CHAPTER-VI
CONCLUSION
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The sensibilities of the human mind work to produce varied forms of visual configurations, which can be understood in different ways. The early western Indian Buddhist caves have always remained the focus of study mainly because of the magnitude of their creative art and architectural monuments. The studies on western Indian caves grew from extensive documentation. A systematic documentation made it possible to study the caves in their historical and art-historical context. Later in the 20th century, emphasis shifted to the chronology of caves. Chronological studies are undoubtedly very important to understand the growth of pictorial language. Chronology has a direct bearing on the evolutionary process of ideas and attitude of the human mind together with the religious, economic and other values attached to the art and architectural monument. The following of certain norms while creating a monument results in distinct practices which gradually become a socio-cultural norm. However, the chronological studies have tended to depend on the political chronology of the Sātavāhanas and later the Traikutakas and the Vākātakas; and consequently, the monuments were labelled after these political dynasties. Such a restricted approach to the chronology of the monuments remained highly unidirectional- thus disregarding formal qualities of works of art, the artisan's creative capabilities, and also the values attached to them. Therefore, an attempt has been made in the present analysis to proceed from the earlier studies to a broader understanding concerning the functioning of the creative mind.

No definite date can be postulated for the spread of Buddhism in the region of western Deccan. However, on the basis of some textual references in the Buddhist texts when correlated with the archaeological evidences, it can be presumed that by 4th century BC Buddhism spread in the region. It took a fairly long time for the Buddhist Sangha to establish itself as an independent functioning organisation in the region. The analysis in the present study would indicate that rock-cut cave activity in western Deccan was in response to the growing needs of the Buddhist Sangha, together with the socio-economic development of the region. The prevailing circumstances in western Deccan acted as a strong force and motivation behind the rise of rock-cut cave
monasteries. The ghāts served as an important channel of communication between the coast and plateau. The main ghāts are Thālghat, Mhāljeğhāt, Nanagḥāt, Borghāt, Tailbailiya ghāt, Kubharlighāt, Kusur ghat etc. In the second-first centuries BC a few cave centres were established all over western Deccan. The cave sites are either close to the ghāts or to the nearby settlements. At the northern end of the Ajanta-Sātamālā ranges, Ajanta was established whereas Pītakhorā and Auranagabād were established in the southern end. Ajanta and Pītakhorā are located in the Tapi-Purna valley and Auranagabād is located in the Godavari valley. All the three cave sites are located in the historical region of Mulaka. Bhāja, Karla, Bedsa, Shelarwadi and Junnar are the principle sites in the Māmala region. It may be noted that the caves of Bhāja are located away from the main route. Junnar is located away from Naneghāt. All the sites are situated in the upper Bhima valley. In the Karhātākā region caves near Karad i.e. Chachegaon group of caves represents the earliest cave-centre, and in the first century BC Wai-Pandavgad cave group emerged as an important monastic cave complex in the Karhātākā region. Both the sites are located in the upper Krishna valley. Nasik is another important cave site, which started in the first century BC in the region of Govardhān āhāra. Nasik is located on the route from the north to the seaport of Kalyan via the Thalghat.

In the coastal region, the early cave sites datable to second century BC are Kondivite, and the Thanala-Nadsur. Kondivite is near the seaport Sopara and likely to have located on the route towards the other south Konkan centres. The location of Thanala-Nadsur is in a remote place and is away from the main Ghāt. In the first century BC, caves of Kondane became notable monastic-complex near the entrance of Borghāt. The importance of the location of Kondane caves lies in the fact that the route through Borghāt passed through the same hill where the caves have been excavated. Interestingly, during the medieval period, a fort was constructed on the same hill.

The early century of Christian era witnessed further expansion of the cave sites in western Deccan. Rock-cut cave activity was confined to the Karhātākā and Aparānta regions. At Karad, a few more caves were excavated on the other side of the same hill. The other small cave site was Yerphal, located on the route from Karad to
Chiplun in the coastal region. In the Aparānta region caves of Chaul, Kanheri, Nenavali became prominent monastic centres. Kanheri assumed more importance and continued to grow.

In second century AD, Shirval, Tamkane and Pohale were additions to the existing cave sites in the Karhātaka region. All are small centres whereas Karad remained a large monastic cave complex. However in the Aparānta region, numerous cave sites were added. They are Kuda, Chiplun and Ambivali. Kuda was a big monastic complex, whereas Chiplun and Ambivali were small cave sites. Further in the third century AD Mahad was established, which was followed by Kol Khed and Panhalekaji in the south Konkaṇ region. The rock-cut activity continued further at Panhale in the subsequent period.

In the Māmala region, caves of Shelarwadi were an addition to the existing lot in the third century AD. Furthermore, in the fifth century AD, Lonad was established in the Aparānta region whereas Ghatotkacha was added in the Mulaka region. Caves of Lonad and Ghatotkacha remained the exclusive Mahāyāna cave sites. It may be observed that only in the Māmala, Aparānta and Karhātaka region, there is an expansion of cave sites from first century AD to third century AD, which would indicate that economic activities grew considerably in the region, which resulted in supporting the Buddhist Sangha.

After the Mauryan dynasty, the major political power was that of the Sātavāhanas in the region. Due to lacunae in the available evidence, it is not known when exactly the Sātavāhanas rose to power. Nevertheless, the present analysis shows that the Sātavāhanas came to power in the first century BC. In all the earlier studies, the evidence of Purānic genealogy has been treated in a unilinear fashion, which resulted in various controversies regarding the beginning of their rule. The Purānic evidence has been heavily emphasised to postulate the beginning of the Sātavāhana rule. For example, the Purāṇas refer to the ten sons of Sātakaṇī and few names are found on inscriptions and coins. Thus, it can be presumed that the ten sons of Sātakaṇī were controlling different areas of western Deccan. At the same time, the Purāṇas also refer to a Sātakaṇī who had ruled for 56 years. Considering the evidence available so far, it is likely that this Sātakaṇī might be a fictitious person who had no
historical existence. Besides, the epigraphs and the coins have not been convincingly attributed to the Sātakarnī who is supposed to have ruled for 56 years. In the first century AD, the region was captured by the Kṣatrapa king, Nahapāṇa, whose rule was overthrown by the Sātavāhana king, Gautamiputra Sātakarnī. Their political conflict also resulted in patronising the Buddhist Sangha at Nasik and Karle. The women members of the Sātavāhana family were the patrons of the Buddhist Sangha. By the mid-second century AD or little earlier, the Sātavāhana rule ended in western Deccan. Inscriptions of the early Sātavāhanas are found in western Deccan, thus indicating how western Deccan came to acquire political importance.

After the Sātavāhanas, the local rulers were controlling their respective areas in the Aparānta whereas Ābhiras gained control in the Nasik region. The Abhiras were overthrown by the Traikutakas in Nasik area. But the Ābhiras appear to have maintained their control in the Khandesh region. Traikutakas became powerful rulers. Traikutakas established their power not only in the Nasik area but also in the Aparānta region. Thus, by first quarter of fourth century AD, they had established their control over the Aparānta. Later by 400 AD, the Konkaṇ Mauryas establish their power in the Aparānta region. In case of the Mulaka and Aśmaka area, it is likely that the local chiefs were ruling, as is evident from the genealogy mentioned in the Ajanta cave No. 20 inscription. The Vākātakas were the next powerful political dynasty in the region. Their rule ended by the early sixth century AD.

Patronage is very important for the study of monuments. Inscriptional data are the only source to study the nature of patronage in the region. At the same time, the present study shows that patronage need not be viewed merely in accordance with the political dynastic affiliations. To create a monument, financial support is a prerequisite. The Buddhist Sangha enjoyed a mass support and it appears that they were not dependent on royal patronage alone. Strong support from the masses and the traders enabled the sangha to expand their network. Participation of people in the monastic activity is exemplified in the inscriptions of various cave sites. Multiple forms of donations were made to express their faith in, and affinity with, the sangha-dhamma. Donatory records suggest their participation in the rock-cut cave activity. Individual as well as collective donations were made for the excavation of caves. In
the early phase, it is noticed that for the excavation of many of the single rock-cut caves were financed by collective donations. There are more than one donation for a single excavation of vihāra and caitya. Examples of collective donations for one single excavation are numerous, for example for Ajanta cave 10, PitalKhora cave 4, Bhaja no 12, Karla 8 i.e. main caitya-grīha, Nasik 19, Kanheri No3. Of all these examples Karla is the most noteworthy. It recorded the maximum number of donors for one single excavation.

Subsequently many cave excavations were also financed by individuals. It may also be noted that some of the caitya caves were an outcome of single and family donations. It is observed that the excavation of the caitya caves of smaller dimensions was patronised by the individuals. At the same time, many vihāra caves were patronised by individual donors. In fact, maximum vihāra caves in the region were patronised by many individuals. Excavation of podhis was also considered as meritorious gifts. The donors were mainly the local population and a few from outside. Their place-names indicated the kind of wide-spread net work of communication.

Donations were of three kinds- 1) donation of money for the actual excavation of the cave, 2) donation of a land to the Buddhist Sangha and 3) donation for the repairing and maintenance of the cave and for the welfare of the monks. The land donations were the long-term patronage to the Sangha. The Buddhist Sangha must have had a strong mechanism for the control of the land donations. It may be observed that it was mostly the local population or the royal members/officers who made land donations, whereas those who were outsiders, always preferred to either finance the excavation or to invest money with trade or other activity and made the Sangha as the beneficiary. Land grants and investments were the long-term patronage of the Sangha. It is likely that the excavation of the cave might have been carried with such investments in lieu of the financial support from anybody as and when the Buddhist Sangha found it necessary. The inscriptional records also show that the land grants were made of particular villages. Inscriptional evidence at Nasik suggests that whenever the village was deserted, the Buddhist Sangha had no source of income from such land donations. As and when the village was deserted, the political rulers also made land donations at some other village. The land donations are recorded only in the Govardhana, Māmala,
and Aparānta regions. The largest number of landgrants were made at Junnar. It is quite possible that the Buddhist Sangha was managing such resources by itself. The other cave sites such as Ajanta, Pītalkhora, Bedsa, Bhaja, Shelarwadi, Shirval, Karad, Wai, Yerphal, Tamkane, Pohale, Kuda, Chaul, Thanala-Nadsur, Kondivite, Kol, Chiplun, Panhalekaji do not have any inscriptive record mentioning land donations. It appears that for land donations there was a special preference for cave sites like Nasik, Junnar, Karla, Kanheri and Mahad, which also indicates their importance in the region. The other monastic complexes were dependent either on local population at large or on the traders.

The ruling dynasties, mainly the Kṣatrapa and Sātavāhanas made land-grants only at Nasik and Karla. It is likely that as Nahapāṇa made donations at Nasik and Karla, the Sātavāhanas also followed the same practice. Nasik was a prosperous town and geographically very important as the other regions mainly the Māmala, Aparānta, and Lāta could be controlled from Nasik. Besides, earlier the Sātavāhana rulers appear to have employed a royal officer as an in-charge of the śramaṇas at Nasik. This factor is very important and, therefore, when Nahapāṇa controlled western Deccan, his son-in-law, Uṣavadatta, actually financed the cave excavation and made land donation for the Buddhist Sangha. Thus, he went a step further than the Sātavāhanas. As far Karla was concerned, it had already established itself as a very important cave centre and the best in the subcontinent. When the Sātavāhanas regained the control of this region from Nahapāṇa, they too made donations for the Buddhist Sangha. However, the local rulers in the Aparānta, Māmala regions remained patrons of the Buddhist Sangha. The local rulers in the fifth century AD were patrons of the rock-cut cave activity in the region of Mulaka along with other patrons. At Nasik, rivalry between the two ruling dynasties resulted in the patronage for the Sangha and at the same time its visible effect is also very explicit in the architectural language. At Karla also the effect of patronage is very indicative of the fact that ample resources were made available to excavate the caitya-griha. Throughout the region, the royal patronage was very limited. On the other hand, community or individual patronage from the masses and traders was in a large measure. Their affinity to the Buddhist Sangha shows how the
Buddhist Sangha in general and Buddhism in particular, as a socio-religious system emerged a strong cultural tradition with openness to every individual in the region.

The other important class of patrons among the ruling class, were the Mahārathis, the Mahābhōjakas and the other local rulers. However, the Mahārathis were active patrons in the second century AD only. In the second and third century AD, the Mahābhōjakas were the supporters of the Sangha at Kuda caves. In the Mahād area, the local rulers were patrons of the Buddhist Sangha. The main political authorities like the Traikūṭakas and the Vākātakas never patronised Buddhism.

In the Māmala region the local ruler such as Upendragupta financed the rock cut cave activity in the fifth century AD. The local rulers and the royal officials such as Varāhadev, a prime-minister of the king, were the main supporters of the Buddhist Sangha. It may be observed that the activity of excavating caves after the second century AD was mostly confined to the Aparānta region under the patronage of the local rulers. Later in the fifth century AD, the rock-cut cave activity was limited to the Mulaka and Aparānta regions only. The other people who were associated with royalty were the royal-physician, lekhāka (scribe) and āmānyas (officers). Their presence is evident at Pītalkhora, Naisik and Junnar, respectively.

Patrons came from divergent professions like gahapati, sethi-gahapati, merchants, traders, gold-smiths, copper-smiths, charioteers, sārthavāhas, gardeners, physicians, iron dealer, farmers, herdsmen, Yavanas, carpenters, lay worshippers and the Buddhist monks and nuns. Collective donations for the Buddhist caves included the donations by the guild of corn dealers, bamboo workers, people of Nasik and vānis (i.e. small trader or grocers) of village Dhenukakata etc. These donations shaped a strong economic base for the Sangha.

Traders mentioned as patrons in the second century BC were very few but in the first century AD their number increased and they are confined to Māmala śāhāra whereas in the second and third centuries AD, their patronage was confined to Kuda and Kanheri. It may also be observed that by this time the main political power was weakened considerably, but it appears that the coastal region remained very important as far as trade economy was concerned. There are numerous Avalokiteśvara images carved in the caves of Kanheri Ajanta and Ellora. These images show the power of
Avalokiteśvara protecting the traders from several eventualities, which indicates that the Buddhist Sangha was making all efforts to keep their affinity with the Sangha. The second century AD witnessed rise in the donations and the patrons were gahapatis, seṭhi-gahapatis, gold-smiths, copper-smiths, charioteers, farmers, herdsmen, Yavanas, carpenters, lay worshippers and the Buddhist monks and nuns. In the third century AD also, the traders and other professionals actively supported the rock cut cave activity along with sārthavāhas, gardeners, physician, and iron dealer. However, it must be noted that the number of donations from the traders were less as compared to the donations from others. It may also be observed that the monks and nuns became active patrons for the cave excavations in second and third centuries AD, especially at Kuda and Kanheri. But earlier their support for the cave excavation was very limited.

The caitya cave excavation takes considerable resources especially for the plans such as the apsidal vault roof variety with pillared hall. But in the later caitya caves of the first-second century AD, it is observed that individuals financed the rock-cut caitya cave excavations especially for designs like the flat roofed quadrangular caityas, which required relatively less resources when compared to the vault roof apsidal plans. Their different techniques of carving would indicate the amount of resources involved in excavating them. Therefore, the flat roofed variety became very popular in the region and hence it was widely used. Furthermore, when these designs were standardised in the Mahāyāna excavations, more ambitious designs and decorations were planned, which indeed required considerable amount of patronage. Nevertheless, in the second century AD when the caitya cave design with the usual apsidal pillared hall with vault roof were planned by collective donations, the decoration and the overall design was also inter-related to the resource availability for the artisans. The inscriptional evidences for the patronage from mid-third century onward are very meagre; however, many caves were excavated in the Aparānta, and Mulaka regions, which would indicate that the support for the Buddhist Sangha had not declined.

Society and the Sangha performed a distinct role. Three parties were involved in the rock-cut excavation- i) The Buddhist Sangha ii) Patrons and iii) The artisans. Their co-ordination was a collective social practice. Artisans were paid by the Sangha.
They had their share in the donations for the excavation of the monuments. The categories of artisans included stone carvers, polishers and overseers. Each of them were specialised in various spheres of cave excavations.

The initial need of the Sangha was the dwelling places and then came the caitya as a hall of congregation. Afterwards, additions were made to the existing caves at several places in accordance with the growing needs of the Sangha. The evolution of the rock-cut cave architecture was a multi-linear process. Though the standard pictorial norms were set up, it always had diverse designs. The beginning of the rock-cut cave excavation was made at several places in western Deccan. Ajanta, Bhaja, Thanala Nadsur, Kondivite are the main cave sites. A noteworthy factor in the early excavation was that the vihāra designs were simple as may be seen at Bhaja Cave No.18, and at Thanala-Nadsur. Many of the vihāras have interior decorations. The pictorial vocabulary was confined to the vedikā design and the caitya arches. In the case of caitya design, the pattern was considerably different. No fixed format was followed. Mainly four designs were evolved- 1) Apsidal pillared hall with vault-roof, 2) Apsidal vault-roof hall without pillars, 3) Circular domical hall with pillars, and 4) A rectangular hall with a domical stūpa chamber at the back. The first variety occurs at Bhaja, Ajanta and Pitalkhora; the second variety occurs at Thanala-Nadsur and Karad-Chachegaon; the third variety is seen only at Junnar, whereas the fourth variety, at Kondivite. However, a common element in their facade was the use of wooden device in the front except at Junnar circular Caitya cave. Ajanta Cave 10 façade is simple whereas Bhaja set altogether a different tradition. The upper part of the façade especially the one above the caitya arch was decorated with extreme care, consisting usually of decorative motifs like the vedikā, caitya arches, square jāli and the petal designs, etc. The carvers could not achieve exact symmetry. Nevertheless, the façade designing set up some norms which were followed in later excavations. It may also be noted that though the decoration at Bhaja lacks overall symmetry, it opened up a new possibility in the concept of the façade designing in the region of Māmala āhāra. Monumentality of Ajanta’s caitya griha was retained at Pitalkhora also. The effect was marvellous. Just within a limited vocabulary of caitya arches, vedikā design and the horizontal and vertical lines and their effective and orderly use of these motifs created
visual impact on the beholders. Perhaps such motifs were common pictorial vocabulary, and therefore, the artisans profusely used them to decorate facades. Pitalkhora *caitya* was a very ambitious project and there is no match to its magnificent facade decoration. The site also received patronage from the people associated with royalty. The *caitya* and *vihāra* were planned together at Pitalkhora. Similar planning was also adopted at Kondane.

In the first century BC, a small change was made in the first design, i.e. instead of an apsidal hall, a rectangular hall was introduced with the apsidal arrangement of the pillars. This change, however, was confined to the Mulaka region alone especially at Ajanta and Aurangabad. It is also observed that the portion above the pillars and below the vault roof is decorated with a series of *caitya* arch motifs. This interior decoration is found at Ajanta and Aurangabad only. In the first century BC itself, a significant change was incorporated in the plan of the Kondivite *caitya*. The addition of the cells was made in the existing rectangular plan, which was implemented at Karla alone. But, the most notable change in the facade design was the replacement of the earlier tradition of wooden facade with the stone screen wall in the front. This change in the conception of the front design of the *caityas* opened new concepts of decorations in view of the fact that it provided better opportunity for the artisans to employ their visual skills more effectively. It is likely that the experience gained at Bhaja and Pitalkhora played an important role. Thus, the façade design of the *caitya* received considerable attention. A format of a big open *caitya* arch window placed on the lintel and entrance doors carved below the lintel was evolved. The other change in the plan of the *caitya* was the introduction of the veranda especially at Bedsa in the Māmala region. The stone screen facade with the apsidal vault roof pillared hall design was followed at Nasik, Bedsa (with the addition of front veranda and front pillars) and Kondane. The *caitya* cave along with *vihāra* at Kondane was planned on the pattern of Pitalkhora, where a disciple of Kanha of Pitalkhora, Balaka, sculpted the image on the front wall of the *caitya*. At Nasik, the front was decorated with a lot of new elements, which later were adopted for the *vihāra* design at Nasik itself.

The artisans indeed appeared to have made use of past experiences while working on the new projects. At Bedsa, the front veranda is decorated with the *caitya*
arches and the *vedikā* designs. The front of the veranda has massive pillars with pot-based and pot-capitals having riders. On the facade of the cave, the area between the entrance door is left empty. The same area at Kondane *caitya* cave has been decorated with sculpture. This development was clearly taken up from Bhaja and Bedsa. At Bedsa, for the first time, a veranda was added to the existing plan along with the cells and front pillars.

At Karla (i.e. cave 11), a new beginning was made to incorporate the cells in the *caitya* hall itself. Though Bedsa has cells in the veranda, it was limited and perhaps was not planned like a *vihāra*. But, at Karla, it was planned like *vihāra*, the cells were decorated with the *caitya* arches. Thus, a new plan of *caitya-vihāra* was evolved. In the case of the great *caitya* hall at Karla, the plan of apsidal vault roof pillared hall with the front veranda and pillars was further improved by the addition of an additional stone screen wall in front of the façade. The space between the doorways (i.e. area between the main entrance and side-entrance) has been decorated with sculptures. The sculptural volume at Karla achieved considerable refinement where the images move very freely.

At Kanheri, the same format i.e. the plan of apsidal vault roof pillared hall with the front veranda and front pillars, stone screen wall in front of the façade was followed with the provision of an additional space in the courtyard. The method of carving also changed considerably.

In Karad *caitya* cave at Chachegaon, though the façade was of stone screen wall, the hall was excavated with apsidal vault roof without pillars. This architectural plan of *caityas* remained the standard format. The apsidal pillarless hall was excavated at Karad cave No. 6 (Jakhinwadi group), Pandavgad-Wai, Yerphal and at Pohale. At Pohale, the roof is flat and the hall is slightly apsidal. Thus, the plan of vault-roof apsidal pillarless hall in small dimension was confined to the Karhātaka region only. It may also be added that though the apsidal vault-roof pillarless *caitya* cave was excavated at Thana-Nadsur in the Aparānta region, it was never followed subsequently.

At Junnar, an early beginning was made by excavating the circular *caitya* cave with pillars around the *stūpa*, but the design remained a very isolated example. On the
other hand, the flat-roofed quadrangular design of the caitya had a logical growth. The first change was envisaged in the format of the facade itself. The usual caitya arch window became blind, thus reducing its existence to a mere decorative device. The second change was the combination of the vihāra facade design with the interior flat-roof hall. Thus the monumentality of the facade excavations was eliminated. Besides, such designs were easy to carve and perhaps had required less resource when compared to the normative apsidal vault roof variety. The society also could appreciate such architectural language and individuals in the society financed such excavations. It may be recalled that earlier, in the Karhātaka region, the vault-roof apsidal pillarless variety was the most economical plan widely adopted at several places. But after evolving a plan of the flat-roof rectangular hall with simple pillars in the front, the earlier plan of the vault-roof apsidal pillarless variety was no more used.

Even in the Aparānta region the flat-roof quadrangular variety was widely used. At Kuda cave No.6, artisans indeed accepted a challenge to create the front portion considerably different and unique. It was achieved by using the vocabulary from the past traditions. At the same time, the development of the caitya-vihāra concept at Nasik played an important role. Such architectural format was followed subsequently at various places. It showed how individual patrons could support such simple architectural design. It may also be observed that while using such architectural format, emphasis was not on the top-level decoration but more on the lower portion decoration. This was a considerable shift in the artisans' sensibility that gave rise to devise several methods of decoration in the exterior embellishments. But, in an overall excavation, symmetry was aptly followed.

In the case of the vihāra designs, all the early vihāras were decorated internally. When the demand to decorate the exterior of the vihāras grew, artisans reacted to the situation with an immense potential. This is exemplified in the exterior decoration of the vihāras that were planned along with the vault roof apsidal caityas as may be observed at Pitalkhora Bhaja, Kondane. At Pitalkhora, the sculptural language appears to have grown out of several experiments carried at Bhaja vihāra sculptures of cave No.22. The use of the overlapping method in relief sculpture to create the effect of recession in the pictorial space was the most preferred method in Bhaja and
Pitalkhora relief. With the help of a deep carving around the image, the effect of three-dimension was achieved. The sculptural language in western Deccan progressed in a different direction. The sculptural decoration shows artisans’ keen observation of the anatomical undulation and planes of body that are simplified over the surface of the sculptures. The use of figures remained for the decoration of the caityas and vihāras.

It is significant to note that the cave tradition in western Deccan continued for a long period of time. It appears that the Hinayāna Buddhism has a dominance here. Later some of the caves show the Mahāyāna occupation also. The absence of Buddha images in many of the cave excavations need not be construed to mean that the region had no Mahāyāna domination; in fact it was likely that the Buddha images were painted in many early caves as several such examples are observed at Ajanta, Karla, Bhaja, Junnar. Owing to the erosion of the painted surface, nothing could be read. But surviving example at these places may be taken as indication to this phenomenon.

The Mahāyāna caves so far have been dated in the fourth and fifth century AD. The date of fifth century dating is based on the inscriptive evidences that are found at Kanheri and Ajanta. All the Buddha images at Ajanta and Kanheri were dated in the fifth century AD. However, it may be noted that in the late second century AD, the Buddha images already appeared at Kanheri. This was a remarkable change in the language of cave architecture and sculpture. These figures are carved on the pillar in the front veranda. They are of seated as well as standing variety. The peculiar feature is that these images were rendered with plain drapery or the transparent drapery. Thus, the transparent treatment of the Buddha’s robe appeared in western India quite early i.e. the late second century AD itself (earlier than the Ganganic valley). So, the concept of the Buddha image was not an alien concept in the western Deccan. The cave excavation process continued further but at a very few places like Mahad, Kondivite, Kanheri, and Ajanta. The earlier Hinayāna caves such as Ajanta caves No. 9, 10, Karla caitya caves were painted with the Buddha images. These images were painted in the third century AD. The other noticeable element was that of the façade design, which gets standardised by the use of either the octagonal or square pillars. The lower part is decorated with the vedikā design or with the vertical strips at regular intervals and the multiple mouldings of
the adhīśṭāma (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-pillars were also used, which was an adoption from the Karla cave No.4 (fig.117). The plan of the cave also gets standardized, consisting of a veranda, hall and a shrine chamber at the back wall. This plan was a continuation of the existing Hinayāna cave traditions. Even the cells were added in the hall to make a combination of caitya-vihāra design. This format of the plan played a major role in the development of the Mahāyāna caves. In addition to this, the treatment of the door frames changed. The door-frames of the caves were carved with multiple dvārśākhās, mainly the door frames of the veranda, and shrine. In the earlier caves like Bhaja and Pitalkhora, the door frames were carved with two śākhās. Later the tradition was not followed. But, in the late Hinayāna excavations of Panhale-Kaji, the tradition of using multiple śākhā was revived. Thus further development of cave excavations can be traced at Ajanta, Kanheri, Kondivite and Mahad.

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. At several caves of 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 and fixed later in the cave.

The stūpa-image concept gained importance as may be seen in Kondivite Cave No.2. The Buddha image was carved independently and fixed on the platform. Many of the subsequent caves followed this method but without the stūpa carving. Such caves appeared in western Deccan in mid or later half of the third century AD. The shrine chamber at the back had a raised platform where the image was fixed. It is observed at Kanheri Nos.12, 25, 26 and 29 & Kondivite Nos. 13, 15, and Ajanta 8. The façade of these caves was an adoption from the vocabulary that had been developed in the earlier
caves, having a decorated lintel, front pillars and a vedikā design at the lower end of the facade with a high plinth. By this time, the door frames had acquired different pictorial treatment, which had become a kind of means to exhibit the artisans' visual skill, the Sākhāś or door frames were added and decorated with flower petals, square blocks and other motives. At Mahad cave no. 1, it was a very ambitious cave excavation. Though it remained unfinished, yet the front facade design of the cave provides the idea of pillar designs, which later were developed at Ajanta.

The Buddha image gained greater importance by fourth century AD. At Kanheri many Buddha images were carved around the beginning of 4th century AD in Cave No.2e and 3. These images are carved with roundish face, pronounced volume, unsharp contours, elongated ears, and incised eye-socket, protruding lips. It served as the standard prototype for the subsequent excavation. In the case of early Mahāyāna development at Ajanta, caves No.11 and 15 were the most crucial ones. The façade of cave No.11 was an adoption from the style of façade design that was being followed at the late Hinayāna excavation at Panhale Kaji cave No. 6 in the Aparanta region. The shrine Buddha image in cave No. 11 of Ajanta, is huge and neatly carved out. The throne at the back is partially carved out and partially painted. The head of the shrine image has outward projection. The torso is well proportioned with broad shoulders and 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. The image has the plain drapery. A figure of kneeling devotee carved at the lower bench of the throne is slender. In the case of cave No. 15 Buddha image of Ajanta, it is stylistically closer to the Buddha image of Ajanta cave 11. The shoulders of Ajanta cave No. 15 Buddha image are not heavy and broad. The door frame of Ajanta cave No. 15 created new design of T-shape door frame, which was adopted in later caves at Ajanta itself. Therefore, Ajanta caves No. 11, 15 may be dated in the later half of the fourth century AD.

Even the Buddha images in this cave especially the shrine Buddha images, are also different from the images that are found in the 5th century AD caves of Ajanta in their pictorial conventions. The subsequent development at Ajanta is observed in caves No.6 & 7. Though cave No. 6 upper level remained unfinished, its early phase of activity can be ascertained from the stylistic conventions of the sculptures by
comparing with the later sculptures at Ajanta itself. The lower story is completely finished. The shrine doorway is carved with considerable elaboration. The shrine image is slightly elongated with broad arms when compared to the images of earlier Ajanta cave No. 11 and 15 Buddha images.

The subsequent excavation at Ajanta was cave No.7, was adopted from Kanheri cave No. 25 in its plan. The shrine image in cave no. 7 is carved with broad shoulders and muscular torso, which is different than the cave no. 11, 15 and 6 Buddha images. Thus a systematic development in the cave excavations is observed in the region. It may be added that the marked difference between the early images and the later images at Ajanta is that of the incorporation of pictorial conventions of Vidarbha sculptures. This may be taken as an index to trace the early and later phase at Ajanta itself.
Appendix: Walter Spink and Ajanta’s Chronology

Walter Spink studied Ajanta caves in considerable detail and attempted to date the caves in different ways. No other art-historian as been as prolific as Walter Spink on the dating of Ajanta caves. But the question is: how far his contentions are valid and do they really help us in understanding the cave monuments better? Spink tried to interpret the cave monument in the context of the Vakātaka history and his principal argument is that after the demise of Hariśeṇa, there was a decline in the rock-cut excavations. The first and foremost question that emerges out of this argument is that was really Hariśeṇa responsible for the cave excavations at Ajanta? Did the Mahāyāna development at Ajanta happen only in the fifth century AD? Moreover is there an early phase of the Mahāyāna excavation at Ajanta, which was done prior to the fifth century AD? And, above all, does the political history have a bearing on the visual language as such? These are important questions which need to be answered while accepting Spink’s arguments. However, let us try to evaluate Spink’s argument critically by discussing the historical and art-historical evidences. Among the historical evidences, inscriptions are the main source. Among all the inscriptions at Ajanta caves 16,17, the Ghatotkacha cave and the inscription of Hisseborala are important. There is no disagreement on the date of the Hisseborala inscription. The inscription at Ajanta, however, requires critical examination and interpretation. The so-called conquest of Hariśeṇa is not clearly stated in the inscription; in fact the names of historical regions are mentioned, but their context is missing. There is no mentioning of the word Viśiṣṭa as occurs in line No.8. The inscription mentions

Harirāmharasmarendukanti Hariśeṇo harivikratramapratapha
Sa k Caitavantiklinga kosal trikuṭī lāṭāndhra----jānimāna.

The word Jānimāna is very important in this line. This line can also be taken to mean that he is very famous for valour and it is acknowledged by these countries. As it is, there is no evidence of Vākātaka occupation in Kosala and Kalinga. Conquering these regions would mean a conflict with the other branch of the Vākātaka dynasty, which was ruling from Nandivardhan in the eastern Vidarbha, where Prithvisena was ruling till 490 AD, on the basis of the regnal year mentioned in one of the land grants as year 17. So,
the whole idea of the conquest does not seem to be very valid. Next is the question of historical geography. V.V. Mirashi assigned the local kings of cave 17 and 20 as the rulers of Rīśika and put Ajanta in the historical region of Rīśika without any supporting evidence. Spink very meticulously followed this line of argument to show the disruption and hiatus in the process of excavation. The historical region Rīśika cannot be the region around Ajanta or Khāndesh (i.e. Jalgaon and Dhule district of Maharashtra as propounded by Mirashi) on the following grounds. 1) The region is mentioned in the Nasik inscription. 2) The seal bearing the name of Assaka Janapada (i.e. Rīšika in Sanskrit) is found at Adam in Nagpur district. 3) The Khārvela inscription mentions the conflict with Sātakarani and his army marching up to the west in the territory of Sātakaraṇi and the storming of the city called Assikanagara along the river Kannabena. The city is identified as Adam on the banks of Kanhan and Wainaganga. The names of rivers name mentioned in the inscription i.e. Kanhana and Bena are Kanha as Kanhan and Benna as Wainaganga. 4) The question then arises is:- which was the historical region where the caves of Ajanta are located? The Suttanipāta mentions that the river Godavari divides the two regions i.e. Mulaka and Aśmaka. Aśmaka lies on the south of Godavari whereas Mulaka on the North and the caves of Ajanta are located in the North of Godavari. Hence, it is likely that the caves are located in the Mulaka region. Thus from the above analysis it is clear that the hiatus cannot be determined on the basis of imaginative reconstruction of the evidences. As the kings of cave No.17 were ruling in the Mulaka region, there is no question of gaining control of their region by the king of the Aśmaka as considered by Walter Spink. 6) The inscriptions of Ajanta cave No.26 clearly mentions the past nature of the king whose name is not given and does not indicate his gaining control over the Ajanta region as such. 7) The evidence of the Daśakumāra-charita cannot be taken as direct evidence as it is a fiction-play based on a certain historical situation. For example, it is mentioned in the text that the king of Murala also took part in the battle against the Vidarbha king. According to Kale, the region is identified with the present Kerala state; so, why a king of Kerala had to come to the Vākātaka territory and fight and fight for what? The battle against the Vidarbha king is mentioned to have been fought on the bank of the river Varada i.e. Wardha or Narmada according to other edition. This possibility again is ruled out because the river Wardha was in the territory of the
Nandivardhan branch and Narmada being located in the northern part, it is practically impossible for the king of Āsmaka along with others to travel all the way and fight. However, it can easily be said that the text mentions the political unrest of the region and nothing more than this. 8) There is no evidence of Vākātaka occupation in the Konkaṇ region and Trikuṭakas were never the feudatories of the Vākātakas, as there is no evidence to support this contention. On the contrary, the Trikuṭakas are dated to the late third century AD to the early 4th century AD on the basis of inscriptive evidences as the Konkaṇ Mauryas were ruling in the Konkaṇ region by 400 AD. According to the inscription of the Konkaṇ Mauryan king dated to saka 322 i.e. 400 AD. 9) If M.J. Sharma’s identifications of Sarvasena III in one of the inscriptions of Kadamba king who was helped to regain his throne by Sarvasena III i.e. successor of Hariśepa and if the date assigned to the Kadamba King is correct i.e. 490-470 /26 AD, then it is clear that the Vākātaka king Sarvasena was ruling at least in 490 AD or so; hence the date of the downfall of the Vākātakas about 490 AD stands incorrect. Thus, these are numerous historical evidences which need very systematic and careful analysis to re-construct the political history of the region.

Now turning towards art historical evidences, these require altogether a different perspective, as inscriptions at Ajanta are not dated. Therefore, the chronological position of the sculptural language should not be seen in the sculptures at Ajanta in isolation. The attendants and the Boddhisattvas in the Buddha shrines of caves 17, 20, 6, 1, 2, 21 and also the images on the façade of cave No.19 have stylistic affinities with the sculptures of the Vidarbha region. The images on the façade of cave 19 are adopted from the images of Vākātaka temples of Ramtek. These images can safely be dated to 418-420 AD on the basis of the Prabhavati Gupta inscription. Thus, it is an indication that the artisans even around 465 or 470 (as per the date of Walter Spink) were following similar conventions. It means, for almost five decades, one style was being followed; then, how is it possible that the images of the earlier mentioned caves developed within the span of just two decades?

Another important factor in the cave excavation is that plans can be altered, certain changes can be incorporated easily thus making it impossible to make out the
various changes as they merged into one single plan of the cave. Besides, in cave 6 and
cave 21 the lower portion of the shrine attendant images are left incomplete but the
images are plastered and painted. This shows that instead of complete carving, the
artisans used short-cut methods. By using plaster and then painting other details over it is
much easier than carving the whole. This cannot be taken as disruption of the activity as
propounded by Walter Spink.

In the case of caves No. 11 and 15, the shrine- images are stylistically different
and do not show any affinity with the images of caves no.16, 17-20 as well as other caves
like cave no.26. In fact, they need to be seen in comparison with the fourth century AD
images of Kanheri caves. By grouping the decorative motifs, it is clear that caves 1, 2 and
21 onwards to 25 have a lot of commonality. The sculptural embellishment also indicates
a kind of progression. When it comes to cave No.26 sculptures, they are far different
from the rest of the sculptures. The complex arrangement of the figures in the Māra
panels and articulation of several independent Buddha images are far different
stylistically. The images of Māra panel are more refined, have a lot of movement and do
not exhibit the crudeness of rendering of volume. Such complex arrangement is possible
only with a considerable degree of experience and cannot be an overnight achievement as
Walter Spink would imagine. Façade images of cave no. 26 are very different, more
refined and elongated. This quality of elongation is a systematic adoption of the
conventions developed at Kanheri as well as at Ajanta. There are many stylistic
conventions followed in this cave sculptures. Moreover, the inscription of cave No.26
does not mention the Vakatakas. But what is important here is the nature of patronage.
Walter Spink associated everything with the Vākātaka king Hariśeṇa but, on the other
hand, the known donors of the caves are – cave 16- Varāhadeva, a minister of the
Vākātakas; Cave No.17 – 20 Upendragupta, a local king; cave No.26- Budhabhadra, a
monk and; cave No. 4-- Mathuradasa. Many of the painted records of donations are of
different monks especially in caves No. 2, 16 and 17. Thus once again it shows that the
nature of patronage is not limited to one single donor; instead along with the main donor
others also made contributions. Besides, how far is it plausible to make a statement that
the patronage was mainly confined to the Vākātakas alone? The intrusive images which
have been made in several caves can also be an indication that the work might not have
been completed at one go and other patrons must have contributed towards the completion and hence such intrusive images. The question needs to be examined in great detail. The most important thing is that the Vakātakas were Vaiṣṇavites and there is not a single record, which mentions the donation to the Buddhist monastery by the Vākātaka king as such. Therefore, the whole idea of patronage and chronology, as propounded by Walter Spink, needs further consideration. Spink does not make any effort to show the very nature of creative mind that was actually working on caves with the help of the pictorial vocabulary, with which the artisans work; there is no attempt to see the iconographic programme of the shrine and its antechamber. In a more recent work, he became very rigid and sees Ajanta as a fiction without reconstructing the historical situation in a wider context such as the options available for artisans to arrange the images in a certain fashion in the shrines; how the decorative vocabulary is developed at the site itself, the relationship between Ajanta sculpture with the Vidarbha sculpture, nature of the bond between the patron, artisans and the Buddhist Sangha as according to his interpretation, it is the patron who thinks of design rather than the Buddhist Sangha & the artisans. Spink’s overall interpretation is set in a rigid frame work of ‘rise and fall’ where the peak moments are achieved by the notion of the spirit of the age, a framework more attuned to the Hegelian dialectics where all the achievements are an outcome of the spirit of the age i.e. during the reign of Vākātaka king Hariśeṇa. What is more important is that the whole framework fails to make us understand a historical reconstruction of the past without knowing the circumstances in which the patron, the Sangha, the artisans lived in, and the nature of response to visual language first by the artisans themselves and by the beholders.