

Donation Patterns of Buddhist Establishments in North Konkan with special Reference to Kanheri Caves

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Abstract: Kanheri Caves are a group of 109 caves situated to the south east of Borivali in Mumbai. The caves consist of Buddhist viharas, chaityas, stupas. The inscriptions refer to castes, gotras, communities etc showing that the local social forces were playing imperative roles in the eco-political ambiance of Deccan. These caves came into limelight under the Satavahanas (1st century A.D). The patronage provided by the merchants helped in the progressive up keep of this monastic establishment which was connected with many trade centres and towns of Kalyan, Sopara and Chaul located in their vicinity. The mercantile community supported this establishment and contributed to the rock cut excavations and maintenance of the monks residing here. Many traders like Fa Hien, Foe Kue Ki, Gracia d'orta and Dom Joao De Castro have made a mention of the caves. In 1839 re-excavation of the lost caves was started by James Bird. The more recent studies of Shobhna Gokhale and Himanshu Prabha Ray attempt to see the site in its social milieu. My purpose is to look into the inscriptional data and infer the nature, purpose and ideology of donations along with the relationship between the patrons and the monastic institution. I have prepared a map of the caves and a table of inscriptions depicting data like time period, occupation of the Donor and location of the inscription. Interestingly the royal donors are greatly outnumbered by merchants, crafts people and farmers. I would like to portray how a thriving Buddhist center is patronized by a multitude of social groups. The paper is primarily based on the epigraphic records from these sites.