



RELATIVELY UNKNOWN ROCK-CUT CAVES AT BEED KHURD IN KHALAPUR, RAIGAD

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ABSTRACT:

The present article aims to study of the relatively unknown rock-cut cave structure at Beed (Bid) khurd village in Raigad District. When the author went on a trek to Gambhirnāth Cave in Borghāt with his friends, he and his team visited these caves after being informed by locals. It cannot be ruled out that some trekkers while wandering in this area may have visited this cave. Local people who call these as *pāṇḍav ghalai* i.e. the cave of *pāṇḍavās*. These rock cut caves are not known to the scholarly world except for the local people.

KEYWORDS: Beed khurd, Borghāt, Theravāda, Rock-cut Cave, Inscriptions.

Beed khurd village, situated at 13 km from the sub-district headquarters Khālāpur and approximately 3 km from the nearest Central Railway's Kelavalī & Dolavli station. This is small village located on the slopes of Borghāt. Borghāt, also known as Khandāla Ghāt, is a mountain pass in the Western Ghats in Maharashtra, India. This mountain pass is known for its scenic beauty, with valleys, waterfalls, and hills, making it a popular destination for nature lovers and trekkers. This was an ancient trade route that has been used since the Sātavāhana period to connect the Konkan coast (with ports like Kalyān, Sopārā) to the Deccan plateau. Even in modern times, it remains an important transport route, connecting present-day Mumbai and Pune by road and rail. It appears to be a large number of Buddhist caves at this Borghāt route.¹ At the foot of the Rājmaṇchi fort is Kondāne as well as Āmbivale, Hāl, Varne² and Jāmbrung (it is now dedicated to Gambhirnāth³) are in the lower part of the Sahyādri mountains and are within a distance of a few miles from the Karjat-Khālāpur. Bhājā, Bedsā and Karle in the spurs that strike out from the same hills into the eastern table-land. There are many small caves in the mountainous region surrounding the Kondivade village near where Kondāne Caves are located.⁴ Based on the above information, we understand that the entire area of Borghāt is historically important and rich in archaeological sites. It is necessary to study the caves of Beed Khurd village in the light of this archaeological information. Because of, there is no additional or specific information that would provide an analysis of the caves.

Beed Khurd Caves located on the eastern hill adjacent to the Beed khurd village. These are mainly two different cave structures. The cave number one (Lat. 18°50'22.1"N Long.

73°20'46.5"E) indicated in this article is *vihārā* cave, containing a single monk cell, two inscriptions, some rock art and two incomplete excavation. Before these caves, there is a large natural cave appears at the beginning (Fig. 2 & 3), which is approximately 20 to 25 feet long and 15 feet wide. It is likely that an excavation attempt has been made there. Because; a bench-like structure is initially appears. Also, signs of excavation are visible deep inside. Cave number two (Lat. 18°50'16.0"N Long. 73°21'10.8"E) is originally a natural cave, and it appears that attempts have been made to convert it into a man-made cave. Ulhās River stream flow from the north-east of these caves and merges into the Vasai Creek. While the Pātālgangā River stream flow from the south-west and merges into the Dharamtar Creek. A more detailed description of these caves structures is given below.

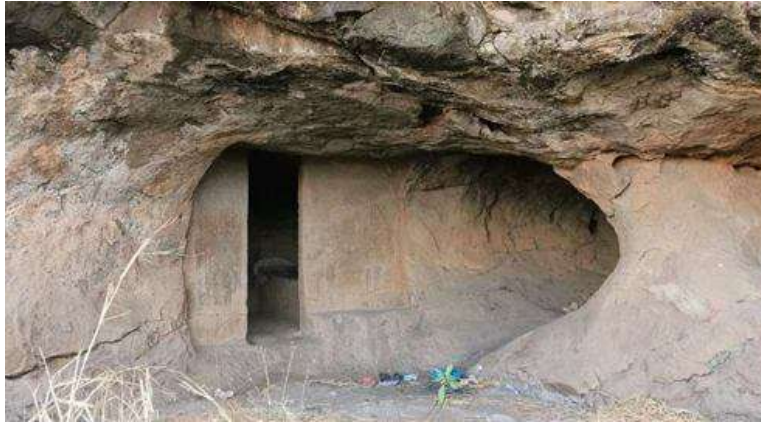


Fig. 1: Front view of Cave No.1, Along with an incomplete excavation

Cave 1 – This is a simple *vihārā* cave (Fig. 1) facing towards west. It has a single south-west facing cell (Fig. 4) for reside to monk (7 ft. long, 4.11 ft. wide and 6.5 ft. high). The cells must have had a door (2 ft. wide) in the past, because; its remains (groove) are visible on the top and bottom of the door frame. Inside the cell there is *āsanapedhī* (Fig.5) i.e. a bench (6.5 ft. long, 2ft. wide and 1.5ft. high) on the right side, which was used by the monks living here to sit or rest. Also; small circular holes seen on the bench. As well as; there is a groove in the floor on the inside of the cell. All other *vihārā* cells in early Buddhist caves has flat roofs.⁵ similarly; this *vihārā* cell has also a flat roof. There is also a small bench on the outside of the cell (3 ft. long, 1 ft. wide and 2 ft. high from floor), attached to the right wall. It has a groove. On the same right wall, there is an inscription on the upper side and some rock art carvings of animal's figures on the lower side. Two excavations are visible on the right side of the cell, and it is possible that an attempt was excavate (monk's cell or prayer hall?) there. However, it appears to have remained incomplete. Among them; an inscription is carved in a small excavation. (Fig.6)



Fig.2: Unfinished work in natural cave



Fig.3: Natural Cave



Fig.4: Front View of Monk's Cell



Fig.5: āsanapedhī i.e. A bench



Fig.6: Location of Inscription No.2

Inscriptions:-

Inscriptions are usually inscribed on donated objects. There are total two short Brāhmī- Prākṛit inscriptions engraved in this cave. The first of these inscriptions (Fig.7) is on the façade of the right wall of the cell. As well as; the second inscription (Fig.8) is engraved in a small excavation of one of the two incomplete excavations (on the right side of the monk's cell) mentioned above.

Inscription No. : 1

This is a single lines donation inscription, with maybe fifteen-sixteen letters. It is inscribed on a rough surface on the façade of the right wall of the cell. The letters in the inscription are not finely and deeply engraved. The first few letters have indistinct and damaged over time, but the last few letters are readable.



Fig.7: Inscription No. 1

The first letter of the inscription is completely unclear. The second letter appears to be 'ma'. There is a debate whether the third letter is 'la' or 'na'. However; the author argues that it should be 'la'. Next to that, perhaps two or three letters are completely destroyed. The last ten letters are relatively good and are in the following order: 'gi', 'rā', 'nam', 'ke', 'jha', 'kā', 'nam', 'pu'. Is the second letter from the end 'ta' or 'sa'? It may be difficult to form an opinion on this. Yet, author read it as 'ta' and the last letter is 'da' or maybe 'dē'? The donation inscriptions from Western Maharashtra usually mention 'dānam' or 'deyadhama' at the end. This inscription too may have been intended to end with the word 'dānam' or 'deyadhama' meaning to donate or a meritorious gift for *dhammā*. However; the next letter after 'da' or 'de' is not inscribed here. From this, it is understood that this inscription is not only inscribed rough surface but also incomplete.

It has been read as:

. ma la . . . gi rā nam ke jha kā nam pu ta or (sa?) da or (de?)

The word '*girā*' in the inscription refers to some hill or mountain. However; since the first few letters of the inscription have been destroyed, there is no way to know the name of the mountain mentioned in that sentence.

The translation of the Inscription as follows:

"(A meritorious gift?) From the son of *kejhakā* who reside at*girī* (hill)."

Inscription No. : 2

As mentioned above, This Inscription is engraved in a small excavation on the right side of the cell. At first glance, this appears to be an incomplete inscription, consist a total of five letters.



Fig.8: Inscription No. 2

It has been read as:

si ha pa bha ka ra or (ro?)

The first four letters of this inscription can be read properly. However; the fifth letter, at first glance, appears to be 'ro'. However; there is also the question of whether it should be 'ka', which is not properly engraved. I read it as 'ka'. At the same time, I raise the doubt that has there been an attempt to adjoining letter 'ra' to that letter 'ka'? If so, this incomplete inscription at incomplete excavation represents the personal name of an individual and is as follows.

Prākṛit: *sihapabhaka (ra?)*

Sanskrit: *simhaprabhāka (ra?)*

The first inscription in this cave only mentions the name of the donor and the town he belongs, but does not mention what exactly was donated.⁶ Also; the second (an incomplete) inscriptions is engraved before the cave was completed, these are signs of early cave inscriptions.⁷ The characters in both these inscriptions suggest that they must have been inscribed early Sātavāhana and shortly after the Mauryan period. Because; the Mauryan period letters are rectangular, meaning they are less wide than tall. However; during the early sātavāhana period, this ratio seems to have become almost equal in height and width. These inscriptions show a mixture of both these features. The first letter 'ma' of Inscription No.1 shows the rounded features of the ashokan style. The letter 'ga' in these Inscription is circular compared to the angular 'ga' in ashokan sopara edicts no. 9. The letter 'ka' in ashokan sopara edict no. 9 is irregular crooked. In comparison, the letter 'ka' in the inscription this cave is engraved as a vertical rectangle. The author draws attention to the final letter 'ka' in the second inscription. This 'ka' is distinctive and curved, perhaps due to the rough stone here? Whatever it is, but; the inscriptions in these caves shed new light on the study of palaeography. They also play an important role in understanding the chronology of the caves in the Western Ghats.

Rock Art:

What makes this cave special is the rock art on the walls of the cell. Rock art can include paintings and sculptures made by people on rocks and caves from prehistoric times to early historical times. In historical times, rock art (paintings, engraving and carving sculpture) has been seen to flourish on a large scale in cave architecture. Cave No.1 has some creatures and some unrecognizable and veritably different rock art on the external wall of the monks' cell. This rock art's seen on both walls divided by the door of cell. Among them, on the right wall, below the inscription, there are quadrupedal animals like horses (Fig.10-iii), deer or donkeys. (Fig.10-i) among the animals on this wall, the one in the middle is special. Because; it is relatively short in legs and longer in length. (Fig.10-ii) Also; a lotus with a stem (Fig.9-ii) and some un-guessable markings (Fig.9-i) are carved on the left wall.

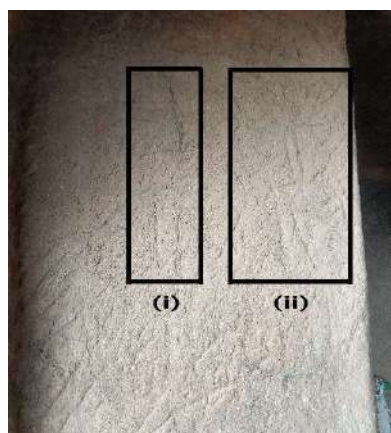


Fig.9: Left Wall Rock Art

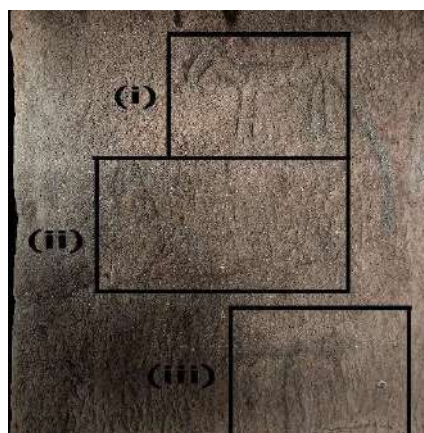


Fig.10: Right Wall Rock Art

Cave 2 – Cave number two is facing towards west (Fig.11) and is 728 meters southeast of the first cave. This cave is basically a natural cave in which a carved *pānapodhī* (water cistern) (Fig.12) can be seen. Similarly, an attempt has been made in this cave to carve *āsanapedhī* (a bench) (Fig.13) too. The roof in the center of this cave is dome shaped (Fig.14) and just below the domed shape roof are square structures of the original rock, which are now broken. I would like to compare this dome-shaped structure with the dome-shaped structure in the cave of Pāndavkadā waterfall in Khārghar.



Fig.11: Front view of cave no.2



Fig.12: Water cistern in cave no.2



Fig.13: A bench in cave no.2



Fig.14: Domed shape roof in cave no.2



Fig.15: Domed shape roof in Pāndavkadā Cave

Pāndavkadā waterfall is located 7 km north-west of Khārgar railway station in Navi Mumbai. A dome-shaped structure can be seen in a natural cave in the middle of this Pāndavkadā waterfall (Fig.15). The chisel marks on that structure are clearly visible. This structure is exactly like that. In this cave, that marks are not visible on the dome-shaped structure. It is possible that there may have once been a stone, brick, and mud stupa at both locations, which was destroyed over time. It is important to note that there is a partially carved *vihārā* cave on the steep cliff of this Pāndavkadā waterfall. The author also visited this *vihārā* cave two years ago. Although geological features indicate that the cave is natural, the presence of carved water tank in the cave, the attempt to carve a bench for seating or resting, the domed shape of the roof in the center of the cave, and the wall-like structure of the original stone just below, it indicating that there has been an attempt to convert the original natural cave into a man-made cave.

When studying these caves, it is noticed that; the entire architecture confirms to be of early Theravada period. Why was this cave architecture not completed? Was it because the rock here was not of good quality or was there some other reason for this? Whatever it was but this newly noticed relatively unknown caves adds up to the number of Buddhist caves already seen in this region and helps in revising the chronology of the rock cut caves of Western Ghats of Maharashtra.

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