

Research Papers



Archaeological Aspects of The Chaityagrahas

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ABSTRACT

Karad is located to the south of the district of Satara. The latitude of Karad is 17° 17' north latitude and 74° 13' east longitude. From the centre of the city of Karad to the north-east are located the Agaashiv mountain ranges. There are as many as 108 caves.1 The Agaashiv caves have been considered to be significant from research point of view. There are Buddhist cave complexes in the mountain ranges of Agaashiv at Jakhinwadi, Bhairavdara, Agaashiv Nagar and Chachegaon.

Karad was a famous trade centre during the Satwahan regime. It was an intermediate trade centre on the trade route between the cities of Chiplun and Paithan. The cave complex of the Agaashiv mountain ranges has 16 caves at Jakhinwadi, 12 caves at Bhairavdara, 14 at Agaashiv Nagar and 3 at Chachegaon. The cave complex is considered to be quite significant from Buddhist architectural and sculptural research point of view.

The ancient name of Karad is supposed to have been 'Karhatak'. Karad is located between the Krushna and Koyana river basins.2 In one of the inscription belonging to Shung Period at Bharhut Karhatak is supposed to have been donated by one of the traders here.3 Besides, there is another proof to the ancient name of Karad as Karhatak at cave number 18 at Kuda, District Raigad.4 During the Satwahan Period Karad is believed to have been quite a prosperous city according to the historical evidence. The relics found here bear witness to the fact that the Satwahans used this route for their trade with the foreign nations.5

The Mourya Period (3rd Century BC) is

called the most significant period in terms of the rock cut (Cave) Architecture. It was during the same period that in Bihar there was initiated the work of digging caves. The caves reflect the proof to the fact that several kings supported the cause of cave architecture during the period. During the Post-Mourya Period the Buddha architecture was given motivation.6

The growth and development of the rock cut architecture was witnessed in the western region of India, especially in Maharashtra. The main reason behind this process was the geographical make-up of the state of Maharashtra. This consists in the mountain ranges of the Sahyaadri that run parallel to the Arabic ocean. Because of the mountain ranges of Sahyaadri the state of Maharashtra is divided into the hilly Konkan and the plain region. The number of rock cut structures is greater in Maharashtra than what it is in any other state of India. The caves are classified into Heenyaan and Mahaayaan, the two cults in Buddhism. The places like Bhaje, Kondhane, Pitalkhora, Ajanta, Bedsaa, Nashik and Karle have the Heenyaan style caves.7

Cave Complex at Jakhinwadi, Karad:

Jakhinwadi is located to the west of Nandlapur off National Highway No. 4, 8 km from Karad. The place is surrounded by hills.⁸ The cave complex here has a total of 26 caves, out of which 22 are vihaars. The cave no. 6, 7, 12, 17 are known as chaityagrahas whereas the cave no. 6 is similar in its structure to the caves found at Junnar, District Pune and Pitalkhore (Dist. Aurangabad). These caves have wooden beams (Tulais) which are found at the caves of Karle and Bhaje. The stoopas here are quite extraordinary. The symbols carved on the entrance to the Chaityagraha are one of the salient features of the cave complex. To the left of the entrance there is carved a hexagonal pillar, at the top of which is an image of a lion. The pillar carved to the right of the entrance has a replica of wheel having 24 spokes at its top.⁹ The cave no. 7 is a vihaar in the style of a Chaityagraha. It has a combination of pillars, a dome and raised structures. The pattern of the pillars is identical to that of the pattern found at Kuda, District Raigad and Nashik. To the either side of the dome are rectangular vihaars. The vihaars have plain roofs. The entrances of the vihaars show evidence to the use of wooden doors, as there are found such provisions built in the walls. To the back of the dome is found the Chaityagraha behind which is a stoupa.

The cave no. 12 is a Chaityagraha. The design of this cave consists in a dome and raised structures. The length of the Chaityagraha is 8.78 m and width is 4.27 m. To the back of this is built a stoupa. There is carved a water tank in the front of the Chaityagraha.

The cave no. 17 is another Chaityagraha which is made up of a courtyard, dome, stoupa etc. The entrance to the cave is through a raised structure. The length of the dome is 6.20 and the width is 3.10. To the back of the dome is found a stoupa made in a simple style. The period of this Chaityagraha must be 3rd Century BC.

The cave no. 9 of the Jakhinwadi cave complex is considered to be multilayered. The roof of the vihaar is plain. The vihaar is in a dilapidated condition. There is a water tank in front of the vihaar. The cave no. 10 is also multilayered, as it consists of eight vihaars. The condition of these structures is very poor. The cave no. 14 is quite special, as it has suites, built one after another. The way into this cave is very narrow. The last of the suites is the smallest and it contains carved beds. There is only one narrow way that leads to the caves no. 15 and 16. The cave no. 22 is the largest

and spacious of all the caves at this complex. The vihaar here is west-oriented and the dome here is surrounded by a vihaar each on three sides. Half of the entrance is destroyed in the course of time. The roof is plain and gives indications of the use of iron beams. There are in total 12 suites around the vihaar. The cave no. 26 is in incomplete condition.

Bhairavdara Cave Complex:

The Bhairavdara cave complex is located on the slopes of the Aagaashiv Mountain which is 3 km to the west of Jakhinwadi. There are a total of 12 caves. Out of these the cave no. 35 is a Chaityagraha. Barring the cave no. 35 the rest of the caves don't have the Chaityagrahas. The cave complex is in an incomplete condition.

Aagaashiv Nagar Cave Complex:

The Aagaashiv Nagar cave complex is located to the south of the Karad to Dhebewadi road. There are 14 caves here. The cave no. 47 and 48 are Chaityagrahas and the remaining are vihaars.

Chachegaon Cave Complex:

The Chachegaon cave complex is located in the Aagaashiv mountain ranges off Karad to Dhebewadi road. There are only 4 caves in this complex, out of the four caves only one is Chaityagraha. The cave no. 2 is multilayered. The Chaityagraha is very simple in its design. There are supposed to be a few more vihaars which lay buried in the debris.

According to the research, all the cave complexes of Karad belong to the Heenyaan cult of the Buddhist religion. From the point of view of the Buddha rock cut architecture these caves are quite significant. Only a little research has been done on these caves at Karad. There is need of undertaking multifarious research on the architectural, the sculptural, the geographical and the geological features of the cave complexes.

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