Deshpande, all show complete disregard to the development of the western Deccan cave tradition. It may be noted that the Traikutaka copper-plate inscription will have to be considered as of early fourth century AD, which has been discussed in chapter-II. The stylistic developments of images in the western Deccan therefore need to be taken as an important reference point to arrive at the acceptable solutions. As far as the stylistic evidences are concerned, the conventions developed in the Gangetic valley are also taken as criteria for dating the western Deccan Buddha images. But as discussed in the previous chapter, the Buddha images in the western Deccan caves started appearing even by late second century AD. Moreover, the pictorial conventions too are different in these Buddha images i.e. transparent drapery and the preaching gesture appear on the court yard pillars of Kanheri cave No.3 (figs. 227, 228). It is evident that the region started producing the Buddha images and on the basis of inscriptive evidence of Traikutaka and its palaeography, it is certain that the Buddha images were carved by the early fourth century AD. It may be noted that M. N. Deshpande assigned the *Mahāyāna* cave No. 2 of Panhale-Kaji to fourth century AD. Considering these evidences together with the architectural and stylistic evidences an attempt is made here to trace the early *Mahāyāna* activity in the western Deccan i.e. whether Mahayana activity started even prior to 4th century. So discussion in this chapter is confined to a few caves.

The late phase of *Hinayāna* cave activity at Kanheri has been extensively discussed by Nagaraju and Dhavalikar. These excavations which are dated to the late third century AD and fourth century AD, will now have to be assigned to the early third century AD. Thus, there seems to be a considerable gap from the early third century AD to the early fourth century AD in the Buddhist cave excavations in the western Deccan. But the visual evidences indeed show that Buddha images appeared early in the region. The late second century AD images at Kanheri cave no. 3, are of standing and seated variety. They are also flanked by two attendants. The torso of these images is broad. In case of standing images, the lower portion from the waist is elongated whereas the seated one bears more weight. These pictorial qualities are further developed in sculptures as well as in paintings. In the following analysis such features are identified at a few caves.
in the region and are described very briefly to recognise the early Mahāyāna phase in the region.

**MULAKA REGION**

At Ajanta caves No. 9, 10, 12, 13 are the earlier Hinayāna caves. The Buddha images are also painted on walls and pillars of caves No. 10 and 9 (figs. No.305-310). These figures do not fall in the genre of fifth century AD. Yazdani\(^10\) observes that these images are likely to be earlier in date. The same opinion has been observed by Madanjit Singh.\(^11\) Stylistically, these images bear pictorial qualities of Kanheri cave No. 3 images.

**MĀMALA REGION**

In many of the cave sites in this historical region, the Buddha images are either painted or sculpted in the caves. No new exclusive Mahāyāna excavations are found. All the additions were made in the existing (Hinayāna) caves themselves. As these images were not part of the original design and plan, they are important visual evidences in understanding the development of the Mahāyāna imageries. The painted Buddha images are found in Bhaja cave No.12, Bedsa cave no.7, Karla great caitya hall and Junnar circular caityagriha of Tulaja group. The painted images at Bedsa and Junnar are no more visible. At Bhaja the images on pillars are still visible. As they are painted without plaster, their visibility has vanished considerably. At Karla images are painted on the interior pillars of the great caitya cave. Many of these images on the front pillars have been wiped out by visitors and worshippers at the temple. The images painted on the pillars around the stūpa have survived because these pillars are in the dark and the paintings over them are not clearly seen with the naked eye. The pillars are plastered and images are painted on them (figs. 111-114), with the same pictorial qualities as in Kanheri cave No.3 images. All these painted images, therefore, will have to be dated in the third century AD. It may be presumed that the Buddha images were painted in many of the earlier excavations. However, at this point of time, the images did not become an integral part of the cave shrine. Later the Buddha image became the integral part of cave shrine. This phase of development is clearly observed at Kanheri, Kondivite and Ajanta.
The following analysis is aimed at tracing such a phase when the Buddha image becomes an integral part of the cave shrine.

THE EARLY MAHĀYĀNA CAVES WITH LOOSE BUDDHA IMAGES & THEIR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT:

From the Traikūṭaka inscriptional evidence at Kanheri it would appear that by the early fourth century AD, the images have been sculpted in the cave. This is easily discernible from the paleography of inscription and stylistic correlation with the Buddha images carved on court-yard pillars in cave No.3 of Kanheri.

As far as the other pictorial conventions are concerned, the façade design had already been standardised by the use of either the octagonal or square pillar. The lower part is decorated with the vedika design or with the vertical strips at regular intervals and the multiple mouldings of the adhiśtāna (a plinth) of the cave. These devices are clearly observed at Kanheri together with the hour-glass motif and an incised carving in the middle of square pillar to break its outer surface configuration. Similarly the cushion capital of the pillar already appears at Karla cave No.4 (fig.117). The plan of the cave consists of a veranda, a hall and a shrine chamber at the back wall, which is also used in the Hinayāna caves. Even the cells are added in the hall to make a combination of caitya-vihāra design. This format of the plan represents a major development of the caves with the Buddha images. Another notable feature is the introduction of the multiple dvārśākhās i.e. doorframes of the veranda door as well as the shrine door, which is used in the late Hinayana excavations of Panhale-Kaji. Thus considering the plan, and the pictorial vocabulary developed in these caves, further development of cave architecture can be traced at Ajanta, Kanheri, Kondivite and Mahad. The intention here is to evaluate the various modes of pictorial representations used by the artisans by using the conventions developed in the past. It may also be noted that the pictorial vocabulary keeps growing and in the process, several additions to the existing vocabulary are made, and at the same time certain motifs are also given up.
The plan of the caityas consisting of the veranda, hall and a shrine cell at the back continued even further with the addition of the Buddha images. The Buddha images are independently carved and fixed on the stone bed of the back wall of the shrine chamber. In several caves at Kanheri, Kondivite and Ajanta No.8, the back wall of the shrine chamber has square holes to fix the images whereas in later caves the Buddha images are carved either on the back wall or they are carved in the veranda. Several Hinayāna caves also have Buddha images, which are later additions especially at Kanheri. Nevertheless, the conspicuous absence of the Buddha images in several caves where the stone bed at the back wall of the shrine chamber is carved along with the square holes on the back wall would indicate that the image was carved separately and fixed later in the cave. This particular feature, therefore, needs to be studied further. So the following analysis is selective and confined to the sites where such peculiarities are observed.

APARĀNTA REGION:

In this region Kanheri, Kondivite and Mahad have early Mahāyāna cave excavations. In the following analysis only those caves which may be considered as the early Mahāyāna excavations are discussed. As noted earlier, by the early fourth century AD the Buddha images at Kanheri were carved in large numbers. However, certain peculiarities are observed in the cave excavations especially at Kanheri. Nevertheless, the conspicuous absence of the Buddha images in several caves where the stone bed at the back wall of the shrine chamber is carved along with the square holes on the back wall would indicate that the image was carved separately and fixed later in the cave. This particular feature, therefore, needs to be studied further. So the following analysis is selective and confined to the sites where such peculiarities are observed.

KANHERI:

At Kanheri the rock cut activity continued in fourth and fifth century AD. Several caves were excavated. Leese\textsuperscript{11} observes the second phase of excavation in 18 caves (Nos. 9, 11, 12, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 41, 52, 5, 89, 90, 1, 48 and 87). Of these caves, very few excavations are important for the present analysis.

Cave No.12. (figs. 295, 296)

The excavation consists of a courtyard, veranda, a hall and a shrine chamber at the back. The front pillars are square from below followed by a curved fluted design. The top of the pillar is surmounted by the cushion capital. The cushion capital is seen at Karla (fig. 117) as well as at Kanheri cave No 3, at its entrance in relief (fig. 220). The veranda door has three dvārāśākhās. The shrine chamber at the back wall of the hall is carved with the stone bed against its back wall. The grooves, noticeable on the stone bed and on
the back wall, were meant for fixing the Buddha image. The inscription in this cave is of later times i.e. during the time of Pullasakti of the 7th entry AD, which talks about some donation to purchase books and for the repair of the cave, thus indicating that the date of excavation is earlier than the inscription.

Cave No.25 (figs. 311, 312)

Cave No.25 is a simple excavation, having a veranda and cells at the back. The shrine chamber is off-centred. Two cells on the left and three on the right of the shrine ante-chamber, are excavated. The shrine ante-chamber is relatively larger in dimension than the cells on the back wall. A shrine chamber is carved with the stone bed to put the Buddha image against its back wall. It may be noted that two dvāraśākhas are carved at the shrine door, which are plain.

Cave No.26 (figs. 311, 312)

Cave No.26 has a big courtyard. The adhiṣṭhāna (plinth) of this vihāra has several mouldings. The front façade is simple. There is no decoration on the top. The pillars are fat square blocks with the hour-glass decoration in the middle, which breaks the continuity of the flat surface. The pilasters too have hour-glass decorative motif. The pillar brackets at the top are semicircular blocks, which form the capital of the pillars. The veranda is bereft of any decoration. A doorway is cut in the centre of the veranda wall, which leads to the rear hall. At the back wall of the hall a stone bench is carved. This excavation too may belong to this phase, but the grooves on the back wall are absent as the Buddha image is carved in a niche. The loose image must have been kept on the stone bench and later an image was carved in the niche. The excavation of this cave is financed by Sivaputa from Chemulaka i.e. from Chaul. On paleographic grounds the inscription is assigned to the third century AD by Shobhana Gokhale who also states that the letters are of peculiarly ornamental style, differing from all other inscriptions at Kanheri. She agrees that the letter style is more developed than that at Kuda and may be considered even prior to the Traikutaka inscription. This would probably indicate a date of mid-third century AD. This, therefore, may be taken as a marked indication of the date, besides the plan and other features which are considerably close to the earlier Hinayāna excavations.
Cave No.29 (fig. 311, 312)

This cave has a façade similar to that of cave no. 26. The cave is of large dimensions with a veranda, a hall and three cells. The veranda is large. A big doorway is cut in the centre with two dvāraśākhās (door-frames). Of the three cells on the back wall, the central one is larger than the rest. The doorway of this central cell has plain dvāraśakshās. The back wall of the cell has a stone bench and holes are carved to fix the Buddha image.

Caves No.12, 25, 26 and 29 are also plastered and must have been painted. Thus considering the architectural features and the paleographical evidence, these caves may be assigned to the mid-third century AD. The subsequent phases of excavation are discussed in detail by Leese. However, her proposed dating of the subsequent phases will have to be revised in the context of the Traikutaka chronology. The next phase of excavation may be seen at Kondivite.

KONDIVITE (fig.182)

The early phase of excavation at Kondivite has already been discussed. The next phase at Kondivite signifies the installation of the Buddha image separately against the back wall. In the case of the exclusive caitya cave of this phase, the image also appears along with the stūpa. But nevertheless the stūpa is an important feature, which holds dominant position in the tradition of the western Deccan caves. As noted earlier, the architectural plan of the cave follows the plan of the Hinayāna caityagriha.

Cave No.2 is a caitya cave (figs.314, 315, 316, 317). The cave has a veranda and rectangular hall with a flat roof. The façade is very simple (fig. 314). It is derived from earlier Hinayāna vihāras especially the façade format, which is widely used at Kanheri, Mahad and Kuda. The top has a curved lintel, carefully dressed. Six caitya arches in relief are carved. The top portion of the caitya arch motif is elongated. The motif is used on the lintel of the façade decoration in earlier excavations such as at Ajanta 9, Bedsa, Karla No.8. The motif though carved in low relief, is clearly visible. Four pillars are carved to support the lintel. The pillars are in square blocks with incised carving below the top portion, nearly two feet below the capital. These designs are undoubtedly developed out the hour glass motif which is widely used at Kanheri and elsewhere.14
The pillar type is the same as in Kanheri caves No.26 and 29. But here the pillars have not only the semi-circular brackets but also the square bases. The front pillars rise above a horizontal rectangular block, which is in the form of a low wall above the *adhiṣṭhāna* of the cave (fig.315). The outer surface of this wall is decorated with the *vedika* design, which is very simple. The *adhiṣṭhāna* surface has two principal mouldings. The gap between the two front pillars forms an entrance to the veranda, reached by a flight of steps. The courtyard in the front is neatly excavated. It is also significant to note that a second platform is carved below the *adhiṣṭhāna* with the steps. The pilasters on either side too bear the same decorative motif as the pillars. The veranda walls are dressed up. The back wall of the veranda has a huge central doorway. The doorway is decorated differently. The plain *dvārśākhas* are replaced by decorative motifs. The outermost layer of the doorway (fig. 316) is decorated with a series of the lotus petals (not visible in the illustration). The next *śākhā* of the door is decorated with the *jāli* design by carving the incised squares alternately. It is followed by the two relief pillars with octagonal shaft. The upper part has the semi-circular moulded lintel with the carving of the *caitya* arches that are highly ornate. The horizontal lintel motif is followed by another horizontal lintel, which is being supported by the two pillars having cushion capitals. Further a recessed *śākhā* is carved. The decorative vocabulary, thus, is advanced by using them elegantly in the existing tradition.

The interior hall is rectangular with flat roof. The ceiling has a slope at the back. Few traces of the plaster can be made out. At the back wall a pedestal is cut (fig. 317). A few sockets are cut in the back wall above the pedestal. In the middle of the socket a relief *stūpa* is carved. It is evident from the sockets that these devices are meant to fix the Buddha image. The existence of the *stūpa* indeed indicates that the *stūpa* worship is still a dominant practice. The combination of the *stūpa* and image is conceived as a new pictorial representation. The relief *stūpa* and a pedestal at the back are properly pre-planned, which must have been incorporated with the consultation of the Buddhist Sangha. Thus, the existing convention of the flat roofed rectangular *caitya* is improvised to suit the new concept of the *stūpa* and image. One may wonder how the artisans arrived at the doorway design. As noted earlier, the *dvārśākhas* is an element of novelty in the late *Hinayāna* cave excavations. The overall format of the lintel supported by two
cushion capitals is an adoption from cave No.3 of Kanheri where the lintel and two pillars in the round are carved over the fencing wall of the caitya cave No. 3 on the right side (figs. 219, 220, 221). Considering the architectural plan, façade design, the doorway design and the stūpa and image combination, Kondivite cave No.2 may be assigned to late 3rd century AD. The adjoining caves No.1 and 3 are also contemporary with cave No.2.

Cave No.4 (figs.182, 318 to 320)

This cave may be taken as the next excavation. It consists of a veranda and a large interior hall with three pillared chambers on three sides. The pillared chamber at the back wall is a shrine chamber. The façade is simple with four front pillars. At the lower portion of the façade it has the typical vedikā design. The veranda back wall has a central doorway and two big windows on either side. Two additional doors are also excavated on both the ends of the veranda back. A low bench runs along the back wall and side walls of the hall. On both the side walls, two rectangular chambers are cut with two front pillars (fig. 320). These chambers have three cells at the back. The back wall of the hall has a shrine chamber a little off the centre. The shrine chamber is more like as niche with pillars in the front (fig. 319). The back wall of the niche has sockets to fix the loose image. Considering the façade design of the cave, it is likely that this cave was started earlier than the previous one and the work is likely to have stopped as can be inferred from the off-centre niche on the back wall. The back niche with pillars appears to be an unfinished excavation, in order to install the image later, the niche must have been carved and grooves have been carved to fix the image. This cave, therefore, may be assigned to late third century AD, and little earlier than caves No. 1, 2, & 3.

Cave no. 15

The next cave excavated at Kondivite is cave No.15. Though small in dimension it is very impressive (figs.327 to 331). This cave is carved on the sloping surface and is deep inside. It has a veranda with front pillars and a shrine chamber at the back. The top of the façade is plain, the front pillars are carved inside. Two pillars in the front have octagonal shafts. A raised low horizontal block is carved between both pillars and pilasters. Its outer surface is decorated with vertical strips. The adhiṣṭhāna of the cave has
two mouldings. At present only one pillar is intact, the one on the left is broken. The cave consists of a veranda and a shrine chamber. The doorway to the shrine chamber is decorated on the pattern of entrance of cave no.2 (figs.329, 330, 331). The back wall of the shrine chamber has square holes to fix the loose Buddha image. The left upper corner of shrine chamber is broken because a cell on the right side wall of cave No.14 crosses this section.

Cave no. 13

Further development of rock-cut cave activity at Kondivite may be observed in cave No.13 where the cave is well elaborated and has distinct features (figs. 321 to 326). This is a caitya-vihāra cave, consisting of a veranda and pillared hall with cells at the back and on either side. The middle cell on the wall is a shrine cell. The front pillars are massive having the cushion capitals. Below the cushion capitals, the shaft is octagonal (fig. 323). Much of the front is broken now. The lower portion of the façade indicates that it has a vedikā design with the adhiśthāna mouldings. The veranda rear wall is massive and is carved with three doors, one in the centre and the other two on either side. Two windows are carved on the either side of the central door. The central door has a single door-frame (dvārśākha). The central hall is big and supported by four massive pillars in the centre. The ceiling of the hall has four protruding beams making a square. Each intersection is supported by massive pillars having double cushion capitals, which are supported by plain vase like motif, the rest of the lower portion has octagonal shaft with a circular base (fig. 322). Three cells each are carved on the side walls and the rear wall. The floor level of first cell on the right wall cuts the corner of the shrine chamber of cave 15. The door-frame of the central cell on the right is carved differently. Though much of the wall surface is eroded due to boles in the rock formation, the upper part of this doorway design has still survived. It consists of a horizontal beam having convex protrusion supported by the small pillar motifs on a massive horizontal base, which is carved with three mouldings (fig. 326). The central part of the upper horizontal motif is a big caitya arch with three outer protrusions around its arch, which are coming out of the outer configuration, making the arch ornate and visually dynamic. The rear wall of the hall has three cells, but the central cell is large as it is meant to be a shrine. The shrine
doorway has multiple *dvāraśākhās* and its decoration is exactly like that in cave No.15, giving the effect of horizontal curved beams with *caitya* arch decorations being held or supported by two relief side pillars (fig. 329). It is derived from Kanheri cave No.3 outer wall decoration (fig.219). At the rear wall (fig.325) of the shrine chamber, a stone bed is cut and grooves are carved on the rear wall. Several square holes are also carved on the rear wall. This again is an indication that the loose Buddha image was fixed at this place too. The plan of the shrine chamber does not have the shrine antechamber as may also fall under the genre of the previous caves and may be assigned to the fourth quarter of third century AD. It may also be observed that the massive pillar types that are developed at Kondivite is a most notable contribution in the existing architectural vocabulary, which is further used at a place like Ajanta. Thus the Buddha image becomes a part of the shrine chamber, though carved independently.

The above analysis shows how the Buddha images in the western Deccan emerged and got incorporated in shrines of the early *Mahāyāna* caves at Kondivite. The next stage of development is observed at Kanheri where the Buddha images are actually carved in many caves, but the early sculpting actively is observed in caves No. 2, 3.

**SCULPTING OF SHRINE BUDDHA IMAGES:**

Sculpting of Buddha images is observed in the caves of Kanheri and Mahad in the Aparānta region. These two sites are significant in studying the development of the Buddha images in the region. Kanheri caves No.3, 2e and Mahad cave no.1 are important cave excavations in this context. In caves No. 3 & 2e of Kanheri the Buddha images are sculpted in the existing caves itself whereas Mahad cave no. 1 is an unfinished cave excavation in which the image is carved in the shrine on an unfinished block which was marked for excavating a *stūpa*. It may also be added that Kanheri emerges as an important centre of rock-cut cave activity even after third century AD as no other cave site has excavations after the third century AD.

**KANHERI:**

Coming back to Kanheri cave No.3, numerous Buddha images are carved, M. Leese has discussed it in great detail. But special mention must be made of the Buddha images of cave No.3 at Kanheri and also a panel of relief sculpture found near cave No.89. One of the Buddha images on the façade stone screen wall of Kanheri cave No.3 *caitya* has an
inscription below it, which says that it is the gift of śākya monk Dharmagupta.\textsuperscript{16} Paleographically, this inscription may be assigned to the early fourth century AD as the letter style is close to the Traikūṭaka inscription of early fourth century AD\textsuperscript{17}. These Buddha images are stylistically later than the Buddha images that are carved on the front pillars in the court-yard. The images are carved above the couple figures of right side on the façade (figs.231, 232). Compared to the earlier pillar images, the treatment of volume in this image is seen to be derived from the earlier images, especially the shoulders, roundish face, and pronounced volume. Contours are not sharp, ears are elongated, the eye sockets are carved by incision and the lips are protruding. The upper part of the saṅghāti i.e. robe is not visible whereas the legs are clearly shown covered with it. The flow of the drapery is linear in treatment. Irrespective of the limited space, the effect of recession is achieved in showing the folding of the legs. It is shown in the pralambapādāsana. The other images carved along with the above, are also worth noting. On the left, two small figures are shown standing and one is shown sitting. The one at the extreme end is shown like the previous one, the other one is shown seated in the padmāsana. The standing figures stick to the surface, and are shown in the abhayamudra, the figure is elongated, more attention is paid to the smooth surface of the volume. All these three figures have decoration of makara-torana above them. In the corner (fig. 231) especially on the vertical beam near the Buddha image, a female figure is carved. Its posture is very remarkable, breasts protrude considerably whereas the torso becomes conical and its belly and waist bulge, its thighs are round in shape, the image is close to Kuda cave No.6 couple images that are carved in its interior hall.

Other images above the doorway of cave No.3 of Kanheri bear the same stylistic features such as plain drapery, broad shoulders, rounded face with the elongated eye sockets etc. These images therefore may be assigned to the early fourth century AD.

\textbf{Cave No.2e} also has a number of Buddha images (figs. 215 to 216). Images on the left wall are all seated in the pralambapādāsana and bear the same features of the earlier images that are described above. Images on the right wall are of standing variety. The right hand of the image is shown downwards whereas the left hand is raised till the shoulder level and holds the drapery. The usnīṣa of the image is broad. The face is voluminous. The ring formations of the muscles around the neck are noteworthy
indicating the artisan’s observing eye, capable of transferring on to the stone the effect of naturalism. The shoulders of the images are not as broad as shoulders of the seated one. The torso’s configuration is derived from previous images like cave No.3 pillar images where the torso is depicted proportionately as broad as shoulder. The stockiness as well as rigidity of the pillar image has disappeared in this image (figs. 214 to 216), legs are little elongated, the drapery marks are indicated by mere schematic lines. Besides, the feet are neatly carved with considerable smoothness. No attempt is made to show the anatomical details; on the other hand, the draped legs are conspicuous. Two figures are carved on the upper part of the Buddha’s head, shown holding the garlands. Figures are dwarfish and stocky (fig. 215). Near the right foot of the Buddha figure, the figure of a seated devotee is shown (carved). The eyes and nose are rendered schematically, and though the hair bears separate volume, schematic lines create the effect of a uniform volume. The face is protruding. Curved planes between the eyebrow and eyeball are small (fig. 216). The eyes are not elongated. The facial smile is closer to that on the pillar image of cave No.3. These images, therefore, may be assigned to early part of the 4th Century AD.

**MAHAD: Cave No.1**

Cave No.1 of Mahad is an ambitious excavation but left unfinished (figs. 332 to 343). The plan consists of a veranda, a hall and a shrine chamber. This excavation is remarkably different in architectural vocabulary and shows considerable progress from the earlier cave excavations. The importance of this cave excavation also lies in the fact that many **Mahayana** caves at Ajanta are excavated and decorated on the pattern of this cave. The facade consists of massive six pillars with two pilasters. Except the first pillar near the pilaster, the rest are unfinished. But, nevertheless, they suggest a fair idea of the type of design the artisans really wanted to do. All the pillars are massive blocks (figs. 332 to 336). Top portion of the pillars is carved with the inverted semi-circular block i.e. the brackets of the pillars are roundish. It signifies that the artisans wanted to carve out massive pillars. The left pillar, which is the only finished one, shows the design the artisans wanted to create. The top portion is a rectangular block i.e. square capital (fig. 336), followed by a six angled circular block, which is followed by a relatively thin block carved with 12 vertical bands over the surface. The lower portion also has similar design
with a vertical square base. The design of the pillars is advanced over the pillar designs of caves No.13 and 15 (figs. 287, 288). The pilasters of the left have vertical strips. The next pillar has been roughly carved to decorate on a similar pattern. The veranda walls are roughly chiselled out. On the left wall, there is a small niche whereas the right wall is devoid of any such carving. Three doorways are cut to make entrances in the hall. The central doorway is bigger in size than the rest of the two doorways on either side. Two large sized windows are also carved on either side of the central door for allowing enough light in the hall. The upper level of the doors and windows is at uniform level.

The interior hall is very big. A bench is excavated running all along the four sides. The floor level of the hall is higher than that of the veranda. There are eight unfinished cells, four on the left wall and four on the back wall. There was an attempt to carve them but all remain unfinished. On the right side wall, not a single cell is carved. The shrine chamber hall is entered by a central doorway along with two big windows (fig. 338) on either side. The height of the window is the same as that of the door. Windows are almost as big as the doorway. Dhavalikar observes this feature at Kuda cave No.6 and at Wai-Lohare caitya cave. 18 But Kuda caitya cave No.6 has similar arrangement on the front wall of the shrine ante-chamber whereas at Mahad it is on the shrine chamber itself. The shrine chamber has square block in its centre, and the top and the bottom are attached with the ceiling and floor, respectively. The floor of the shrine chamber is roughly chiselled and left unfinished. The left side and front side along the square block are properly chiselled whereas the rest of the area is unfinished and is at a higher level than the rest of the floor level. The back of the square block is roughly chiselled into a stūpa configuration (fig. 340). It is indeed, noticeable from the unfinished nature of excavation that the work probably did not progress. The figures that are carved on the square block are later additions.

On the front side of the block, a seated Buddha image with two attendant figures are carved on either side; they may be identified as Padmapāni and Vajrapāni (fig. 339). A makara- torana and seated deer are carved on the top and below respectively. The upper torana decoration is the one, which is found extensively at Kanheri caves. On the left and right side of the square blocks are the images of the Bodhisattva. The left one may be identified as Vajrapāni by the presence of a stūpa in the crown. The seated
posture of the Buddha resembles that of the seated images that are carved at Kanheri cave No.2e and Kanheri cave No.3. However, there appears to be a little difference in the treatment of the volume. The shoulders are broad and now the torso becomes conical. If we observe this feature right from Kanheri cave three pillar images (figs.227, 228), the torso is proportionate to the shoulders, this treatment continues in the later images of caves No.3 and 2e of Kanheri. But here, the torso gets narrowed at the lower end, which also resulted in the expansion of the hands in space. The image, therefore, may be assigned to the second half of the fourth century AD. Though Dehejia and Nagaraju assign this excavation to much later times, on the other hand, Dhavalikar observes it as a late Hinayana caitya cave, but from the above analysis the first phase of cave excavation may be assigned to the first quarter of the fourth century AD and addition of image may be assigned to second half of the fourth century AD.

Thus it may be seen that there are important developments in the Aparânta region in the third and fourth century AD. At Kanheri, rock-cut excavation activity continues further and the site shows some remarkable features in the arrangement of shrine chamber, Buddha images as well as certain iconographic peculiarities in the depiction of the Boddhisattva images. Kanheri almost forms the epicentre of activity in the Aparânta region. The only exclusive Mahayana site in this region is Lonad, which has been discussed by M. N. Deshpande and A. P. Jamkhedkar.

MULAKA REGION

In this region Ajanta becomes a principal site where the Mahayana excavations began and progressed further at Aurangabad, Ghatotkacha, and Ellora. However, as mentioned earlier, the installation of loose Buddha image in the shrine is also observed at Ajanta. Therefore, in the following section, Ajanta cave no.8 and further progress in the cave excavations are discussed. Development after cave No. 8 is more complex and needs to be studied very systematically keeping in mind the criteria discussed in the beginning of the previous chapter and the facade design developed in the Aparânta region. Among the notable cave excavations after cave 8 at Ajanta are caves No. 11, 15, 6 (upper & lower) & 7. It is significant to note that all these caves are excavated close to the earlier Hinayana cave excavations. So far these caves have been assigned to the fifth century AD. However, the analysis in the following will show that these caves were
excavated before the fifth century AD. There are also certain additions in these caves especially the Buddha images that are later in date.

**AJANTA: Cave No.8 (fig. 344)**

The cave is located near cave No.9. At present, it is transformed into a powerhouse by the ASI. But, nevertheless, it is an important excavation as the cave is a remarkable evidence of transition from the *Hinayāna* cave to the *Mahāyāna* cave. It consists of a hall and a cell around. The front is broken. Two cells are carved on the side-walls. The back wall consists of five cells. The middle three cells are carved a little inside. The central cell is a shrine chamber with an ante-chamber in the front. The back wall of the chamber has a raised platform, which is obviously used to install the loose Buddha image. Dhavalikar assigns this cave and other Kanheri caves to a phase of transition from *Hinayāna* to the *Mahāyāna* and dates this cave to the late fourth century AD. However, this cave too is similar to Kanheri caves No. 12, 25, 26, 29 and Kondivite caves No.13 and 15, and therefore, may be assigned to the last decade of the third century AD.

**AJANTA: post cave no. 8 phase**

By the time the next phase of excavation began at Ajanta, the Buddha image was already a part of the cave architectural tradition of western Deccan. The development of Buddha images at Kanheri has a considerable bearing on the development at Ajanta. All the *Mahāyāna* excavations at Ajanta have always been assigned to the second half of the fifth century AD. But by the early fourth century AD, the Buddha images are sculpted at Kanheri, in the process the pictorial conventions too get stylised. The facade design developed in the Aparānta region constitutes massive octagonal pillars, raised horizontal base with the vertical band design, semi-circular capital, squarish pillars, *caitya* arches on the lintel. This format is further followed at Ajanta, making some variations in decorations. Thus the pictorial vocabulary underwent constant changes right from the earliest times.

The question that needs to be raised is, whether the rock-cut activity at Ajanta, continued or not even after cave No. 8? It has always been taken for granted that the *Mahāyāna* caves at Ajanta began only in the 5th century AD. The painted images at
Ajanta caves No.9 and 10 are assigned to the third century AD. Therefore, it is imperative to look into the problem afresh.

Cave No.11 marks the beginning of the post cave No.8 phase of activity at Ajanta. The cave (figs. 345 to 358) is placed between caves No.10 and 12. The cave is excavated at higher level than that of the caitya cave No.10 and cave 12. The cave is squeezed between the two earlier caves. The plan of the cave consists of a veranda, a hall and a shrine chamber (fig.358). The hall is 37ft. wide, 28 ft. deep and 10 ft high. The cave is cut a little inside of the hill surface. The façade is simple (fig. 345). The upper horizontal beam is supported by the four octagonal pillars. The pillars have stepped semicircular capital. Space between the two centre pillars, forms the entrance to the cave. A low-level wall rises from the veranda floor. This wall runs till the height of the base of the front two central pillars. The exterior surface of this carved block is decorated with vertical rectangles in relief. The pillars are octagonal. This pillar type is also observed at Kanheri and Mahad cave No.3. The façade also resembles the façade of Panahale-Kaji cave No.6 (fig. 303). The veranda has the cell at the left end. The back wall of the veranda has a door way in the centre and two big windows on either side. The windows are not usual types. The pillar motifs are carved inside the window frame. However, their designs are markedly different. The left (figure 348) pillars are decorated like square block with incised carving at the top. The incised carved space is decorated with octagonal shafts. These designs resemble Kondivite caves No.1, 2, 3 and Kanheri cave No.25. The right window-frame has two rounded pillars with the ghata-capitals (fig. 349) and broad round base. The ghata-capital has a flat ring, carved near its base. The portion below the ghata is shaped like a jar having a curved neck. The artisans appear not to be bothered about the symmetrical arrangement in the motifs. Both the windows have single śākha. The central doorway to the hall has three plain dvārśākhhas without any decoration. One step is carved at the base. Two ends of the steps are carved with lion motifs. Only their heads are carved, their manes have linear treatment. The dvārśākhhas are painted instead of having carved decoration. On the right end of the veranda wall, a small door is carved, which leads to the interior cell parallel to the interior hall. Another cell is also carved opposite to the above. On the left side wall, a cell is excavated, one more cell is excavated on the side of veranda back wall.
The interior hall is nearly squarish. Four interior pillars are carved supporting the ceiling. Pillar arrangement makes a square in the interior hall. These pillars support a beam like relief carved over the ceiling. The upper portion of these pillars has flat square motifs whose lower plane is decorated with petal design. It is followed by the purnaghata form (fig. 350). The rest of the pillar is carved with octagonal shafts and also has octagonal base. On the left side of the interior wall, three cells are excavated whereas on the right wall, no attempt is made to carve any cell. The back wall of the hall has shrine chamber, which is little off-centred. Two cells are carved on its left and one on the right.

The door-frame of the shrine chamber has three dvārśākhās. The inner most frame is very thin (fig. 351). The shrine chamber is big and deeply carved. The rear floor of the shrine chamber is left incomplete. A Buddha image is carved on the front of the stūpa (fig. 351 to 357). The back side of the stūpa is roughly carved out (fig. 355). On the left wall of the shrine chamber, attempt was made to excavate another cell, which began only from the top of the wall.

The excavator seems to be quite aware that the cave is placed between two caves and planned it parallel to cave 12 instead of cave 10 (see the site map). As the deep cutting of the cave is planned parallel to cave No.12, there is little space left to carve out the cells. Any carving on this side would have resulted in the disturbance and destruction of the caitya hall.

The shrine image is huge and neatly carved out. The throne at the back is partially carved out and partially painted (fig.353). The carved decorated motif of the throne is confined to motifs of a few animals such as horse, makara etc. (figs. 353, 355). The head of the shrine image is well projected out of the throne’s back plane. The face is round. The torso is well proportioned. Shoulders are broad but proportionately carved, contours of muscular curves make the body torso slender whereas the spread of the thighs at both the sides balances properly the weight of the image. Noteworthy in this sculpture is the plain drapery of the Buddha image. The outline of the overall figure is sharply delineated (figs. 352, 353). On the lower bench of the throne, a seated devotee figure is carved, kneeling on his legs with namaskārmudra along with the deer motif, which signifies the dharmachakrapravartana (fig. 354). The figure of the kneeling devotee is slender. What one can admire about this small sculpture is the way the legs are folded at the back and
the thigh muscles get expanded due to the weight of the folded legs, even the fingers of the feet are sculpted with the proper curve. The entire weight of the body is put on the folded knees. The sense of observation of the sculptor is remarkable.

The drapery of both the Buddha figure as well as the kneeling devotee covers their left shoulders. Above the Buddha image two *gandharva* figures are carved (figs. 356, 357). They are dwarfish with big heads. The muscular treatment of the body is smoothened to give the effect of the delicacy or baby flesh. The eyes of these figures are broad with sharp lines separating the forehead plane from the eye-socket plane. The nose is of the flat variety with clear indication of the nostrils. The surrounding area and the roof of the hall are chiselled out very roughly. This has been done deliberately as the artisans were aware that the cave had to be plastered and painted. If this shrine image is compared to the standing image of the Buddha with the kneeling devotee on the right vertical beam of cave No. 9 of Ajanta itself, one comes to notice certain similarities in their conventions. The treatment of the torso is the same in both the images. The standing image of cave No. 9 is not at all refined. The proportions are very disturbing as the right hand of the image is highly elongated. However, in cave No.11 the Buddha image is very refined and can be taken as a further advance in the execution of the Buddha image over cave No.9. The other notable difference in the treatment of the *gandharva* figure is their chubbiness as well as the body surface, which is markedly different than the Vidarbha sculptures of the Vakataka period. The plain drapery was no more an alien concept for the artisans of western Deccan as it had already existed in late second century AD and the subsequent images at Kanheri cave No.3 and 2e. The concept of the *stūpa*-image too was not new as is observed at Kondivite Cave No.2. Besides the treatment of the torso is closer to Kanheri Cave No.3 lintel images of the façade. The figure of the devotee is also carved in cave No.2e of Kanheri. The entire cave was painted though much of the painting has been eroded.

In cave No.11 of Ajanta, a few painted inscriptions are noticed by Dhavalikar who assigns these inscriptions to the later half of the fifth century AD on palaeographic grounds. This has led Walter Spink to date the cave to 462 AD. The reasons are already discussed earlier (see chapter-I). Spink further observes that there was an interruption of work in c. AD 468 and further when work started the plan was revised, which involved
the provision for a shrine with a Buddha image and pradakṣiṇāpatha, this change was accompanied by cutting back what was originally to have been the middle cell on the rear wall and the image appears to have been hurriedly completed.25 He further observes that the excavators were inexperienced as the planners did not take proper placement of the adjacent Hinayāna caitya hall cave No.10. Prior to these observations, Spink observes that the position of the shrine, off the centre, was probably also due to the planner's inexperience in excavation during the first year of the Mahāyāna patronage at the site (i.e. 465 AD), the Buddha image in the cave was completely finished but pradakṣiṇāpatha was never finished.26 Spink's next statement is stranger in this regard- 'we can imagine that there was considerable unpleasantness when the patron who was struck with the bill discovered that the whole right wall of his interior hall could not have monk cells....'27 Spink appears to be obsessed with certain imaginative ideas, which he has been developing since long. Cave 11 appears to be a well planned excavation. The off centre position of a shrine does not indicate anything, as even earlier such off centred placement of the votive stupā in cave No.3 at Nasik and the late Hinayāna caityas is observed. Therefore, off-centred position cannot be something unusual. The incomplete nature of the pradakṣiṇāpatha can have varied reasons such as- 1) The monks or the Sangha might not have thought it important, so artisans did not complete it. 2) Or, due to lack of patronage. The unfinished nature of the rear of the stūpa however cannot be attributed to the lack of patronage or disruption of the excavation work as has always been the tradition in the western Deccan, the rear always been roughly carved out and plastered such as at Karla's great caitya hall where the rear is roughly carved out. So cave No.11 of Ajanta is no exception in this regard. With regard to the floor level of the shrine, its unfinished nature may be attributed either to lack of patronage or due to no necessity. The sculptural panel (fig. 347) is a later addition. Such additions are made at Ajanta and elsewhere too. The stylistic conventions of these images are quite dissimilar to the tradition of cave no.11 shrine image. Besides if one visualises what the possible plan of the cave would have been, then it would have been like Mahad cave no.8 which is without pillars and also like Kondivite 13. As has been discussed earlier, the pictorial as well as the architectural conventions and their correlation would support a mid fourth century AD date for this cave. It should also be noted that the plain drapery with the lines
cannot alone be associated with northern Indian pictorial conventions as it occurs in the western Deccan cave itself in the late second century AD. When the plan and location (i.e. close to earlier *Hinayāna* cave) of this cave is compared to Kondivite cave no.13, one finds considerable similarity.

**AJANTA: Cave 15**

Cave No.15 marks a further stage of excavation in terms of stylistic development of the Buddha image and the door-frame design. The cave is located at an upper level from cave No.13. It consists of a veranda, hall, shrine antechamber, shrine chamber and cells around the hall (fig. 363). The façade of the cave is broken. Burgess described the veranda and pillars in detail. The column as described by Burgess appears to be like the one used in cave No.6 upper level of Ajanta but, nevertheless, such pillar types are also found at Mahad cave No.1 and are an advancement over earlier octagonal pillars with the square base. The rear wall of the veranda has an entrance in the centre and two windows are cut on either side. The central doorway is well designed, having three recessed dvārśākhās (figs. 359, 360, 361). The first dvārśākha is carved to give an effect of a pillar to hold the top lintel. The upper level of the door is carved with two moulded lintels, one followed by the other. The upper lintel has been decorated with relief arches, containing human faces. Five such relief *caitya* arches with human faces are carved. In the centre of the *caitya* arch two birds in relief are delineated on either side. The space which the birds occupy in the overall lintel invites quick attention of the beholder as the rest of the space in between the other two arches is left empty. Though the figures are in low relief, they are not linear. The contours of the birds are smoothened to achieve the effect of projected volume over the surface. On the second lintel too similar *caitya* arch motifs are used except on the middle portion which has a vertical rectangular space touching the upper lintel. The *caitya* arch motif of the upper beam, forms the crown of the rectangular space of the lower lintel and thereby a motif of *lalātabimba* is formed. The motif of the stūpa covered with a snake hood is depicted on the *lalātabimba*. The lintel is placed on the two side pillars. Unlike the veranda pillars, these pillars in high relief are relatively less high. Two female figures in the tri-bhāṇga posture are used to decorate the capitals. Both the female images stand cross-legged on the animal motif which is difficult to identify but very close to the *makara* motif which is widely used in the later excavations at Ajanta as
well as elsewhere. Below it are the round mouldings and *ghata* motif followed by a flat pillar. This is a departure from the usual round shaped pillar. The flat surface provides ample scope to employ different motifs as decorative devices. This flat space is divided into a rectangle, square and rectangle, respectively (fig.361). The upper rectangular space has a standing male figure whereas in the middle square, a *ghata* or *kalaśa* motif is depicted. At the base, the image of standing dwarf load bearers are shown on both the sides. It may also be noted that the upper portion of the pillars i.e. capital where the form of two standing female figures is carved, the area around these female form is little enlarged at the outer space, thus, the outer boundaries get bulged from the straight alignment of the configuration of pillars, thereby forming a kind of T-shape. These female figures are voluminous with the bulging waist to one side and are elongated with pronounced breasts and are shown standing on the *makara*. The male figures in the middle are voluminous due to more incised carving of the surrounding area which they occupy. Though figures are small yet these bear weight in the firmness of their posture. Similarly, the lower most *bhūravāhakas* i.e. load bearers occupy the angular space, they have completely come out of their picture plane, a quality which is an advancement over Kanheri and Kuda images. The *kalaśa* they hold is also seen to be derived from Kanheri cave No.3 (fig.222). The rest of the *śākhās* are plain.

The interior hall of the cave is big and devoid of any pillars. There are four cells on the left as well as the right walls. The rear wall of the hall has a shrine and shrine antechamber which has pillars in the front. The pillar design consists of a square base and capital, and the middle portion is filled with vertical strips. Thus the pillar design is an obvious indication that it is developed from the normative octagonal shafts to the more ornate octagonal at the base and bottom and vertical strips in the middle like Mahad cave No.1 (fig. 336). The doorway to the shrine chamber has three *dvārśākhās*, which are devoid of any decorations.

It is evident that the artisans never wanted to make any further carvings in the door-frames; instead they intended to paint it as a painting generally takes less time than sculpting. At the back wall of the shrine chamber, an image of the Buddha is sculpted (fig. 362). It is shown seated in *padmāsana* and at the front plane of the pedestal, the *dharmačakra*, and lions are carved in low relief. Both the hands of the Buddha image are
broken now. The head of the figure is big. The area of upānīṣa is considerably bigger in proportion than the face. It appears as if the hair-knot is dense. Eyebrows and eyes are not at all elongated. Nose is straight whereas nostrils are not wide. Protrusion of the lip is not wide. The neck is slightly elongated when compared to cave 11 Buddha image. Torso is slender and stands straight. Shoulders are not heavy and broad. Muscles are tightened. Drapery is transparent. Contours are diffused, giving the effect of sweeping line. Saṅghāti covers both the shoulders. The image sticks to the wall firmly. The halo behind the head is large in diameter. Two gandharva figures are carved at the top level of hallow.

The shrine Buddha image of cave 15 is stylistically closer to the Buddha image of Ajanta cave 11. The transparent variety of drapery is derived from Kanheri cave 3. The door frame sculptures of this cave may be compared to Kuda cave No.6 sculptures which are later than those at Kanheri cave No.3. The traces of mud plasters on the ceiling are still visible. Architecturally the format of cells around the hall and the arrangement of shrine antechamber is derived from the earlier tradition of the late Hinayāna caityas such as Kuda and Ajanta No.8. M. N. Dehspande rightly observes that cave 15, with eight cells and an astylar hall may be the earlier vihāra of the later series.29 The Buddha figure in the sanctum is stylistically earlier and is without attendants30. Considering the formal language of architecture and sculpture the cave may be dated to the later half of the fourth century AD. However, Walter Spink dated the cave to 468-470 AD in 197431, then to around 478-79 to 482-3 AD32 and later in 1994 to 463-468 AD33, but without providing any adequate evidence.

It may also be observed that the development of pictorial vocabulary together with the improvisation of the conventions needs to be seen in the context of the pictorial tradition being followed in the region. Bulging of the form below the lintel and above the pillar of the door-frame making a slight T-shape is one such improvisation over the earlier designs as a similar such format in its basic form was earlier used at Kanheri caitya cave No. 3 (fig. 219). So making use of such pictorial vocabulary indeed was part of the pictorial conventions which artisans have developed in the visual tradition. It marked the new design format of the door-frames at Ajanta. However, it may be observed that the female figures standing on the makara motif are repeated in the later caves at
Ajanta and there is no depiction of *Ganga* and *Yamuna* on the door-frames of the Buddhist caves in the region the way they are represented on the Brahmanical cave temples in western Deccan or in central India like Udayagiri.

With regard to the shrine Buddha image, Walter Spink observes that the image in the shrine of caves 15 & 7 originally was intended to be centred in the shrine but in the rush of the moment this was never done, and remained undedicated and painted. This presumption of Walter Spink is based on the preconceived notions, which have already been explained earlier. However, our analysis shows that Walter Spink’s ideas cannot be accepted because stylistically the sculptures in the cave are of an early in date than what he believes and the architectural plan follows the late *Hinayāna caitya* mode. Similar shrines with the image at the back wall are observed at Kanheri caves No.12, 25, 26, 29, Panhale-Kaji 5 & 6 and Kondivite cave No.4 and 13. So the artisans really followed the format which was in the tradition of western Deccan itself.

**AJANTA: Caves No. 6 and 7**

After the excavation of caves 11 and 15, the next excavation appears to be highly ambitious in nature in the form of cave No.6 (fig. 393). If one considers the magnitude of its size, it is indeed a very ambitious cave excavation undertaken at Ajanta’s second phase of rock-cut architectural activity. The cave is a double storied excavation with certain new features in addition to the existing design. However, it may be observed that the most significant factor of this cave is the unfinished nature of its excavation, which led to numerous speculations (especially in the interpretations of Walter Spink). The lower storey of this cave is completely finished whereas the upper storey has remained unfinished. The upper storey was carved first and then the lower storey was added. This can also be determined from the provision of the pillars in the interior hall of the lower storey. The approach to the upper storey is provided from the interior hall of the lower storey which indicates that both the caves were well-planned. Another added element in the existing plan of upper story is that of shrine-lets in front of the cave. There are additional small cave-shrines in the interior of the cave along with the main shrine at the rear of the hall.

The upper storey cave consists of a pillared facade, veranda, hall with pillars and cells around, shrine-antechamber, main shrine, and two shrine-lets in the front. There are
two more shrine-lets in the interior hall. The selection of the slope of the hill provides
enough scope to have side walls in the court yard, though small in dimensions. The side
wall surface also provides an opportunity for the sculptural decorations, which the
artisans at Ajanta utilised to its full potential. There are two figures sculpted on the side
walls of the courtyard, one is the image of the Nāga and the other is that of the flag
holder. Two small cave-shrines with the image of Buddha are also excavated at both ends
of the cave which appear to be later additions and are not in the original plan of the cave.
The facade of the cave is broken, but some portion has survived at the top left corner,
indicating the possible design of the facade. The facade consists of a simple horizontal
bar and caitya arch with a face inside carved on its surface. Below the above, another
curved horizontal bar is excavated (fig. 364). The next lintel is carved below the above
and is supported by the two pilasters and front pillars.

On the left wall two standing images are carved at different heights and wall
surface. Their hands are mutilated. One is the image of Nāga at the top level whereas the
other is the image of a flag-holder which is carved at the lower end of the Nāga figure.
What appears likely is that the wall was first dressed up and then the images were carved.
Therefore, the surrounding area around the image of Nāga is deeply cut (figs. 365, 366,
367). The Nāga figure has a halo of snake-hood (figs. 365, 366) over its head and its
movement is suggested by a bent leg. The face is mutilated. The shoulders are broad. One
of its hands is broken but the other i.e. the left hand has a bend which expands the elbow
in space and is placed on the left thigh. The torso still remains cylindrical and the
shoulders acquired altogether different dimensions. Though the image is voluminous yet
it remains in its given space. The other image is that of a flag holder standing firmly (figs
365, 367). Its lower parts are broken. But the treatment of the form of this image is
different in depicting the shoulders. There is no pronounced shoulder plane, in fact the
broadness of the shoulder is very proportionate to the volume of the torso. A side bend of
the image creates a recession in the space. Both the legs are placed separately.

On the opposite side of the above, nothing can be made out due to the mutilated
rock. But it can be ascertained that a courtyard space was provided in front of the veranda
pillars. Besides, the raised fencing wall at the base on the left side would indicate that the
cave had a front fencing wall. On both sides, shrinelets with the Buddha images (figs.
(365, 367, 371 & 372) carved at a later stage are found in the space between the Nāga figure and the pillar of the veranda on both sides. It may be observed that the Nāga figure in this cave is noteworthy as it is also depicted at Junnar Manmodi-caitya and Kanheri cave No. 3 (fig. 220) on the fencing wall of the courtyard as well as at the base of the courtyard pillars (fig. 225). The Image at Kanheri sticks to its surface plane, volume is subdued and the shoulders do not get broadened. In the Ajanta images, volume is more pronounced, shoulders become weighty. This would indicate that on the basis of such stylistic features, the image of Nāga is later in date than the Kanheri figure.

The four pillars of the veranda (fig. 368) are ribbed with the upper part having a cushion capital with a square above it. The pillar bases are shaped as an octagon and square, respectively. The middle portion of the pillar is decorated with the concave vertical strips. The pillars in the middle also have similar decoration except that their continuity in the middle portion is disrupted by the circular bands. The pillar design appears to have grown out of the earlier octagonal pillars. Artisans started making use of the pillar space to articulate their pictorial vocabulary giving new pattern to the pillar design. (It may be noted that the pillar motif in relief near the Nāga figure in Kanheri cave No. 3 are decorated with the cross pattern design, so the present decoration of the pillar has its inspiration from Kanheri). The pilasters and brackets are ornately decorated. The lower surface of the semi-circular formation of the bracket is divided into three parts, the middle one is larger, decorated by petals in concentric circle, whereas the other two are narrow strips, having flower and leaf motifs (figs. 369, 370). The division of space for surface decoration is adopted from the pillar types that are widely used at Kanheri and Kondivite, where the continuity of the square pillar design surface is broken with the incised cut at the upper level of the pillar. The top-most division in the rectangular space has vegetative motifs with symmetrical repetition. The lower division is a square space having the same motifs except in the inner circle, an animal motif is carved (fig. 369). The head of the animal motif is difficult to make but it appears to be a miniaturised, simplified version of the animal motifs found at Ajanta cave No.15 door-frame (fig. 361). The veranda side wall has two pillared chambers at both ends; a stair is provided to facilitate the entrance from the lower storey. The veranda wall has a central door and two windows on either side. The central doorway has four Śākhās without any carvings.
The interior hall has several pillars of which three have remained unfinished. Altogether there are twelve pillars in a square format, having semi-circular capital and a square base. The middle portion of the pillar has octagonal shafts.

Pillars ABC are left unfinished at the base (fig. 377). The shaded pillars in the above diagram have images of the Buddha at the top along with stūpas (figs. 374, 375, 376). Considering the nature of the carving of the veranda design, where the interior carving began, it is evident that the back portion of the hall was marked to determine the depth of the hall first and simultaneously the work progressed on the shrine antechamber and shrine chamber. On the back wall, there are two well-planned cells on either side of the shrine antechamber. But the left side of the hall was started and completed first. In the interior hall, the first and third cells have pillared chambers with interior cells similar to the veranda chambers. The middle (second) cell is a simple one.

The cells on the rear have also been planned in a similar fashion (see plan fig. 373). Work then progressed slowly on the right aisle where the floor level is still left incomplete (fig. 379). Nevertheless, the pillared chamber with the interior cell has been done keeping in mind the symmetry in the architectural plan (fig. 380). However, the right end of the rear wall could not be done the way the left side has been done. This clearly indicates different stages of excavation of the cave. What is important in this cave is that the space above the pillared chamber of the front veranda as well as the interior hall’s pillared chamber have been carved with the series of small Buddha images over the previously carved relief stūpas. These appear to be a later addition.

Altogether there are three shrine-chambers in the interior hall. The main shrine chamber with shrine antechamber in the middle of the rear wall (figs. 382 to 388), one
shrinelet on the right side of the back wall (fig.389) and one carved in the first cell on the right side wall (fig.390-392). The description of the above cave indicates that indeed the upper storey of cave No.6 went through different stages of excavation and the images added later can be clearly recognised. The veranda excavation was done at one time but the interior hall, however, shows different stages of rock cutting. The series of the Buddha images carved in the veranda on left and right appear to be an addition. Initially, the relief stūpas were carved and later they were converted into Buddha images (fig.373). Similar images are also observed in the interior of the cave especially in the front and side aisle. While the shrine antechamber and shrine chamber were initially cut in order to determine the depth of the hall, the surrounding area especially the two side aisles and the interior pillars remained unfinished at this stage. When the excavation was progressing, the shrine antechamber was cut and the shrine doorway was planned. The fact is that the shrine doorway has three sākhās with the upper lintel having the carving of the caitya windows being supported by the two pillars (fig. 383). This type of doorway is also attempted in cave No. 15 of Ajanta and Kondivite No.13, 14 & 2. This is a fair indication that the doorway is not only early but also excavation of the cave was planned at a fairly early stage. Afterwards the excavation was abandoned and it is likely that the patronage to the cave was interrupted. Carving of the main shrine stopped completely. This phase of activity may be assigned to the end of the fourth century AD.

Work on the cave was resumed after a certain gap. This time it was not to finish the rest of the excavations but shrinelets were planned to be incorporated in the cave. The first was in the front aisle at the right side (figs. 390 to 392). The Buddha images above the doorway (fig. 391) are an addition in place of the earlier relief stūpa. The doorway too has three sākhās with less decoration. A series of caitya arches are carved over the door lintel (fig. 391) which is supported by relief pillars. Inside, an image of the seated Buddha on the throne is carved (fig. 392) with the space at the back being utilised to its full advantage. The throne-back is suggested by the low relief carving comprising of motifs such as makara on both the sides, followed by the vyūha figures. This design is an improvisation over the throne back design of cave No.11 Buddha image. There is a conspicuous rendering of the makara motif, which is very different in cave No.11. At the top, there are two flying gandharva images, which has already become a standard motif
in the Buddha image. The flying figures are a continuation of the pictorial tradition of earlier relief sculptures where the stūpas are being adorned by the flying figures at places like Barhut, Sanchi, Amaravati and Nagarjunkonda etc. The Buddha image is carved with considerable refinement, the proportions are aptly balanced. It is no more slim; on the contrary, it bears considerable weight with broad shoulders and equally heavy torso, thus abandoning the slenderness in the torso. The base of the throne is also simple, two lions at both the ends bear the weight of the image. Between them is the carving of a wheel and two deers and a devotee on either side. The Buddha is shown in the preaching posture as revealed in the hand gesture. The episode of Dharmačakra pravartana is clearly signified here and gets standardised for future representations. There are two attendant images of the Buddha in a very graceful posture. Their grace is defined by the soft contours of their volume. One of their hands holds a robe and the other is placed near the knee. These figures too bear weight. Muscular planes of the body are easily seen through the transparent drapery. Both are standing on the lotus, the lotus being held by Nāgas.

Another shrinelet on the right side of the back wall has similar features with certain elaboration on the doorways (fig.389). While the interior shrine-lets progressed, the main Buddha image of the cave too began, but now with definite iconographic forms such as Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya Bodhisattvas (as shown with the seated Buddha image and a stūpa in the crown respectively). The shrine antechamber has standing Buddha images (figs. 385-388). An added feature in this cave is the outer shrine-lets images, which are again later intrusions (figs. 371, 372). The maximum number of intrusive images in the site are found only in this cave. This is particularly very significant. This would indicate that the excavation process went on for a considerably long time.

Ajanta cave No.6 at a lower level is an integrated part of the ambitious project (figs. 393-398). It consists of a pillared hall, shrine antechamber, shrine chamber and cells around. Though the upper level in the front is mutilated, the lower portion is intact. It has a big doorway in the centre and two big windows on either side. The window frames have a single dvārāsākhā. The area below these windows has vertical bands placed between two horizontal strips. Much of the lower portion is filled up with cement as a restoration measure. Hence it is difficult to make out the exact nature of the floor level.
Whatever remains, shows that the lower portion below the vertical bands also have railing consisting of thin vertical bands. This design is very common in the Aparanta region especially at Kanheri. The main doorway’s decoration is unique in the complex of Ajanta caves. A pillar motif is carved which gets thin at the upper level. The lower base of the pillars has ghata which are being held by the dwarf load bearers (figs. 395-96). These load bearers are small in dimension but bear heavy volume. It is important to observe that the torso of these images, though dwarfish, has a lot of strength, i.e. a muscular strength in their arms and the images are voluminous. Elephants are carved at the base. The only elephant figure, which is intact, has its head carved as if it emerges out of the base of the door-frame. At the upper level of the pillar again, a ghata capital is carved, with space above for the figure. It is likely that independent images were carved and fixed in this bracket space. Furthermore, the door has a recessed plane. The hall is quite large and has rows of pillars. The front and back aisles are relatively longer. The side walls are cut a little forward, which break the uniformity in the interior space. Both the sides have three cells each; in addition to this, aisles are carved in the front and rear. On the front right corner of the front aisle are located the stairs, which lead to the upper storey of cave No.6. The back wall has six cells, three each on either side of the shrine ante-chamber. There are 16 pillars in the hall. The interior pillar design is very simple, consisting of cushion capital at the upper end, followed by vertical flutes. The continuity of these vertical flutes is disrupted at a considerable height itself, where the pillar became octagonal till the floor level without any base. But the pillars in front of the shrine antechamber have an altogether different design. The base of these pillars is enlarged at the upper level like square blocks. The middle portion of the pillar gets thin and has a series of vertical lines. Further, it has cushion-like capital design with the continuation of vertical lines over its surface, which are then followed by inverted stepped bands at the top level. The pillar design resembles that of Kanheri cave No.26 pillars. The left wall of the antechamber is painted with the theme of the miracle of Śrāvasti whereas the right one is painted with Māravijaya. Vajrapāṇi and Padamapāṇi are painted on the right and left of the doorway.

The excavation of the cave appears to have gone smoothly as planned. The shrine doorway was planned to have ornate decoration (figs. 397, 398). Though the recession of
the door-frame is not deep, it still achieved an effect of ornate recessions. The motif of *Makara torāṇa* dominated the overall design of the door-frame. Instead of going in for more recessions as has been done in the later caves, artisans restricted them to three. The outer-most boundary of the door-frame is framed under the lotus petal design and then in a recessed plane, a *jāli* design is employed which is common in the western Deccan tradition. The next is a pillar with the base exactly like the one in the front door-way. The technique of execution is the same as the front door and appears to be a work of the same sculptor. The pillar design is elaborate in nature. It has a *ghata* base from where the pillar emerges and gets a little narrow at the upper end where it has a cushion capital along with the inverted bells and *makaras*, are shown. A semi-circular *torāṇa* emerges from the mouth of the *makara* touching the ceiling. The space between the *torāṇa* and the door lintel is filled up with the image of Buddha with the halo of serpent hood and two figures are shown on its either side holding a garland. The vertical space between the pillar and the door frame is ornately decorated with numerous floral and animal motifs. Two female figures are carved at the base. The upper portions above the *makara* are occupied by the flying *gandharvas*. Thus for the first time the shrine doorway is elaborately decorated.

Avoidance of too many recessions is an idea adopted from Kondivite 13, where the doorway is highly elaborated but without too many recessions in the door-frame. It is a surface undulation around the actual doorway that creates the effect of the ornateness. As has been stated earlier, the use of pillars as door frames is commonly found not only in the relief sculptures of Nagarjunkonda but also of Sannati. An application of such a design on a large scale was done at Kondivite and later at Ajanta too.

The shrine chamber of the cave is big and an image of the Buddha is seated on the lion throne in the *pravārčana mudra* (fig. 398). The image is slightly elongated. Its arms are broad when compared to the images of caves No.11 and 15. The *uṣaniṣa* and the treatment of the contour of the face is more attuned with the image of cave No.15. The throne of the image is being supported by lions and in the centre, a *dhamma-čakra* along with the two deer on its either side are visible, thus signifying the first sermon. Spink has rightly observed that ‘what distinguishes these images from later ones is the absence in all four of attendant *bodhisattavas* as well as a characteristically early throne base, in which lions appear under (but not as later supporting the throne and deer flank a simple wheel).
Also the halo is much larger than it is in a typically late image, and where it shows (as in cave 6 & 11) the throne back is far simpler than that at an early date or under the vyālas. Spink further observed that the rear wall of the shrine is left unpainted and the area of a back wall was very rough when the crisis (i.e. according to Spink, conflict between Rīsika & Aśmaka) took place. However, it should be noted that it is not always necessary to paint the rear wall of the shrine as already two walls have painted Buddha images. It can also be due to the insistence of the monks. The rear wall being left rough and undressed cannot be taken as a criterion for the non-completion of the work because even in the earlier caitya caves at Karla and Kanheri, the rear wall had not been smoothened properly.

The evidence of the pictorial format of the doorways and the Buddha image indicates that it was made after caves No. 11 and 15. Further the existence of the pillared hall would indicate that the cave was planned as a double storey excavation and was excavated after the upper storey and thus may be assigned to the period from the third to fifth decades of the 5th century AD. Spink, however, assigns the lower and upper storeys to different dates simply by arguing that the intrusive images in upper 6 and on the basis of the so called unfinished nature of the back wall of the L6 shrine chamber. Here is a chart:

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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>470-495</td>
<td>460-480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>464-470</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>462-468</td>
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<td>1992 U</td>
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<td>1992 L</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buddha Image 466-469</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994 U</td>
<td>465-468</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994 L</td>
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<td>477-479</td>
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<td>Buddha Image 466-468</td>
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The above chart itself shows how Walter Spink’s analysis of the monument contains varied conclusions. Besides, cave excavation always begins from top to bottom, but Spink is inclined to think that the upper level cave started later than the lower cave. It is true that the lower one is a more finished excavation than the upper six but upper six clearly indicates that the excavation remained unfinished and the shrine-lets that are carved in the caves also indicate different sculptural styles which are observed in the later excavation. The cave 6-lower does not show any interruption in the excavation as the cave is nearly finished. So the break in the cave excavation of lower 6 as assumed by Walter Spink appears imagined rather than convincingly argued.

Ajanta Cave No. 7

Like cave No. Upper 6, cave No 7 at Ajanta too is a complicated excavation, whose plan appears to have undergone several changes. It also opened up new possibilities in the conception of not only the architectural design but also the shrine chamber. It has an unusual plan and what exactly the artisan intended is difficult to ascertain. The plan of the cave consists of a veranda with two front porches, cells, shrine-antechamber and shrine at the back. There are two pillared chambers with cells at the back on both the ends of the veranda. An additional cell chamber is also excavated on the left wall, which is at the outer end (fig. 406). Yazdani observes that as this cave is near the old steps which formed the main approach from the valley to the group of the earlier caves IX, X, XI, XII, XIII, it is likely that its plan was changed at various times. The façade (fig. 399) of the cave deviates from the normal design of the row of front pillars. The veranda has two porches with outward projections. The upper part has two lintels with the caitya arch design, whose outer edges came out of their exterior boundary on its two side ends, whereas the centre portion of the caitya arches is elongated. Below this lintel, another beam of smaller dimension is cut. The porch pillars are decorated with the double cushion capitals with the ghata motif as its support base. Both are carved with vertical lines. The rest of the pillar is with octagonal shafts without base. The other pillars at the back are simple. The pillar designs used in the porch are developed from the pillars of cave No.13 of Kondivite (fig. 323).

The veranda is big, with pillared chambers with cells on the sides. At left end of the veranda, the excavation appears incomplete. The chamber and the cell on the left
appear to be later additions. Though the work on the façade started earlier, may be after U6 façade, the excavation remained incomplete and after a certain gap, the excavation began with different ideas and conception. At the rear, a pillared antechamber and shrine chamber in the centre and two cells on either side are excavated. It may also be observed that the pillared chamber with the additional cells is excavated at a higher level on the left end of the veranda whereas on the right end it is at a lower level i.e. on the floor level of the veranda. This is a significant evidence in determining the progress of excavation in this cave in a phased manner. In the first phase, the pillared porch and veranda were cut along with the four cells on the back wall and the antechamber. In the subsequent phase the additions at two ends of the veranda were made. However in the first phase itself, the shrine chamber and shrine antechamber were planned. The plan of veranda with the cells and shrine chamber with its antechamber is adopted from the plan of Kanheri cave No.25 (fig.311). The artisans appear to be well aware of the traditions that are being developed at various centres. (It has been observed by Walter Spink that the shrine image is an early conception due to its throne design which is quite similar to the early images of caves No.11, 15 and L6. But he further adds that the shrine has been reworked).

The shrine antechamber has two front pillars designed like the front pillars of Mahad cave No.1. The side walls of the shrine antechamber have numerous Buddha images representing the miracle at Sravasti. The rear wall of the antechamber has a door in the centre that leads to the shrine chamber. The doorway has three dwārśākhas (fig.405). The top horizontal bar is carved with seated Buddha images. The outer vertical śākhas of the door frame touch the ceiling of the antechamber. At the upper portion, a standing female figure on the makara is carved under a tree, which is being supported by a pillar with cushioned and pot capital. Below the capital, seated and standing Buddha images are carved. The entire beam is supported by the seated dwarf load bearers, whereas the second dwārśākha too has been divided into numerous frames where seated and standing Buddha images are carved alternately, the frame at the lower end being supported by lions. These lower level devices of load bearers and the lions are an adoption from the L6 cave entrance where the load bearers and elephants are carved. These images bear the same pictorial qualities of Ajanta cave no. Lower 6. The surrounding space around the door-frame i.e. the back wall of the veranda, has seated
Buddhas, three on each side. It is significant to note that the mudras and thrones at the back of these Buddha images are very peculiar and varied. Starting from the top in the left row, the first one is in the preaching mudra which is also found in cave No.15 and L6 but the image is without any throne-back. The pillars on both the sides have the motifs of vyālas. The rest of the images in the row have throne backs having makara design with pillars. The second and third images are in the dhyānamūdrā.

On the right side, image at the top has cushion throne with the snake-hood around the Buddhhas head signifying Muchalindanāga with Buddha. It is in dhyānamūdrā. The second and third images have throne backs. They are surrounded by pillars holding a lintel at the top. The second one is in the abhayamūdrā, its right hand is raised at the shoulder level whereas the left one is holding the robe. The third image of the Buddha is in the dhyānamūdrā. Considering the different gestures of the images, it is important to note that the preaching mudra’s hand is not shown at the shoulder level, however, in the image carved on left pillar’s top, both the hands are shown at the level of chest. This appears to be a notable exception because even in earlier caves like 11 and 15, hands of the shrine Buddha images are shown below the chest. The hands of the Buddha image shown against the chest in preaching mūdrā, are diligently followed in later caves like caves No.17, 20, 16 and U6 at Ajanta. A slight variation in this gesture is also observed in the lowering of the level of palms below the chest level, which was first worked out at cave No.U6 shrinelet in the front aisle of the hall (fig.378), which is also diligently followed in the later caves such as Nos. 1, 2, 4 and 21. Thus the changes in these small images have significant influence in the development of the later shrine images. It may be said that these small relief sculptures in caves No. 6 and 7 provided the standard format in the development of the shrine images. All these images on the antechamber wall are voluminous, shoulders become broad and the tendency to make the waist slim or to make the torso cylindrical by concave lines completely disappears. This is a marked change from the earlier images. The same quality is also observed in the shrinelets of cave U6.

The shrine proper in the site is an interesting conception. The main image of the Buddha is centred in the hall, seated on the throne in padmāsana. Though the right hand of the image is broken, its position would suggest that the hand was in the abhaya-mūdra.
(figs. 300, 301, 302). At the base of the throne, two deer in the centre facing the *cakra* and two lions at the end supporting the throne are carved. The lions supporting the throne along with the deer and *cakra* are a feature common to all the early caves at Ajanta. The upper portion of the throne is elaborately carved with the *makara* design and few rider figures. The *Makara* is being supported by a pillar. The design is more elaborated than those found around the small Buddha images on the antechamber rear wall. Two attendants holding *cauri* are carved at the back of the throne. These attendant figures are heavy with broad shoulders and strong torso. The contours of the body are dominated by the sheer weight of the images. The crowns over their heads are neatly decorated, faces have upward projection with flat treatment of the nose. Recession in the cheek plane further adds to the projection. The Buddha image has broad shoulders and the torso no more remains cylindrical; instead it becomes muscular, a quality added in the conventions of the artisan’s treatment of form. This is very different from the earlier shrine images of caves No.11, 15 and L6.

Two small standing Buddha figures are also carved on either side of the shrine Buddha images. They are shown like attendant figures together with several Buddha figures on the side wall of the shrine. At the base of these standing images, several seated Buddha figures are carved. The standing Buddha images are conspicuous by their sheer weight. There are few tiny images that are space fillers. Spink observes that the *makara* with the pillar on the throne and the standing images on the side walls indicate that the shrine was reworked and further adds that even the shrine’s doorway was reworked. It is possible that the excavation in this cave ran into several phases. But reworking of the shrine appears a distant possibility because the *makara* with pillar on the throne-back is also found in the relief sculptures of the shrine antechamber. If the carving of the image stopped earlier as Spink would prefer to conclude on the basis of the throne back and the cutting of the Buddha image, then, it must be noted that the carving of the image begins from the top and as it may be noticed at Ajanta itself, often the lower portion is incomplete which would indicate that carving of the attendants and entire image was part of an integrated design.

On the left side of the main Buddha image, the lower portion is roughly chiselled out and looks incomplete. But it was meant to be plastered and painted. Often
such lower portions were carved out roughly. Though the shrine's standing Buddha images on the side walls are like those of caves No.U6 and No.4, it needs not be taken as an indicator that the shrine was reworked at a later time (as Walter Spink would think), because there is a marked stylistic difference between the images of cave 7 and that of caves No.4 and U6. The Buddha images in the shrine of Cave upper 6 appear stylistically later than the 7 and L6. This would indicate that the shrine of cave U6 was carved after cave 7 and L6. Cave No.7 therefore may be considered after 11, 15 & L6 and may be assigned to the mid-fifth century AD. The shrine-lets in cave No.U6 too are carved in the fourth or fifth decade of the fifth century AD.

In caves U6 and 7, the excavation activity of the cave appears to have been a prolonged one. It was never finished in one single phase, as may be seen in the rock cutting. Moreover two distinct stylistic conventions were followed, one is observed in cave U6 including the shrine lets and another in cave 7. The shrine images in these caves are stylistically more advanced than the earlier images of caves No.11, 15 and L6. The shrines of cave U6 and 7 have simultaneous progression, which can be determined by the marked similarity in the physiognomic treatment in the standing Buddha images of the main shrine chambers. In cave No.7, the throne back and attendant are altogether a new concept in the shrine imagery. Walter Spink assumes that it was taken from cave No.16 shrine image\(^{41}\) but in making this observation he completely disregarded the conventions which the artisans were experimenting with. The treatment of the volume and body surface in the attendant images of caves 7 and 16 behind the throne (fig. 408) are very different and do not have any commonality. The attendant images of the main Buddha figure of cave 16 clearly show the pictorial qualities of Vidarbha sculptures, especially of Ramtek. Therefore, the Buddha images of the shrine of cave 7 assume greater significance. Before arriving at the magnificent conception of the shrine image of cave No.16, the artisans indeed gained the visualisation of such imagery through these smaller works in caves U6 and 7. It is worth noting that the shrinelet of front aisle on the right of cave U6, the attendants of Buddha images (fig. 378) resemble the standing Buddha images of the façade of cave No.19. The artisans did not arrive at such pictorial conventions over-night; in fact the pictorial language of the artisans developed with the
execution of works and is derived from the existing tradition which is inherited by the artisans.

The subsequent phase of Ajanta caves can be easily determined by inscriptive evidence as well as stylistic evidences. The marked influence of Vidarbha’s sculptural style would indicate the next phase of Ajanta. Another noteworthy feature is that the Buddha images in the shrines of the later caves gain a peculiar character of pushing forward energy. Many figures that are carved around caves No.9 and 10 may also be considered earlier work when compared to Kanheri’s early fourth century AD images. Some of the stylistic conventions continued for a longer time whereas some underwent quick changes. But what is observed in western Deccan is that the Buddha images have become standardised by the mid-fifth century AD and are followed diligently in subsequent cave excavations at Ajanta and elsewhere.

NOTES:

1. Mirashi V.V. 1963 Inscriptions of the Vakatakas Corpus Inscription Indicarum-V.
4. Dhavalikar M. K. 1984 Late Hinayana Caves in Western India, assigned few Kanheri caves to 4th century AD.

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The date should be considered as Gupta era is confirmed by K.V. Ramesh & Tiwari S.P. (Ed) Bagh, *A Copper-plate Hoard of the Gupta Period from Bagh Madhya Pradesh; New Delhi 1990* See Introduction.

8. op cit
10. *Ajanta Text & Plate.*
11. Madanjit Singh *Ajanta Paintings.*
13. Ibid. No.27 p- 77.
17. Ibid. Shobhana Gokhale’s observation except the proposed date.
19. Dehejia Vidya *Early Rock-cut Buddhist Temples of Western India*, p-
20. Nagaraju op. Cit
23. Dhavalikar op cit p- 50
27. Spink 1981 op cit. p-137
28. Burgess op cit p-303, describes as follows—‘ The veranda is about 30 ft. long inside by 6.6 wide, and had two columns and two pilasters. But the front has fallen away, a fragment of one pillar lying in the veranda, showing that they had a torus and fillet at the base, above which they were octagonal, changing to 16 sides, and hence to 32 flutes. The architrave of the door is plain, but the pilasters beyond it are similar to those in other caves.’
29. *Ajanta Murals* (ed.) A. Ghosh p-20, foot note no.1
30. Ibid
31. 1974, p-220.
32. *Ars Orientalis* vol.6
34. 1992, *The Archaeology of Ajanta*,
35. 1992 op cit. P70
36. Ibid p-76 and footnote 12 p-93.
37 See Bibliography