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# A Hiatus in the Cutting of Buddhist Caves in the Western Deccan

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## Abstract

*This article places the expansion of Buddhist monasteries in the Western Deccan in its wider context, examining how social, political and economic forces might have impacted on the tempo of Buddhist cave cutting. A framework for dating the caves is outlined and a hiatus in their construction during the first century AD noted. Epigraphic evidence is then used to link this hiatus to the conflict between the Western Ksatrapas and the Satavahanas that also occurred during the period of study. Inscriptions often mention the social groups, which donated to monasteries, and the article evaluates how the conflict would have affected their ability to donate. Finally, a case study of the cave complex at Pandu Lena, Nasik is used to illustrate the nature of interaction between Buddhism and society.*

## Introduction

Of the architecture constructed during the Satavahana period, the rock cut caves of the Western Deccan are the best preserved. These Buddhist monasteries were hewn from cliff faces throughout what is now known as Maharashtra from the accession of the Satavahanas, around the first century BCE, until long after they had lost control of the region, in the late first millennia CE. Occasionally built with funding from elites, more often they were constructed through donation from lay followers of Buddhist religion. Fluctuation in the economy at large therefore could have affected “the tempo of cave cutting” (Morrison, 1995:210). A hiatus in cave construction throughout the western Deccan around the beginning of the Christian era was the most prominent example of such a change in tempo and, although precise dating is problematic, it is clear that it roughly coincides with a period of political instability. This article will explore the relationship between the hiatus and the period of political instability in more detail.

We know from dynastic information outlined in the *Puranas*, that the Satavahana polity was unstable between the reigns of Satakarni and Gautamiputra Satakarni. The epoch is characterised by unrest; some *Puranas* claim that sixteen kings held the throne within a

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period of a few decades. Although dating the reigns of Satavahana monarchs is problematic, most sources indicate that the political instability was resolved by Gautamiputra Satakarni, who ascended the throne at or shortly after the end of the first century BCE (Bhandare, 1998; Mirashi, 1981:69; Rao, 1960; Shastri, 1998 etc.).

Previous studies of the caves have associated the hiatus in cave construction with this unstable era of Satavahana history; Dehejia states that:

“We have seen that the dynasty split into several branch lines during this period, and we know that the Satavahana's hold over their territories was weak, since the Ksharatas were able to take over important portions of their domains. It would thus be a reasonable assumption that political unrest caused an ebb in general prosperity which led to an adverse effect upon the patronage of religious establishments.”(Dehejia, 1972:148)

In a similar vein, Nagaraju asks,

“Could this (the hiatus) be due to sudden political change, and consequent cessation of commercial activities or diversion of the same to some other region by which the old towns along the ancient trade routes had to witness economic depression?”(Nagaraju, 1981:326)

These authors link change in the tempo of cave cutting to developments in Satavahana politics (also see Morrison, 1995:210). It should be noted that a cessation in rock cutting need not necessarily imply that monasteries were abandoned or that the popularity of Buddhism waned but was determined by the absence of a particular variety of donation which resulted in the construction of a particular type of monastery halting for a short time. This article will investigate why a disruption to the donations that were essential for the construction of Buddhist monasteries, might have occurred.

## Donation

For our purposes, donations which were given to the monastic community dwelling within rock cut caves can be divided into two types. The first, funded the building, extension, or decoration of the monastic infrastructure itself, whilst the second provided maintenance, helping to sustain both the monastery and its inhabitants. In a number of cases, inscriptions indicate that a conflation of the two occurred, as a case study discussing the cave complex at Nasik, Pandu Lena will illustrate later in this paper. A number of inscriptions at Pandu Lena, for example in caves III and X, indicate that funding was provided to cut a new *vihara* along with the grant of a field or taxes from a nearby village to feed and clothe the monks that inhabited the *vihara* (Luders, 1912 Inscriptions 1125, 1126, 1131). Gregory Schopen (2004:229) has examined the extent to which donors who funded the construction of monasteries continued to provide support for the maintenance of monasteries. Whilst he argues for a close correlation, perhaps even an obligation, his writing is based on evidence from the *Mulasarvasivada vinaya* and other texts from northern South Asia, which may not be of relevance to Buddhism as practiced in the Western Ghats. The fact that rock cut caves were occupied for centuries would also suggest that supplementary donors would have been required for *viharas* to remain inhabited. Moreover, epigraphic evidence from the caves clearly shows that in some cases, different donors provided for the construction and maintenance of a monastery (for example Luders, 1912 Inscription 1123). Although the

nature of epigraphic and structural evidence allow donations toward monastic construction to be identified more readily in the archaeological record, donation toward the maintenance of the monastic community was also intrinsic to the functioning and health of a monastery.

Epigraphic evidence shows that the cutting of caves was mainly funded by groups of lay Buddhists. A number of inscriptions mention the 'profession' and/or title of the donor who funded monastic expansion. See Figure 1.

Based on the sources: Burgess and Indrajai (1881), Gokhale (1991), Jacobi (1878), Luders (1912), Senart (1905, 1906), Vats (1926), West (1862).

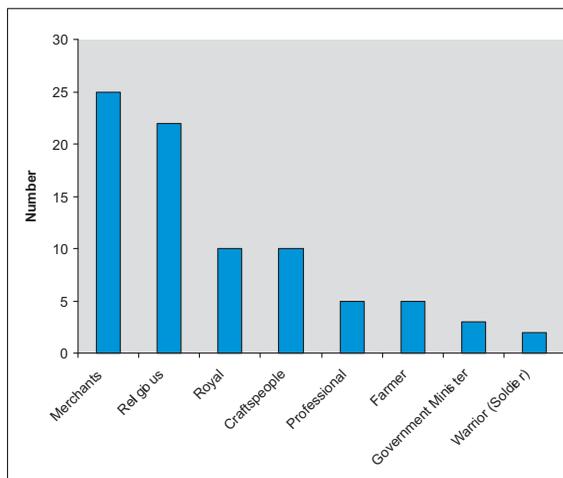


Figure 1 - Professions Mentioned in Donatory Inscriptions

Note: The graph is constituted only of inscriptions from cave sites located in the Western Ghats and coastline of Maharashtra.

Only inscriptions which specifically mention that the donation funded the construction of a feature of a monastery (e.g. cave, pillar, cistern, sculpture) have been included.

Terms that can only be loosely defined (eg *Gahapati*) have not been included. Whilst these are an important component in the corpus of inscriptions, existing literature on the meaning of these titles is voluminous. The debates on the social implications of such titles are beyond the scope of this article and so have not been included in the graph.

The inscriptions that mention 'professions' in relation to the expansion of monasteries make up around thirty five percent of the total inscriptions that I have recovered from sources such as Luders (1912), Senart (1905, 1906), Burgess and Indrajai (1881), Jacobi (1878), Vats (1926), West (1862), Gokhale (1991), the majority of which have been compiled by Nagaraju (1982).

### Donatory Categories

Figure 1 indicates that donations were mainly made by people belonging to four groups, namely royalty, merchants, craftspeople, and members of the monastic community.

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Although religious donations constitute the largest single group, non-religious donations form the overall majority. The expansion of monasteries in this period therefore, cannot be described as an insular process but should be recognised as dependent on the generation of wealth in other sections of society. It is clear, that disruption to the economy, particularly if it affected the livelihoods of merchants and craftsmen could have led to a hiatus in cave cutting.

The intentions and motivations for, and the prioritisation of, donations would have differed according to the status and profession of the donor. The epigraphic evidence that we have at our disposal allows us to examine such differences separately, whilst also identifying the relative importance of each group.

### ***Merchants***

Numerous scholars have regarded trade, often with reference to the Indian Ocean as a particularly important component of the Satavahana economy (Mirashi, 1981; Nagaraju, 1981; Ray, 1986) although the role of trade in the formation of the Satavahana empire has been questioned in recent years (Morrison, 1995:209-210). The large proportion of inscriptions that mention mercantile donation support the view that trade was an important influence on the expansion of Buddhist monasteries.

Trade routes leading through the western Deccan carried large volumes of traffic moving southwest from the interior of the sub-continent to ports along the west coast. Many of the Buddhist caves are clearly located along these routes. Any disruption to the routes would have had a profound and detrimental effect on the prosperity of merchants and traders, since the vast majority either travelled the routes or traded in the commodities that moved along them. Therefore, disruption to the Satavahana empire can be clearly linked to a decline in mercantile donations for the cutting of caves.

### ***Religious***

This category refers to donations from people who were defined by a religious term in the epigraphic record, and appear to have given over their daily life to the pursuit of Buddhist ideals. These donatory inscriptions have been translated and ascribed to a number of categories, such as monk, nun, abbot, friar and ascetic. One basic division within this corpus that I have amalgamated, is between donors who lived within monasteries and donors who were ascetics. Older interpretations, assumed that Buddhists renounced their wealth on joining the monastic order, this assumption has been seriously questioned in recent years (Schopen, 1997 & 2004; Strenski, 1983).

Epigraphic evidence from the caves clearly shows that members of the monastic community still possessed wealth after they had been indoctrinated (eg Burgess and Indrajī, 1881; Luders, 1912 etc.). In addition, excavations of Buddhist monasteries have uncovered coins as well as structural features, such as store rooms and refectories, which are indicative of the retention of resources by the *sangha* (for two examples see: Rees forthcoming; Sastry, Subrahmanyam and Rao, 1992). Whilst the origin of this wealth cannot be identified in most

cases, it must have either belonged to Buddhists when entering the faith or been inherited at a later date as there is little evidence to suggest that substantial wealth was generated within Buddhist monasteries themselves (Heitzman, 1984:132; Morrison, 1995:210). Since monastic wealth originated outside the monastery, the prosperity of monasteries must have been affected to some extent by disruption in the wider economy. An understanding of religious donatory inscriptions requires here, as in the other identified categories, an understanding of the context in which they were produced.

### ***Royal***

This category refers to donations either by monarchs themselves, members of their family, or government officials where a close relationship to the monarch was explicitly mentioned. The importance of royal donations in this early phase of Buddhism should not be overestimated, with regard to the cutting of caves, or Buddhist monasteries in general (Dehejia, 1992: 36-40). Inscriptions of this type are rare, constituting less than 20 % of the total corpus of donatory inscriptions for the cutting of caves. Of these, a large number are located at a single site, Nasik, where most have been inscribed into only two caves, III and X. The cave complex at Nasik, which significantly is located close to the Ksatrapa polity, appears to have been incorporated into a strategy of legitimization since the high proportion of royal donations here differs from the majority of cave complexes.

### ***Craftspeople***

Craftspeople would have been affected in a similar manner to merchants by disruption to these routes. The flow of both trade goods and raw materials between settlements in the Western Deccan during the Early Historic period has been previously assessed (Lahiri, 1992: 333-341). The professions mentioned in inscriptions from the caves are often only vague references. Where such references are made, they often mention the material that the craftsperson worked. Examples of these include metal workers; blacksmiths and goldsmiths, and craftspeople who worked with organic materials, such as bamboo workers. Less specific examples include jewellers and dyers (Burgess and Indrajai, 1881; Gokhale, 1991; Lueders, 1912 etc.). Due to a number of generalised professional titles, exact numbers for these different categories cannot be ascertained. Disruption in the Satavahana empire would have effected craftspeople in a similar fashion to merchants, since both groups were financially reliant on trading networks.

### ***Farmers***

Whilst constituting only a small proportion of donors, farmers still played an essential part in monastic expansion. Here, I refer back to a distinction made earlier, between donations which contributed towards the maintenance of monasteries and those that financed their construction. Given that monks did not farm themselves, an agricultural sector producing a surplus was necessary to support monastic expansion (Bailey and Mabbett, 2003; Ray, 1986 & 92; Rees forthcoming; Shaw, 2005). For example at sites like Junnar,

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Nasik and Karle, donation to the Buddhist *sangha* included tracts of farm land (Chauhan and Raheman, 1992). Clearly, during periods of general economic depression, agricultural production may not have been as efficient as during more prosperous times. The subsequent effect of this on the expansion of monasteries is, however difficult to gauge. In some instances, the *vinaya* refers to caves that remained empty and were cut purely for merit (Schopen, 2004:26). One would assume, however, that such instances were few and far between. A full discussion of the complex relations between farmers and monasteries is beyond the scope of this paper as they constitute such a small proportion of the epigraphic evidence (See Rees forthcoming).

The volume of literature examining the consequences, and, the intentions that motivated donation to Buddhist monasteries has grown considerably over the last two decades (see Dehejia, 1992; Parry, 1986; Schopen, 1997 & 2004a; Strenski, 1983; Thapar, 1992). In the main, these interpretations view donation, in terms of reciprocity as a 'gift', emphasising the esoteric benefits in the form of status and social cohesion that the donor might have gained. Although fundamental changes in the relationship between Buddhism and society could have been a causal factor in the cessation in cave cutting, it does not seem likely that this was the primary cause as cutting resumed reasonably quickly and in a similar manner after the hiatus. It is more likely that a breakdown in the wider economy lead to the movement of resources away from more peripheral concerns, such as Buddhism until the economy recovered.

## Dating

A connection between Buddhism and the prosperity of wider society has hitherto been clearly established, and will be returned to at the end of this article. We now turn our attention to the caves themselves. A secure dating methodology is critical to an evaluation of the tempo of cave cutting. Reasonably accurate dating has been achieved using three main methods: the content of inscriptions, the palaeography of inscriptions, and the architectural style of the caves.

Of these, the content of inscriptions provides the most precise dating method. Many refer to the construction of specific parts of monasteries, mentioning the monarch, and sometimes, the year since accession that that part was built. The correlation of this with dynastic information, can provide precise dating of cave construction. Evidence from the *Puranas*, numismatics, and epigraphy is, however inconclusive, and the exact dates of Satavahana monarchs reigns are also a matter of debate. The so called 'shorter chronology' will be adopted here as a general dating framework, placing the accession to the throne of Simuka, the first Satavahana king around 100 BCE since, on the basis of the available evidence, this date appears the most secure (A. Jha Pers. Comm; Parasher-Sen, 1993; Shastri, 1999; Sinopoli, 2001: 166 etc.).

The second method that has been employed in dating the caves is palaeography. Developments in the form of the Brahmi letters, of which the inscriptions are constituted, have been analysed, allowing inscriptions to be placed in chronological sequence. Dehejia (1972), Nagaraju (1981), and Dhavalikar (1984) have used palaeographic developments to

date the inscriptions in comparison with others whose dates are known. Whilst providing a useful avenue of enquiry, this type of dating is not as accurate as Dehejia, in particular, would suggest. Her placement of these inscriptions in twenty and even ten year periods is difficult to substantiate from the available data. Palaeography can provide a general dating framework, but will not be relied upon for more accurate dating in this article.

The third method used to date the caves is architectural evidence. Through a stylistic comparison of architectural features, we can place the cutting of caves in sequence. The most significant diagnostic features of the caves are the façade, the pillars, the floorplan and the *dagoba*. Whilst relative dating can be easily and reliably achieved, determining how this relates to an absolute dating scheme is problematic. Although dates can be extrapolated through correlation with inscriptional evidence, (eg Dehejia, 1972; Nagaraju, 1981) the caves are often located long distances apart, with topographic and political boundaries separating different groups. The idea that an architectural development observed at one site coincided within a ten or twenty year period (as propounded by Dehejia, 1972; Dhavalikar, 1984; Jadhav, 1980) with those at another location must therefore be questioned.

Using a combination of these methods, a lull in the construction of caves has been dated to the first century CE. An exhaustive discussion of the three types of evidence has been carried out by Nagaraju (1981), and so will not be undertaken here. Of the three methods, epigraphic data provides the most striking and robust indication that a hiatus occurred; most notably, the absence of inscriptions commemorating the cutting of a cave ascribable to the period between Satakarni's rule and the accession of Nahapana or Gautamiputra Satakarni (Burgess and Indrajai, 1881; Luders, 1912 etc.).

Based on the sources: Burgess and Indrajai (1881), Gokhale (1991), Jacobi (1878), Luders (1912), Senart (1905, 1906), Vats (1926), West (1862).

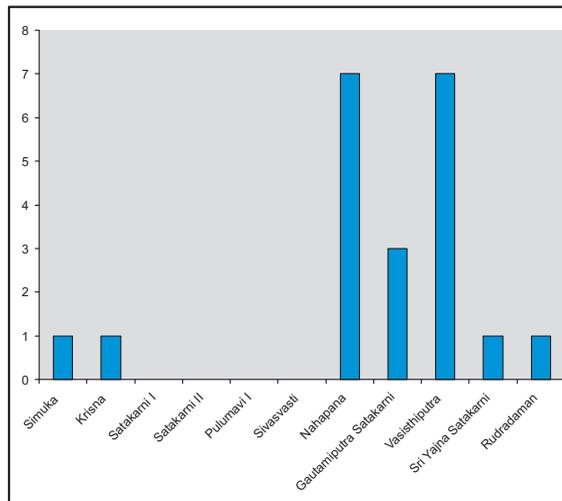


Figure 2 - Kings Named in Inscriptions

*Note: The graph is constituted only of inscriptions from cave sites located in the Western Ghats and coastline of Maharashtra.*

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The graph does not include information from the Naneghat inscriptions as they do not record donations to a Buddhist monastery.

The graph only includes Satavahana and Western Ksatrapa rulers, not other regional rulers for example the Mahabhoja inscriptions at Kuda. (Dynastic information on these groups is not known but Bhandare (2006) is beginning to examine this issue).

Kings are recorded here if an inscription mentions that the king on throne, even if the king was not the donor.

On the basis of the *Puranas* and numismatic evidence, we know that the four kings mentioned between Krisna and Nahapana represent only a few of the many monarchs known to have ruled for short periods.

Whilst inscriptions mentioning kings' names make up a small proportion of the overall corpus, they provide a reliable dating method, therefore their paucity provides excellent evidence that a hiatus occurred.

We have now established that there was a hiatus in the cutting of caves in the Western Deccan between the reigns of Satakarni and Nahapana. Furthermore, it has been shown that the cutting of caves was reliant on economic developments outside the religion. As the quotes from Dehejia and Nagaraju given at the beginning of the article suggest, the hiatus has tentatively been associated with a period of political instability. In order to explore this relationship further, an outline of the form, extent, and date, of this instability will be provided.

## **Fragmentation and Conflict**

Numismatic work by Bhandare, and numerous others has shown that in the Western Deccan during the first century CE regional lineages were becoming powerful, issuing increasingly varied, in Bhandare's terms, "regio-specific" (1998:142) types of coin. Examples of these groups include the Mahabhojas of the Southern Konkan and the Kumaras, who ruled the region around Karahakata, modern day Karhad (Bhandare, 1998). The control and jurisdiction that the centralised Satavahana administration exerted over areas that they have traditionally been associated with has been called into question in recent years (Sinopoli, 2001) and it is clear that the Satavahana 'empire' was based on a complex set of relations between regional power authorities.

The most prominent political development during the period in question was the conflict between the Western Ksatrapas and the Satavahanas. Examination of historical sources, such as the *Periplus* (Huntingford, 1980; Casson, 1989) and the *Puranas* interpreted alongside numismatic evidence (Bhandare, 1998; Shastri, 1998 etc.), has shown that the Western Ksatrapa ruler who gained territory from the Satavahanas was known as Nahapana. He ruled for about forty years and was the most militarily successful of the Ksatrapa rulers, expanding the empire south, into the area around Nasik, what is today known as Pune district, and the northern Konkan, as well as eastwards, into the Malwa region. At the height of their power the Ksatrapas held sway over an area that encompassed the modern areas of Gujarat, parts of Maharashtra, western Madhya Pradesh, south eastern Rajasthan and the lower Indus.

Evidence from the *Puranas*, Jain texts, epigraphy from the cave complex at Nasik and numismatics, indicate that Gautamiputra Satakarni 'restored Satavahana glory' by regaining much of the territory that had been lost to Nahapana. This accession is clearly visible in the epigraphic record at Nasik, which will form a case study, later in this paper. Numismatic evidence provides further support, for example a hoard of coins found at Josalthembi depict Nahapana, and were, in most cases countermarked with Gautamiputra Satakarni's image (Scott, 1908) over a period of some years (Bhandare, 1998: 266).

Bhandare (1998:255-258) has postulated, using numismatic and epigraphic evidence, that Nahapana's priority was to attack the coastline first, so as to control the ports and therefore, the lucrative Indian ocean trade. As well as being the most logical course of action, a number of lines from the ancient seafaring guide, the Periplus justify this postulate. Casson (1983:174) has convincingly argued that the Periplus describes a situation in which the coastline as far south as modern day Mumbai/Kalyan was controlled by the Ksatrapas with the 'Andhras' (or Satavahanas) attempting to subvert seaborne trade along the coast.

It would appear that the Ksatrapa's initial southward thrust was followed by an incursion east, along the Thal ghat which led to Nasik. In addition to numismatic evidence, (Bhandare, 1998:257-258), the placement of Ksatrapa inscriptions at Junnar aligned with the Nane ghat, and Karle on the Bor Ghat, also suggests that the Ksatrapas next pushed south and subsequently gained control of the region around Junnar. This incursion would have taken place prior to the accession of Gautamiputra Satakarni.

Such conflict would have had a major impact on the various donatory groups highlighted earlier. Referring to the Gangetic Valley, Bailey and Mabbet have suggested that:

“The scale of war, given the centralized control of manpower and organization, probably promoted enormous disruption to normal life” (2003:103).

The thirteenth major rock edict of Asoka states that in defeating the Kalinga, 150,000 people were uprooted and a further 100,000 died (Thapar, 1997: 90 & 255). The accuracy of these figures is questionable, yet conflict that even vaguely resembled the scale of Mauryan warfare would have had a strong and detrimental impact on the economies of the polities involved. The Satavahana and Ksatrapa polities' economic and political sophistication would have been similar to that of the Maha-janapadas just prior to the Mauryan era and there is therefore no reason to believe that a similar scale of warfare would not have occurred in this period also. Clearly, the prosperity of the professional groups discussed earlier would have been affected by conflict of this magnitude.

The Bor, Nane and Thal Ghats were not only the main thoroughfares between the coast and the interior of the Deccan, they were the foci of cave cutting. Disruption to these trade routes would have affected economic transactions, particularly with regard to merchants and craftspeople discussed earlier. Although Junnar and Nasik are the most northerly cave groups, both lie within what has been described as the core area of the Satavahana empire (Bhandare, 1998) See Figure 3.

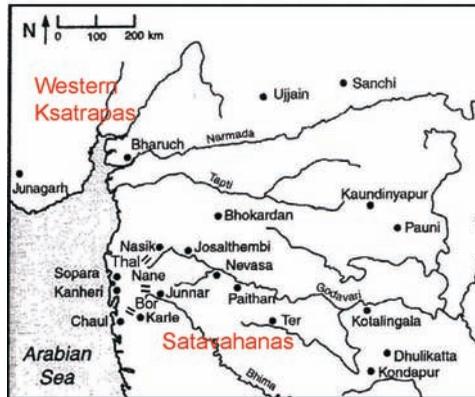


Figure 3. General view of Satavahana and Ksatrapa domains. (After Sinopoli 2001, 165).

The Ksatrapas ruled from Bharuch in Gujarat and, as Nasik is located close by, it is no surprise that Ksatrapa inscriptions are also found here. Junnar was a Satavahana administrative centre and is located not far from Paithan, a city traditionally described as the Satavahana capital. Intrusion into this core area is indicative of the scale of disruption that the Satavahana empire faced.

If the hiatus and the reign of Nahapana could be dated precisely, the two could be linked more directly. Unfortunately, this is not possible at the present time as the epigraphic, historical and literary evidence presently available suggests that the Ksatrapa incursions occurred somewhat later than the hiatus (Dehejia, 1972:23, Nagaraju, 1981:22). Again, current scholarship indicates that Gautamiputra Satakarni was in power at a later date, some time towards the end of the first century CE.

In reference to the period immediately preceding the conflict, numismatic evidence indicates that the Satavahana empire was particularly fragmented with regional powers in their ascendancy. The Ksatrapas took advantage of a polity that had fractured into disparate parts, forming alliances with some of the regional lineages, the latter has been confirmed by the incorporation of Ksatrapa motifs in many of the regio-specific varieties of coin (Bhandare, 1998: Chapter 4). Such a breakdown in the empire's socio-political order, which would have begun well before the conflict with the Ksatrapas was initiated, would have had a considerable impact on cave cutting. The hiatus, which lasted for a period of between fifty and one hundred years, endured for a longer period than the conflict between the Satavahanas and Ksatrapas and therefore, we cannot view it as directly responsible for the hiatus.

## Nasik

Pandu Lena caves were cut from a basalt escarpment both before and after the hiatus. The nearby town of Nasik has been occupied since the Chalcolithic period, with the most prominent phases dating to the Early Historic and Medieval periods (Sankalia and Deo, 1955). The variety of locations mentioned in inscriptions at Pandu Lena are indicative of the long distances that people travelled in order to make donations towards the construction of

these caves. The caves lie alongside the ancient route to the Thal Ghat, a pass that carried large volumes of traffic to access the seaboard throughout Indian history (Gazetteer, 1883:25).

Previous work on the chronology of Pandu Lena has been carried out by Dehejia (1972: 159-160) and Nagaraju (1981: 258-281). The rich corpus of epigraphic material available at Nasik allows the different phases of construction to be dated in absolute terms. There is a general consensus between the two scholars on the sequence of cave cutting, and which caves mark the hiatus, but the absolute dates mentioned by each are very different.

Both authors agree that the earliest excavation at Nasik is *vihara* XIX. This *vihara* incorporates an inscription indicating that the cave was excavated when Krisna was king. Krisna, was one of the earliest Satavahana monarchs. Palaeographic evidence also supports this early date. The problem of providing an absolute date is illustrated by the disparity between the dates identified by different chronological frameworks. Whilst Nagaraju would place it between 205 and 187 BCE, Dehejia places its construction to between 90 and 70 BCE (Dehejia, 1972: 159). Shastri, on the other hand, claims Krisna ruled between 29 and 12 BCE, (Shastri, 1999: 23) also placing the excavation of the caves between these dates. Determining the relative value of these different interpretations is beyond the scope of this paper. Precise dating is not, however, essential to identify and describe the hiatus. For our purposes, here, relative dating will suffice.

Cave XVIII at Pandu Lena is a *chaitya* and adjoins *vihara* XIX. An analysis of its palaeography and architectural style indicate that it was the next cave after XIX to be excavated at Nasik (Dehejia, 1972:159; Nagaraju, 1981:274). Architecturally, it is similar to

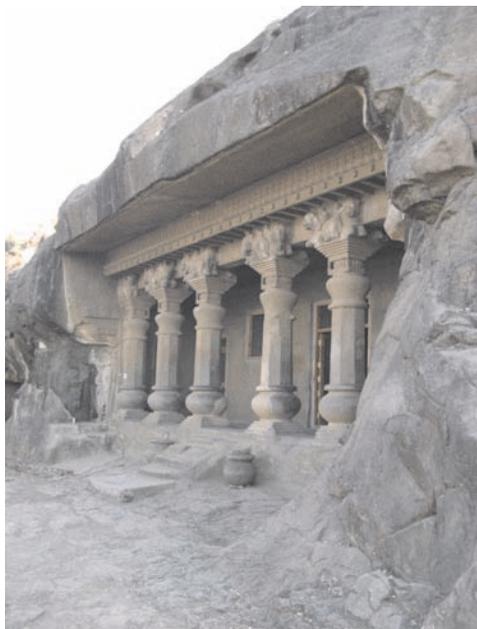


Figure 4. Cave X, Pandu Lena.  
(Photo – Rees 2007)

cave IX at Ajanta. As it does not incorporate a wooden façade, it has been dated to a later phase than the *chaityas* at Bhaja, Kondane and Pitalkhora,. The simple decoration of the pillars, which lack full capitals and bases, further corroborate the dating of this excavation to the later phase (Nagaraju, 1981:271). The *chaitya* was excavated in a number of phases which have been interpreted through the use of epigraphic as well as architectural evidence. Architecturally, there is a marked inconsistency in decoration within the cave, as different types of pillars are employed in different areas. Palaeography indicates that two of the three inscriptions were carved prior to the hiatus. We can, therefore be clear that the initial construction of the *chaitya* was prior to the hiatus.

Cutting at Nasik began again in earnest at the end of first century CE. *Vihara* X can be considered the first to be cut in this period (See figure 4.)

A number of inscriptions at Pandu Lena mention the Ksatrapa ruler Nahapana. One states that the *vihara* was completed in the forty second year of his reign (Luders, 1912: Inscription 1133). The content of these inscriptions will be dealt with in detail shortly, it is sufficient to note now, that they indicate that the cutting of the cave occurred later than the cutting of *chaitya* XIX (Dehejia, 1972: 159; Nagaraju, 1981: 266). There appears to be a period between the excavation of the *chaitya* and *vihara* X, for which we have no evidence of the cutting of new caves at Pandu Lena. We might also be justified in inferring that the Western Ksatrapas were in control of the region when cutting resumed, a point to which we shall return shortly.



Figure 5 – Cave III Pandu Lena. (Photo Rees 2007).

*Vihara* III was very similar in plan to *vihara* X and epigraphic evidence indicates that cutting commenced soon after *vihara* X was completed. See Figure 6.

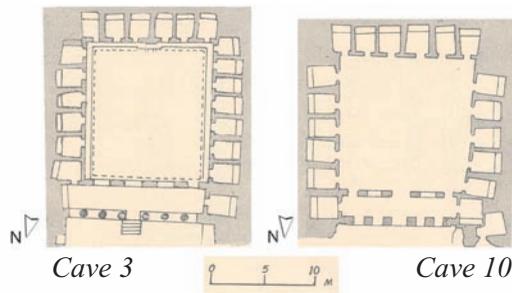


Figure 6 – Plans of Caves at Pandu Lena (After Nagaraju, 1982: Fig.54)

*Vihara* III was excavated in a number of phases. An inscription dating to the fourteenth year of Gautamiputra Satakarni's reign suggests that the first phase of work on the cave was finished not long after the Ksatrapas lost control of the region; Gautamiputra Satakarni has been identified as the Satavahana ruler who won back the territory lost by the Western

Ksatrapas. The other inscription, cut in the nineteenth year of Pulumavi's reign, indicates that the cave was enlarged with the addition of a cell in the veranda shortly after the initial phase of construction (Dehejia, 1972: 160). *Vihara* III and *vihara* X are critical to understanding royal donations at Nasik. The similarity in their construction suggests that *vihara* III was modelled on *vihara* X.

Dating the other caves is more difficult since their inscriptions do not mention the ruling monarch, and we are therefore reliant on palaeography and architecture for evidence. The veranda pillars with bell capitals at *viharas* V, VIII, XVII and XX are similar to *vihara* X and we would therefore assume that they were cut either at the same time or slightly later (Dehejia, 1972:160). A palaeographic analysis of inscriptions contained in *viharas* XVII and XX indicates generally that their construction dates to a period between 110 and 150 CE (Nagaraju, 1982: 274). With respect to these caves, whilst they cannot be placed in sequence, architectural and palaeographic evidence points to a post-hiatus date.

The inscriptions found in caves III and X suggest a progression in influence over Pandu Lena, from Nahapana to Gautamiputra Satakarni. Both Nagaraju (1982: 267) and Dehejia (1972: 160) agree that these caves were excavated within a relatively short period of time. The caves are not only similar in plan and design but also contain the only two inscriptions commemorating donation by royalty at this site. Would we be justified, then on the basis of this evidence in postulating that Gautamiputra attempted to imitate his adversary, during, or shortly after regaining control of Nasik?

The epigraphic evidence suggests that Nasik was won back by the Satavahanas from the Ksatrapas between the cutting of the two caves. Such an interpretation relies on the assumption that monarchs only donated to monasteries located within their territory. It is clear that in the forty second year of his reign a donation from the Ksatrapa ruler Nahapana's family and associates, for the construction of cave III roughly coincided with the conflict (Nagaraju, 1981: 268). The geographic location of Nasik, being one of the most north westerly of Satavahana cities also suggests that at some point it would have come under Ksatrapa control (See Figure 3). This period can be identified as the most likely time in which the caves and inscriptions were cut. Donations to construct caves at Karle, Junnar, and Nasik, were all given by members of Nahapana's family or his ministers. The tradition of regal donation was already established, and conspicuous donation helped to naturalise the Ksatrapa's position in a region which had recently come under their control, tying the new rulers to an older tradition.

## **A Wider Perspective**

The majority of cave sites in the Western Ghats appear to have also experienced a hiatus. At Karle, a similar pattern is apparent. The *chaitya* was built in an early phase with one or two *viharas*. A long gap in activity followed until the Christian era, when cave cutting resumed in earnest and a number of *viharas* were excavated over the next few centuries (Dehejia 1972, 177; Nagaraju 1981, 229). The existence of this gap has been established through the use of epigraphic and architectural evidence.

The site of Kanheri experienced a similar hiatus (Nagaraju, 1981: 197; Pandit, 2004: 4-8).

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Work on the *chaitya* hall at Kanheri began in an earlier period. The hall was not completed however, until the uncarved areas were decorated in a style that postdates the original work, circa the second century CE. It is beyond the scope of the present study to examine all cave sites in detail, there are however other complexes that exhibit the same lull, including for example, Pitalkhora, Junnar, Bedsa and Bhaja. Indeed, all those complexes which can be dated show no sign of activity during this period (Dehejia, 1972: 184-185; Nagaraju, 1981: 312).

## Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has situated the development and construction of Buddhist caves within a sociological framework, by emphasising the links between the religion and wider society. The manner in which changes in the Satavahana economy outside the religious sphere impacted on the tempo at which caves were cut has been emphasised with particular reference to a period of political disruption in the first century CE. This disruption was caused by and resulted in strained relations with the various regional lineages that together constituted the Satavahana empire, and must have been particularly detrimental to the accessibility of the seaboard and trade. This weakness was exploited by the Western Ksatrapas under Nahapana who took control of parts of Satavahana territory causing further disruption. Resources that were available to the major donor groups were stretched throughout the period. For several reasons donations from, royalty, merchants, craftspeople and from people within the religion, towards the expansion of monasteries would not, therefore, have been a priority.

It should be clear that it is not my contention that the hiatus in cave construction was caused by the incursions of the Ksatrapas. A complex network of political, religious and economic ties that constituted the Satavahana empire broke down during the period in question; this was subsequently compounded by, but not caused by the Western Ksatrapas. These difficulties led to and were caused by political and economic problems which were resolved during the reign of Gautamiputra Satakarni, during which the stability of the Satavahana empire was restored and as epigraphic evidence indicates, Buddhist cave monasteries were expanded once more.

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\* *One assumption is that regal donations were made to monasteries located within an area of influence. It is difficult to imagine Ksatrapa rulers donating toward the construction of monasteries in a region occupied by their Satavahanas whilst the two were at war however the possibility should be ruled considered.*