

# Unveiling Bhikkhunīs in Oblivion:

What Deccan Cave Inscriptions Reveal about the Ancient Bhikkhunī Sangha

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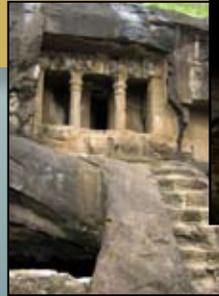
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## Nuns as Part of the Fourfold Saṅgha

When Venerable Ānanda approached the Buddha on behalf of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī<sup>1</sup> and the Buddha agreed to let her ordain, the doors of organized religious life were opened for women in Buddhism. Women could aspire to higher spiritual goals, choosing to enter monastic life, or stay within family life and ardently follow the path of the Dhamma.

It was during the lifetime of the Buddha that the order of nuns crystallized. As stated in the Pāsādika Sutta, the Buddha expressed in very plain words his faith in the capability of the ordained monks and nuns as the torchbearers of the Dhamma in the future.<sup>2</sup> Nuns like Alavikā, Sōmā, Kisāgotami, Vajjirā, Vijayā, Uppalavanā, Śīsupācala, as recorded in the Bhikkhunī Samyutta (Book 5)<sup>3</sup>, vigilantly deterred the deceitful enticement of Māra. These episodes clearly attest to the nuns' sound grounding in the Dhamma and Vinaya. Additionally, the *Therīgāthā*, the ninth book of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, consists of 73 poems — 522 stanzas in all — in which the early bhikkhunīs recount their struggles and accomplishments along the road to arahantship.

At that time of the Buddha's impending Mahāparinirvāṇa, bhikkhunīs like Subhadrā, Upāṇḍā, Sāgaramatī, along with their counterparts, were present in large numbers. They were all great arhants. Thus, as per the Buddha's wish expressed in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta<sup>4</sup>, his Fourfold Saṅgha<sup>5</sup> was stably functioning and ready to meet the challenges of the future:

I will not pass away, O Evil One, until I have bhikkhu disciples... bhikkhunī disciples... layman disciples... laywomen disciples who are accomplished, disciplined, skilled, learned, expert in the Dhamma, practiced in accord with the Dhamma, properly practiced, living in accord with Dhamma, who, having learnt from their own teacher, expound, teach, declare, set out, explain, analyze it and make it clear; who are able to refute in accord with Dhamma other teachings that appear, and then teach the wonderful Dhamma.<sup>7</sup> (Dīgha Nikāya- Mahāparinibbāna Sutta)

### Towards Lithic Records:

Although the origin of Buddhism predates the period from which the inscriptions are available, inscriptions, especially the votive epigraphs, constitute a significant and tangible source for the history of Buddhism in India from early times. Inscriptions also mark a transition from orality to literacy. Votive inscriptions can be read by posterity and give immortality to the donor.

### The Order of Nuns as Gleaned through the Edicts of Emperor Aśoka:

The art of engraving inscriptions was popularized by Mauryan Emperor Aśoka in India in the third century B.C.E. and proliferated thereafter. Approximately thirty-five distinct inscriptions have been found within and outside the political frontiers of modern India, with the most important appearing in the Fourteen Rock Edicts and Seven Pillar Edicts series.<sup>6</sup> Edicts of Aśoka, that he himself termed as Dhamma Lipī<sup>7</sup> (Bhandarkar D. R. 2005: 35), describe his polity, administrative mechanism, human values and most importantly, the Dhamma he envisaged. During the first and second centuries after the Mahāparinirvāṇa of the Buddha, Buddhism could hardly be distinguished from other ascetic movements. It was evidently due to the endeavors of Emperor Aśoka that Buddhism emerged as a distinct religion with great potentialities for expansion.

Minor Rock Edict I<sup>8</sup> (Rupnāth<sup>9</sup> Version) records Emperor Aśoka's gradual commitment to Buddhism. The edict reads as follows: "...a little over two and half years have passed since I have become a lay disciple. But I was not initially very zealous. But for a little more than a year, I have drawn close to the saṅgha and have been very zealous." The inscription suggests that as an *upāsaka*, the emperor did little to promote Buddhism.<sup>10</sup> However, he made significant contributions to its growth in later years, signified by the term 'saṅghama

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*Early Buddhist missionaries gravitated to the niches in Sahyādrī Mountains to suit their ideas of asceticism and the norms of monastic life. The Western Ghāṭa’s topography with its flat-topped basalt hills, deep ravines, and sharp cliffs, was suited to their monastic requirements primarily for the Vassāvāsa (Rains Retreat). As a result of the expressions of faith in the Dhamma, rock-cut caityas (caves) such as those found at Kārlē, Bhājē, Kānhērī, and Nāsika, were carved into the Sahyādrī ranges and date back to the second century B.C.E.*

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upētē’.<sup>11</sup> He was not only interested in the propagation and maintenance of homogeneity within the saṅgha, but also took measures to avert the ideological differences leading to dissensions and schisms.

As recorded in lithic records, glimpses of the order of Buddhist nuns in ancient India can be found for the first time in the edicts of Emperor Aśoka. In this paper, three edicts need particular evaluation. Collectively they are called the Schism Edicts that were issued from Sānci, Sārnāth and Allāhābād-Kausambī.

The Sāncī<sup>12</sup> Minor Pillar Edict<sup>13</sup> reads as follows:

...The saṅgha of the monks and nuns is made united as long as (my) sons and grandsons (shall reign and) as long as the sun and the moon (shall shine). The monk or nun, who shall break up the saṅgha, should be caused to put on white robes and reside in a non-residence<sup>14</sup>. For what is my desire? That the saṅgha may be united and be everlasting.

The Minor Pillar Edict at Sārnāth<sup>15</sup> states:

... [thus ordains] His sacred & gracious majesty... The saṅgha cannot be divided by anyone whatsoever. Whoever, monk or nun, breaks up the saṅgha must be made to wear white garments & to take up aboard in a place other than a monastery. Thus, should this order be made known in the saṅghas of bhikshus as well as of bhikshuṇīs<sup>16</sup>.

The Minor Pillar Edict at Allāhābād-Kausambī<sup>17</sup> states<sup>18</sup>:

...Devānām Priya (Emperor Aśoka) commands thus to the Mahāmātras of Kausambī ... whosoever, monk or nun, breaks up the saṅgha, should be caused to put on robes and to reside in a non-residence<sup>19</sup>.

A careful reading of these edicts reveals not only a deep concern on part of the emperor about the prevailing discord among the community of monks and nuns, but also the measures that he instructed to his *dharmamahāmātras*,<sup>20</sup> religious ministers, to implement for the schismatic monks and nuns. This notion has been phrased in almost identical words in these three edicts, and the text of these edicts prescribes a

two-fold treatment for the apostate monks and nuns. First, such monks and nuns should be deprived of the *civara*<sup>21</sup> and made to wear white garments as a part of the punishment; second, they should be expelled from the monastic residence.

Questions remain about the exact role of the religious ministers. In the Dhaurī<sup>22</sup> Rock edict<sup>23</sup>, Emperor Aśoka states the role and function of the *dharmamahāmātras* as follows: “...now for a long time past previously, there were no *dharmamahāmātras*. *Dharmamahāmātras* were created by me when I had been consecrated thirteen years. They have been set to work among all sects for the establishment and promotion of the Dhamma ...”

Edicts of Aśoka refer to the mahāmātras of Yavana, Kāmbōja, Gāṇḍhāra, Rāṣṭrika, Pāṭalīputra, Kausambī, Tōsālī, Saṃpanā, Suvarṇagiri, Isilā (Hazra 2002: 71) There were obviously more *dharmamahāmātras* elsewhere in the empire who were instructed by the emperor to place the copies of these orders at places accessible to the laity. Did these officers have the right to find and blame the bellicose monk or the nun of schism, or was the dissension on the part of any individual monk or nun reported to them by the local saṅgha? Had the saṅgha, known for its democratic character, vested such ecclesiastic powers with the royal authority? Was the final verdict—within the jurisdiction of the king and the *dharmamahāmātras*—acceptable to the apostate monks and the nuns as well as the saṅgha?

These three edicts also raise one more uncertainty. Emperor Aśoka, while elaborating at length about the Dhamma and his concern about the dissensions, refers to the saṅgha as a whole unit, but was it? Were his orders meant for all monastics, or a particular sect? Following the Buddha’s *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, the First Buddhist Council was held at Rājagṛha, resulting in the codification of Dhamma and Vinaya rules. The Second Council was convened by King Kalaśoka at Vaiśālī about a century later, at the behest of the Ven. Yasa over the issues of ten un-Vinayic points followed by the Vajjian monks of Vaiśālī. The verdict of the council was not acceptable to them. This was the beginning of the first major dissension, the Mahasanghika, the precursor of Mahayanism.

Emperor Aśoka understood the role of monks and nuns as the torchbearers of Dhamma. How could this task be accomplished unless they themselves were prepared? He strongly recommends certain texts<sup>24</sup> in his Bhābrā<sup>25</sup> Inscription: “Sirs, I desire that many groups of monks and nuns may repeatedly

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*As the ecclesiastic, lay, mercantile, and royal endowments grew, cave interiors changed from simple monastic dwellings to become more elaborate, with interior walls decorated with paintings, reliefs, and intricate carvings. Facades were added to the exteriors as the interiors became designated for specific uses as monasteries (vihāras) and worship halls (caityas). Over the centuries, simple caves became magnificent structures, needing formal design and highly skilled artisans and craftsmen to complete.*

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listen to these expositions of the Dhamma and may reflect (on them). I am having this engraved Sirs, so that you may know what I desire.”

The rule of Emperor Aśoka came to an end by c.232 B.C.E. The epigraphical sources corroborate that the order of nuns continued thereafter across ancient India.<sup>26</sup> With the help of votive inscriptions in the rock-cut caves of ancient Deccan dating back to the early centuries of the Christian era, an attempt will be made to identify and understand the valuable contributions of these ancient nuns.

#### **Rise of Rock-cut Caves of Deccan:**

People of Deccan were familiar with Buddhism since the pre-Mauryan times. Buddhist tradition identifies a wealthy merchant-converted monk, Punna of Surpāraka, as the great evangelist who introduced Buddhism to the land of Srōṇa-Aparāntaka. Literary accounts suggest that Buddhism had been launched in Western Ghats<sup>27</sup> by Bāvri and his sixteen disciples. (Ray - Sinopoli 2004:115)

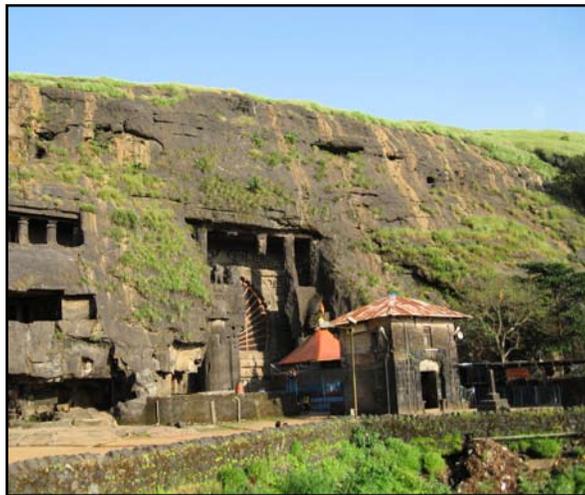
The Third Buddhist Council was convened by Emperor Aśoka at Pāṭaliputra under the leadership of the monk Moggaliputta Tissa. Elders came to a decision to send missionaries to preach Buddhism at several places in India and far flung places abroad. A yavana called Yōn Dharmarakṣita<sup>28</sup> was then sent to Aparānta<sup>29</sup> where he is said to have successfully converted a large number of people—including women and nobles—to Buddhism.<sup>0</sup>

Early Buddhist missionaries gravitated to the niches in Sahyādrī Mountains to suit their ideas of asceticism and the norms of monastic life. The Western Ghāṭa's topography with its flat-topped basalt hills, deep ravines, and sharp cliffs, was suited to their monastic requirements primarily for the Vassāvāsa (Rains Retreat). As a result of the expressions of faith in the Dhamma, rock-cut caityas<sup>30</sup> (caves) such as those found at Kārlē, Bhājē, Kānhērī, and Nāsika, were carved into the Sahyādrī ranges and date back to the second century B.C.E.

The commencement of missionary movement in coastal Deccan coincided with several favorable economic, political, and climatic factors.<sup>31</sup> Except for a few passes, the Sahyādrī

ranges pose as a barrier of communication between the ports on the Arabian coast and the plateau. Most of these cave sites are located near such passes just before the caravans enter the difficult terrain.<sup>32</sup> Hence, monasteries became stopovers for the caravan traffic.<sup>33</sup>

As the ecclesiastic, lay, mercantile, and royal endowments grew, cave interiors changed from simple monastic dwellings to become more elaborate, with interior walls decorated with paintings, reliefs, and intricate carvings. Facades were added to the exteriors as the interiors became designated for specific uses as monasteries (vihāras) and worship halls (caityas). Over the centuries, simple caves became magnificent structures, needing formal design and highly skilled artisans and craftsmen to complete. Their expansion also made the acquisition of finances for construction and maintenance necessary.



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#### **Donations of Nuns at the Rock-cut Caves in Deccan:**

The votive inscriptions in the rock-cut architecture of ancient Deccan have recorded donations of many nuns. They allow us to glean information about the order of nuns in Western India during the early centuries of Christian era. Though much scholarly literature is available on the rise and growth of Buddhism in ancient India through literary and archaeological data, the role of women as believers in the Dhamma, actively propagating Buddhism in ancient India in general and Western India in particular, needs more attention. In the superstructure of power and patronage, the role of nuns as benefactors of Buddhism needs to be highlighted. These nuns also showed a vision of immortalizing the details of their donations by engraving it in the caityas and vihāras, and by selecting visually more accessible surfaces.

Seventeen epigraphs that document the donations of nuns at Kānhērī, Kārlē, Kuḍā, Paunī, Junnar, Pitalakhōrē, and Śēlāravāḍī caves have been evaluated in this paper.

Kānhērī (Burgess Fergusson 2000:348)<sup>34</sup>

In Cave Fifty-four<sup>35</sup>, the donation of the nun Therī

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Antēvāsini Pavaītikā' Pōṇakiasaṇā, her sister (name not mentioned), and brothers who are identified as sramaṇa is recorded. Pōṇakiasaṇā was the disciple of Thēra Bhadanta Ghōṣa . She donated the leṇa (cave) and pāṇīyapōḍhī (water cistern) for the welfare and happiness of the whole world. Pōṇakiasaṇā has another title, therī (elder nun), indicating her superior status in the order. She donated 200 pieces of currency called Kārṣapaṇa as a perpetual endowment. Out of the interest accrued thereon, one-sixteenth share was meant for the clothes of the monks. (Gokhale1991:88 & Epigraphia Indica, X, p., 105, n. 1006) <sup>36</sup>

1. In Cave Ninety-eight<sup>37</sup>, the donation of Bhikkhunī Damīlā is recorded. She donated a cave and a water cistern. (Gokhale1991:147 & Epigraphia Indica, X p., 106, n. 1014) <sup>38</sup>
2. In Cave Twenty-two<sup>39</sup>, the donation of a water cistern by a nun and disciple of Bhadanta Sagha addressed as Antēvāsiniya Pavajitīkāyā (name lost) has been recorded. (Gokhale 1991:77)
4. In Cave Ninety-three<sup>40</sup>, donation of a water cistern by Jamadēvikā, daughter of a goldsmith, Sivātana, along with Pavaītikā Jamanasā has been recorded. (Gokhale1991:147)
5. In Cave Sixty-five<sup>41</sup>, a leṇa and water cistern has been

donated by Pavaītikā Sāpā , who prefers to be identified as the daughter of Kulapriya Dhamaṇak of Dhenukākaṭ. She was the pupil of revered Thēra Bodhika. Sāpā's sister, Ratīnikā (no monastic attribute suggests that she was a laywoman), and many relatives (nātīsambandhī) were co-donors. (Gokhale1991:91) This donation for the Aparāsēliya sect was expected to earn puṇya (religious merit) for the parents of Pavaītikā Sāpā.

6. Cave number eighty-one<sup>42</sup>, records the donation of a cave by merchant Navinaka and his mother Pavaītikā Damāryā for the welfare of all. (Gokhale 1991:102).

#### **Kārī** <sup>43</sup>

1. An inscription<sup>44</sup> on the base of a veyikā to the left of the central door of the Great Caitya Hall records the donation of a rail by Bhikkhunī Kōdī, the mother of Ghuṇika. (Burgess- Indrajī 1881:35 & Epigraphia Indica, VII, p. 1-12 and Epigraphia Indica, X, p. 119, n. 1104)
2. An inscription on the belt of a rail pattern on the inner face of the sill of the largest window of the Great Caitya Hall, records the donation of Bhikkhunī Asādhmitā<sup>45</sup> (Burgess- Indrajī 1881:33& Epigraphia Indica, X, p. 118, n. 1098, and Epigraphia Indica, VII, 1-12)
3. An inscription in a recess over a water cistern at the end of



Kārī

*These nuns have mostly financed the construction of water cisterns...and caves, indicating that all these sites were inhabited not only for the Vassāvāsa, but also throughout the year. All these sites are situated in the ranges of the Sahyādrī Mountains and receive very heavy rainfall during the months of monsoon, but a stark summer thereafter. Thus, the priority for the storage of water is amply justified.*

Cave Thirteen records that women disciples (antēvāsini) of some bhadanta donated a cave and a water cistern.<sup>46</sup> (Burgess- Indrajī 1881:37 & Epigraphia Indica, X p. 120, n. 1107) As the record is much mutilated, only the name of Antēvāsini Usabahā can be read.

#### **Kuḍā**<sup>47</sup>

1. An inscription in Cave Five (Burgess-Indrajī 1881:6, Burgess Fergusson 2000:206, Epigraphia Indica, X, p. 110, n. 1043)<sup>48</sup> records donation of Pavayitīkāya Paduminikā who is identified as the daughter of Pavayitīkā Naganikā and niece of Thēra Bhadant Patimit and Bhadant Agimīt along with Antēvāsini Bodhī and Antēvāsini Asalhamitā. Bodhī and Asalhamitā were perhaps the disciples of Paduminikā.
2. An inscription in Cave Six records the donation of Vyagrakā, a Śākyōpāsikā (disciple of Buddhā).<sup>49</sup> (Burgess-Indrajī 1881:8 & Epigraphia Indica, X, p.110, n. 1043)
3. In Cave Sixteen (Burgess- Indrajī 1881:18)<sup>50</sup>, a donation of Antēvāsini Pavaītikā Sāpilā, the disciple of Thēra Bhayaṅt Vijay along with Lohitā, Veṅhuyā and Antēvāsini Bodhī has been recorded. In the absence of any honorific titles, the status of Lohitā and Veṅhuyā cannot be ascertained.

#### **Nāśik** (Burgess Fergusson 2000:263)<sup>51</sup>

1. An inscription in Cave Seven on the back wall of the open front records that a Pavaītikā Tāpasini, the disciple of Sawa, donated for the benefit of the monks from the four directions.<sup>52</sup>(Epigraphia Indica, X, p. 125, n. 1128 & Nagaraju1980:343)

#### **Junnar- Śivnērī** (Dhavalikar1984:12)<sup>53</sup>

1. An inscription in Cave Thirty-three<sup>54</sup>, on the left of the cell door, records gift of a leṇa and water cistern by Patibhādak Girībhutiī, son of Savāgiriya, a resident of Apāguriya and his wife, Śivapālnikāy. They also donated a permanent endowment for the nunnery of the Dhammottariya. (Burgess- Indrajī 1881:43)

#### **Paunī** (Koltē V.B.1987:4)<sup>55</sup>

1. An inscription dated first century B.C.E.—second century C.E. in the Paunī caves record the donation of Bhikkhunī Haliyā. (Deo S. B.1984:256-261)

#### **Pitāḷkhorē** (Burgess- Indrajī 2000:242)<sup>56</sup>

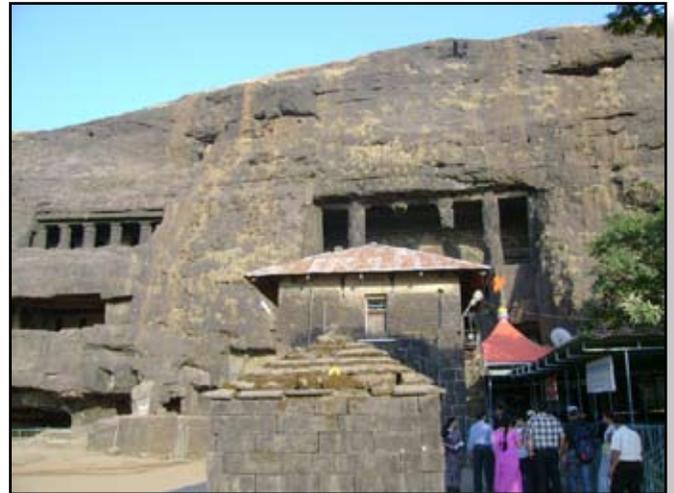
1. An inscription<sup>57</sup> dated second century B.C.E.—first century B.C.E, records donation of a pillar by a bhikkhunī (name lost).

#### **Śēlarwāḍī** (Burgess- Indrajī 2000:246)<sup>58</sup>

1. An inscription in Cave Eight (Nagaraju1984:346)<sup>59</sup> records donation of a caitya by Pavaītikā Gahparā, disciple of Thēra Bhayaṅt Simha to earn puṇya (religious merit) for her parents.

#### **Précis**

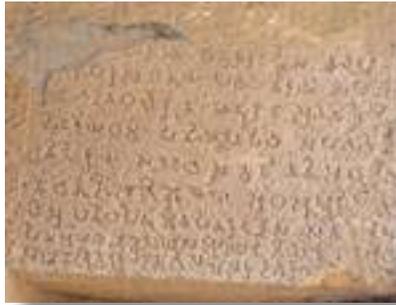
An attempt has been made in this paper to offer 'rightful space' to bhikkhunī in the annals of Buddhism.<sup>60</sup> As shown earlier in the paper, there has been a sustained and fruitful involvement of bhikkhunīs in the growth and development of Buddhism in ancient India.<sup>61</sup> However a careful examination of scholarly works reveals a less encouraging scenario.<sup>62</sup> Most of the published works fall in the realm of religious history. Such works are more concerned about the scriptures and development of the religion as gleaned through the texts and commentaries composed over vast times and places, leaving minimal space



Karle Front View

for the bhikkhunīs who made their presence felt by way of engraving inscriptions.<sup>63</sup> It is very true that epigraphical sources are available only after the third century B.C.E., and thus literary sources are indispensable until then, but thereafter, the epigraphical data cannot be neglected.<sup>64</sup> While searching for a solution to reconstruct the history of women in ancient India, there is a need for a corrective methodology<sup>65</sup> that looks beyond an altekarian<sup>66</sup> paradigm. These works do not specify the required methodology, which is to incorporate the epigraphical data.

- Though all the above mentioned seventeen inscriptions are undated, they are engraved in ancient Prākṛta - Brāhmī script that can be placed between the second century B.C.E. and the second century C.E. except one (number eleven). This is the only inscription engraved in Brāhmī -Sanskrit that can be dated to the fifth century C.E. on paleographic basis. This important inscription affirms the existence of a bhikkhunī tradition in Western India until a later date. It is also important to note that Vyāgrakā highlights the importance of the Śākya clan as associated with Buddhism.
- These rather short inscriptions have not mentioned any sectarian affiliations of the nuns. Two sects, namely the Aparāsēlila and Dharmottariya sects, have been referred to (numbers five and fourteen). Kārlē was a predominantly Mahāsaṅghika site, but three nuns who have recorded their donations at Kārlē do not confirm to any such affiliation (numbers seven, eight, and nine).
- These nuns have mostly financed the construction of water cisterns (numbers one, two, three, five, and nine) and caves, indicating that all these sites were inhabited not only for the Vassāvāsa, but also throughout the year. All these sites are situated in the ranges of the Sahyādrī Mountains and receive very heavy rainfall during the months of monsoon, but a stark summer thereafter. Thus, the priority for the storage of water is amply justified. It is equally important to note that no nun has financed the erection of Buddha or Bodhisattva image, a feature that was to be a dominant feature of Buddhist sites and iconography.<sup>67</sup>
- We do not find epigraphical reference of donations of nuns at the familiar and famous rock-cut caves of Ajañtā and Ellora, donations that continued up to the seventh century C.E. Probably the required finances were offered by the contemporary royal houses like Vākāṭaka. Only the site of Kānhērī stands as an exception to it. Though the site survived in the later centuries, we do not come across the donations by nuns after the second century C.E.
- The nuns have been addressed by three distinct terms<sup>68</sup>,



Kānhērī

namely bhikkhunī, antēvāsini and pavaītikā. Only five nuns, namely Damilā (number two), Kōdi (number seven), Aṣādhmitā (number eight), Hāliyā (number fifteen), and a nun from Pitaḷkhorē (name lost, number sixteen) have been addressed as bhikkhunī which indicates their senior status. It was only Pōṇakiasaṇā (number one) from Kānhērī who has been awarded further superior title of thēri.

- The term pavaītikā was used to indicate one who was ordained (pravrajitā) but had not received the higher ordination (upasampadā). Antēvāsini can be decoded as female pupil.<sup>69</sup> Three female donors listed here, namely Pōṇakiasaṇā (number one), Sāpilā (number twelve) and one from Kānhērī (name lost, number three) are addressed with double title, that of pavaītikā as well as antēvāsini.
- Seven have been addressed as pavaītikā. They are Jamanasā (number four), Sāpā (number five), Damāryā (number six), Paduminikā (number ten), Nāganikā (number ten), Tāpasini (number thirteen), and Ghaparā (number fourteen). Whereas three have been addressed as antēvāsini. They are Usabhā (number fourteen), Bōdhī (number ten), Asālhamitā (number ten), and a group of antēvāsini (number nine) whose name cannot be read from Kārlē.

It is clear from these epigraphs that all the nuns, irrespective of their internal hierarchy, had a senior monk who is duly recognized in most of the inscriptions. The names of the senior monks like Thēra Bhadañt Ghōṣa (number one), Bhadañt

Saṅgha (number three), Thēra Bōdhik (number five), Thēra Vijay (number twelve), Sawas (number thirteen), Thēra Bhayat Simha (number seventeen) are duly recorded in these inscriptions.

- Only four nuns have given donations without referring to any familial ties or senior monks. They are Damilā (number two), Asādhmitā (number eight), and Hāliyā (number fifteen).
- There are only two cases where we learn the place of their residence of the nuns or their stopover at the time of making donations. Damilā (number two) categorically

*It is after renouncing worldly possessions that these nuns have recorded their donations. As the inscriptions imply, if nuns were the sole donors and do not indicate the donations were an outcome of alms, other possibilities need to be considered. The nuns might have carried the strīdhana (her personal wealth) while entering the saṅgha. Inscriptions show that nuns were not cut off from the family, as there are joint family donations. The nuns could have retained their share in the ancestral property. Perhaps they were permitted to make one donation at the time of ordination.*



Kuda

mentions Kalyāṇ, a suburb of Mumbaī, my hometown, in the inscription. In fact she does not give any other information apart from this. It must be noted that a large number of artisans, merchants, and women of Kalyāṇ have financed the construction of different caves at Kānhērī. Sāpā (number five) hails from Dhēnukākāṭa. A large number of men and women, including yavanas (only men) from Dhēnukākāṭa have donated for the construction of Kārḷē Caitya. Twenty-five nuns have donated at the Stūpas of Sāñcī. (Findley 2000:21)<sup>70</sup> Unlike the nuns in Deccan, here most of them have been identified not by their monastic title, but by places, where they perhaps resided or were present at the time of recording the donations<sup>71</sup>.

- A sole example from Junnar- Śivnērī (number fourteen) provides a very crucial reference to the existence of nunnery (Bhikkhunī Upāya)<sup>72</sup> in Deccan. Patibhādak Girībhutī, and his wife, Sivapālnikāy, donated a permanent endowment for the nunnery of the Dharmōttariya, which should be in the vicinity of the ancient town of Junnar. The exact reference to the Dharmōttariya sect is also very crucial.
- Two important issues need to be discussed in the end. They are the family ties of the nuns, and the monetary factor involved in making these donations.
- Inscriptions suggest that after taking the vows, some nuns maintained ties with their families. While making donations they have identified themselves with their family members. Their familial relations are more prominent than the monastic identities in some inscriptions. Very large numbers of Buddhist lay donors have identified themselves as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters-in-law. However, attachment and a deep concern for the spiritual gain of relatives by someone who has renounced

worldly affairs is an unusual occurrence. Passing on the merit of a religious act to someone, or sharing the puṇya with others—a popular concept in Hinduism—can be observed here. Thērī Ponakiasanna offers an interesting instance. She donated with her sister and brothers who are addressed as sramaṇas (number one). Sāpā prefers to be identified as the daughter of Kulapriya Dhamaṇak of Dhēnukākāṭa. Sāpā has added in her lay sister, Ratinikā, and many relatives. This entire exercise was meant to earn puṇya for her parents. This instance very clearly shows the affection of Sāpā for her parents, especially for her father, Kulapriya Dhamaṇak (number 5). Paduminikā has also identified herself as daughter, but in this case it is her mother,

Naganika. Paduminikā has also included her two maternal uncles, Patimīt and Agimīt, in this inscription. All of them have entered monastic order. These details very clearly indicate the influence of the maternal family and their religious inclinations on Paduminikā. The inscription is silent about Paduminikā's father and his religious inclinations. It is just possible that he believed in the Vedic tradition. Inscriptions revealed that such religious coexistence within a family was possible, and women were allowed to follow a religion of their choice in ancient Indian society. The trend of continuing the family tradition for two generations in monastic activities is sufficient to show the devotion of a family to Buddhism (number ten). In some other cases women who had taken the vows still preferred to be identified as mothers. The instances of Pravajītā Damāryā (number six) and Bhikkhunī Kōdī (number seven) can be cited in this respect.

- It is after renouncing worldly possessions that these nuns have recorded their donations. As the inscriptions imply, if nuns were the sole donors and do not indicate the donations were an outcome of alms, other possibilities need to be considered. The nuns might have carried the strīdhana<sup>73</sup> while entering the saṅgha. Inscriptions show that nuns were not cut off from the family, as there are joint family donations. The nuns could have retained their share in the ancestral property. Perhaps they were permitted to make one donation at the time of ordination. Though the individual ascetic was bound by his vows to own no property except the bare necessities, to touch no silver or gold, the monasteries grew rich on the alms of the faithful.
- Two donations (numbers one and fourteen) refer to

akhiyanivī or akshaynivī, terms meaning permanent endowment. The donors handed over the corpus to the trustees with desired guidelines. Whether this corpus was handled within the concerned cave site, or the authority was delegated to any local śrēṇī or guild is not known in these inscriptions. However, along with her spiritual awareness, Poṅakiasaṇā's economic vision must be appreciated.

The mammoth corpus of the sacred texts, composed in different languages at varied times and places, might not be accessible and comprehensible to all these benefactor nuns, but the deep-rooted faith becomes very evident in the donative inscriptions. These inscriptions not only resurrect the valuable contributions of the nuns in ancient Western India, but also allow us to glean much about the order of nuns in the formative centuries of Buddhism. The history of Buddhism will be incomplete if contributions of these nuns remain in oblivion.



Nashik

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<sup>1</sup> According to the canonical texts, before the Buddha allowed Pajāpatī into the Saṅgha, she had to agree to eight *garudhammas*, or grave rules, not required of men.

<sup>2</sup> [http://tipitaka.wikia.com/wiki/Pasadika\\_Sutta](http://tipitaka.wikia.com/wiki/Pasadika_Sutta).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.urbandharma.org/udharma/nunsuttas.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Collected Wheel Publications Volume 5, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, p. 159

<sup>5</sup> It was a group of bhikkhunīs, bhikkhus, upsasīkas, and upasakas.

<sup>6</sup> These edicts are located at various places on pillars, cave walls and boulders in India, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

<sup>7</sup> Righteousness Edict.

<sup>8</sup> The edict at Rupnāth is a single flinty block of dark red sandstone lying at the foot of the Kaimūra range of hills just below the fertile plateau of Bahuribaṇḍ, 32 miles north of Jabalpur.

<sup>9</sup> Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum Vol.-I, p. 166 devānam piyē hēvā(m)ahā sati(ra)kēkāni aḍhāti(y)ani va ya sumī prakasa(sa) k(ē) nō chu bāḍhī pakātē satilēkē chu chhavāchhavē yā sumī hakā(m) sagh(a) up(ē)t ē

<sup>10</sup> Emperor Aśoka developed remorse for warfare and was drawn towards the teachings of Dhamma after his victory over Kalinga country (c.265 B.C.E.) that was accompanied by enormous bloodshed and destruction. (Kalinga Rock Edict - XIII)

<sup>11</sup> This term used in the same inscription denotes meaning that “He took shelter in the saṅgha.” There are variations in the reading of this term as saṅghē upeti and saṅgham upā ī. This term has also failed to gain a universally acceptable meaning from academics.

<sup>12</sup> Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum Vol.-I, p. xxi, This pillar is located five and half miles from Bhilsā in Rāyasēna District, Madhya Pradesh. The pillar is only a fragment of a large polished shaft but near it lies a beautiful broken capital crowned by four lions which once surmounted it.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 160-61... .....(y)a bhē(tā).....(gh)ē.....magē katē (bhi) khuna(m)cha bhi(khu)inam ch(a)ti(p)uta pabh(a)khati bhikhu vā bhikhunī va oḍtā nī dus(ān)ī sanam(dhapay)itu anā(vā) sāsī vā(sā)pētaviyē iccha hī mē kim ti sanghē chilā thikiyē siyā ti

<sup>14</sup> Outside the monastic abode

<sup>15</sup> Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum Vol. I, p. xxi, This pillar is located three and half miles away from Benaras. Dēvā ...ē .. l... pata ...yē kēnāpī saṅghē bhētavē ē chum kho (bhikh)u (vā) (bhikh)unī vā saṅgham bh(akha)t(i) s(ē) oḍatani dus(ān)ī (sa) mnamḍhapayiyā anāvāsāsī

<sup>16</sup> The emperor ordered in this edict to the Mahāmātras (of perhaps Paṭalīputra) that this edict should be submitted to both the saṅgha of monks and nuns. He further instructed to the Mahāmātras that it was their responsibility to circulate the order among the citizens as well.

<sup>17</sup> Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum Vol. I, p.xix, This pillar is a three-foot single shaft of polished sandstone. It contains four strata of records viz., Inscriptions of Emperor Aśoka, Inscription of Gupta Emperor Samudragupta, interlineations in Nāgarī characters and the inscription of Mughal Emperor Jahāngir. This edict was addressed to the Mahāmātras of Kausambī.

<sup>18</sup> Dēvānām (p)iyē ānapayati Kōsāmbiyām mahām(a)tā ..... (sa)mā (gē ka)t (ē) sa(m)gh(a)sī nō l(a)hiyē ..... (saṅgham bhā)khati bhikh(u) v(a) bhikh(u)ni vā(sēpī) (ō)dat(ā) dusanī (sa)namḍhapi yātu a(navā) sas(i) (ā)chav(ā)sayiyē

<sup>19</sup> Outside the monastic abode.

<sup>20</sup> The ministers in charge of religious affairs that were appointed by Emperor Aśoka.

<sup>21</sup> Monastic clothing.

<sup>22</sup> Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum Vol.-I, p. xiii This edict is inscribed in three columns and located at Dhaulī, in the Purī district of Orissā state.

<sup>23</sup> Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum Vol.-I, 105-106 na bhutpruvam dhamm mahāmātā nām (ē)t mayā traidasavāsābhisitēn dhammmhāmaā katā (ō)tē sawapāsaṅḍesu vyāpatā dhāmadhistānāy

<sup>24</sup> These texts are: Vinaya –Samukasē (It is just possible that Vinaya-Samukasē may refer to the Old Commentary as well as to the Patimokkkha, the basic Thēravāda code of monastic discipline, consisting of 227 rules for fully ordained bhikkhus and 311 for nuns), Aliya –Vasanī, Anagata-bhayani, Muni- gathā (Sutta Nipāta), Monēya –Sutē (Nalaka –Sutta), Upatisa-Pasina (Sariputta –Suta) and the sermon to Rāhula pronounced by the Buddha concerning falsehood.

<sup>25</sup> Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum Vol. I, 171-174.

<sup>26</sup> Abundant epigraphs in languages like Sanskrit and Pāli and scripts like Brāhmī from different sites such as Sanchi, Bharhut in north India and Sannati, Nagarjunkonda as well as the rock-cut caves lined up in the western coastal area.

<sup>27</sup> The Western Ghats are a mountain range in India that run parallel along the western frame of the Deccan Plateau and separate it from a narrow coastal plain along the Arabian Sea. Located in the mountain range of Western Ghats, Sahyādrī Mountains are not just a geographical form and silent onlooker for the state of Mahārāṣṭra in India but has been an active partaker in the making of its history in general and Buddhism in particular.

<sup>28</sup> “The Thēra Dhammarakkhita the Yōna, being gone to Aparāntaka and having preached in the midst of the people the Aggikkhandhopama-sutta (of Aṅguttarnikāy) gave to drink of the nectar of truth to thirty-seven thousand living beings who had come together there, lie who perfectly understood truth and untruth. A thousand men and yet more women went forth from noble families and received the pabbajjā.” (Mahāvamsā-XII, Dīpavaṃśa-VIII.7)

<sup>29</sup> Literally meaning “the western end.” Aparānta seems to signify the western seaboard of India. As per to Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, Aparanta was the northern Kōkaṇa, the capital of which was Śūrpāraka (modern Sōpārā)

<sup>30</sup> There are all around 1500 rock-cut caves found in India. Out of these 1200 are carved in this era. 1000 are only in Mahārāṣṭra and 800 are carved in the Sātavāhana era.

<sup>31</sup> From the fourth century B.C.E., climatic conditions became favorable for the Indian peninsula. The second wave of urbanization experienced the rise of urban centers like Junnar, Tēr, Pratiṣṭhāna etc. in Deccan. Greek sailor Hippalus discovered the monsoon around c. 45 C.E., and since then, the business of the western coast flourished with the Roman Empire. During this era, the Arabian coast was dotted with excellent ports between Bhaḍōca and Muziris. As a result of thriving overseas trade with the western world, the traders, skilled artisans, and farmers prospered in Deccan until the third century C.E. The cushion of political stability necessary to sustain the commercial and religious activities was offered by the Satavahana dynasty in Mahārāṣṭra. This dynasty sprung up in Mahārāṣṭra after the disintegration of Mauryan Empire around 230 B.C.E. and continued up to 220 C.E. Fortunately, the Sātavāhana rulers also unreservedly financed and supported these monasteries though their personal religious inclinations were different.

<sup>32</sup> The Shēr and Taḷ ghāṭ (pass) connect Sōpārā with Nāsika; and

then inland. The Naṅghāṭ links Kalyāṇ to Junnar and then to Paiṭhaṇ. Bhor Ghat connects Kalyāṇ to Karle and then to Ter. In addition there are smaller passes near Bhōr Ghāṭ that lead to the Port of Chaul. Naturally, they received liberal patronage from the mercantile class. The intimate connection between the caves and the trade routes has long been recognized. Rev. Abbot discovered the excavations at Naḍṣūr as he was convinced of the existence of caves along the route linking Chaul to the interior.

<sup>33</sup> Thus the caityas and vihāras suited the commercial as well as the ecclesiastical needs of the newly emerged mercantile class which willingly financed for the construction of the same. It must be noted that the trader class which favored Buddhism was not only indigenous but also traders of Yavana descent.

<sup>34</sup> The ancient name of Kānherī was Kṛṣṇagiri. The Kanherī Buddhist Caves are situated in Borivalī, a suburban town of Mumbai. The earliest epigraph can be traced to the Sātavāhana Period. Most of the Kānherī caves are of a very simple type and the early Hināyāna sect excavated probably nearly all. However, later the influence of Mahayana sect is also very visible.

<sup>35</sup> Prākṛta Brāhmī , 200 C.E.

<sup>36</sup> Sidham thēraṇa bhayanta-Ghōṣānā antēvāsiniye pavaitikā a Poṇakiasaṇā thēraiya leṇa .....Paṇiyapōḍhī ch deyadhamma sahabhāginiya saha cha.... (bhātuhī) (Samanā) pāpākēhī chatudisē bhikkhusanghē patithāpita (tapitarō udi) sa akhyanivī cha sanghasa dina kahapaṇa satānī (bē) eto ciarika solakasa padiko masē cha utukalē sava Lokasa hitasugathā

<sup>37</sup> Prākṛta -Brāhmī , 200 C.E.

<sup>38</sup> Sidham Kaliyāṇakiya bhikhuniya Damiliya leṇa deyadhamam pōḍhī cha

<sup>39</sup> Prākṛta -Brāhmī c. 200 A.D. Sidham thērāṇam sagha..... antēvāsiniya pavajitikāya Deyadhama...sagham paṇiya (pōḍhī)

<sup>40</sup> Prākṛta -Brāhmī c. 200 A.D. Suvanakasa Sivātana saha bālikā Jamadevikasa Pavaitikā Jamanasā..... paṇiyapōḍhī (deyadhama) saha para (ri)ium ....yasama pavanau

<sup>41</sup> Prākṛta -Brāhmī c. 200 A.D. Sidham upāsakasa Dhēnukākaṭa yasa kula(piyasa)(Dha)maṇakasa dhutuya pavaitiyaka Sāpā (yā) (thē)rana bhadata Bodhikana Ponakanō antevasinī(ya) Leṇa deyadhama paṇiyapōḍhī cha saha bhāgi(nīya)Ratinikāya saha cha savēna natisabadhī (vagē)nā chatudisē bhikkhusanghē atha Apariselēsu Patithāpita mātāpitarō udisā sava (satāna) Hitasugathā bhikkusanghasa akhayanivī cha Dina etō cha (bhikhu) Saghana civaraka datava sōlakasa utukalē cha....The Aparasēliya School is included in the four schools (Haimavata, Rajaghirīya, Siddhatthaka, and Aparasēliya) that emerged out of the Mahāsaṅghikās.

<sup>42</sup> Prākṛta -Brāhmī c. 200 A.D. Sa... pala navinakena vasa..... Tenattana cha vi....su.....mahā Atanasa saghartha cha nēgamā Navinakēna ....saha Cha matuya pavachatikāya Damāyāya yēvā akhyanivī cha leṇam datānī savasatanam hitasu gharthā akhayanivī cha dina

<sup>43</sup> The ancient name of Kārlē was Vihārgaon or Valuraka. This caitya belongs to the first century B.C.E. and is the last of the finest type of Hinayana caves. The caitya contains a huge stūpa and thirty-seven richly decorated pillars. An inscription in the caitya states that this is the best cave in the entire Jambudvīpa and was completed by the moneylender Bhutapala of Vaijayantī. (Vejayamtitō sēthina Bhutapalēna sēlaghara parinithāpita Ja(m)budipamni uthama(m))

<sup>44</sup> Prākṛta -Brāhmī Kodiy Bhikhuīy Ghunikmātu veyika dāna (na)diken katām This donation can well be placed in the first century B.C. as the donation is meant for the architectural components of the main caitya.

<sup>45</sup> Prākṛta -Brāhmī first century B.C. Asādhamitāyē bhikhunīyē.....

<sup>46</sup> (sawaccha)rē 5 hēmtān pakhē... (ētāy) puwāy (bh)yata ....hiṇam atēvāsiniṇ leṇa bhaginē .....sāwikān sadiga .....ghasu kālē pawaitāna saghay bu.....ch (dēy)dham poḍhī..... parivarēṇ upay antēvāsinihi Usabhāyē

<sup>47</sup> Kuḍā is a small village on the shore of the Rajāpurī Creek in the Maṅgaon Taluka, Raigad District. On a low hill there is group of twenty-six rock-cut caityas of the Hināyāna faith, but the image of the Buddha carved in Cave Six, dated to the sixth century B.C.E., indicates the Mahāyāna occupation which occurred at a later date. Researchers have placed the inscriptions between the second to fourth centuries C.E.

<sup>48</sup>Prākṛta-Brāhmīsidham thēraa(ṇam) bhadata Pa..timī-tana bhadaṇta Agimita(ta)na cha bhāgiṇēyīya pāvayitīkāya Nāganikāya duhutaya pāvayitīkāya Padumanikāya dyadhammam leṇa pōdhī cha saha antēvāsiniya Bōdhiya saha cha antēvāsiniya Asālhamitāya<sup>49</sup> Dēydharmōyam Śākyōpāsika Vyāghrakāyā yadatr puṇya tadbhavatu Mātāpitru purvāgamam kṛtvā sarvasatvānām anuttari dnyanāvāpaya

<sup>50</sup> Sidham thēraṇam bhayat Vijayāṇ ātivāvāsiniy pavaītikāy sapilāy deyadhamm leṇa sah sā Lōhitāhi veṇhuyāhi s(ha)ch ātivāvāsiniy Bōdhiy

<sup>51</sup> The town is a place of great antiquity and sanctity being associated with the legend of Lord Rāma who is said to have spent part of his exile at Panchavaṭī, a suburb of Nāśika. It was one of the important Hināyāna centers and the caves, twenty four in number, contain important inscriptions of the Western Kṣatrapa and the Sātavāhana.

<sup>52</sup> Prākṛta-Brāhmī Inscription second century B.C.E. Bhaymta Savasānam antēvāsiniya pavaītayā Tāpasiniya cha deyadhamma (leṇa) chatudisasa bhikkhusangha datam

<sup>53</sup> Junnar has the largest Hināyāna establishment, comprised of 324 rock-cut excavations. Of these, ten are caitya gr̥ha, 174 vihāras, 115 cisterns, and the remaining unfinished excavations. They are nearly equally distributed in five different localities, making fifty-seven separate excavations altogether. After the Sātavāhana power eclipsed, Junnar also lost its importance as a religious and commercial center.

<sup>54</sup> Prākṛta -Brāhmī , Apāguriyān Savagiriyaṣa putas Patibhadakas Giribhuti (sah) bhayāy Sivapālnikāy leṇam pōdhī ch nkarē ch Bhikhunī Upāsāyō(y)s Dhammutariyān akhayanivī

<sup>55</sup> Paunī was an ancient and important Buddhist centre in Ancient India. A pillar edict of Mahākṣatrapa Rūpiamma discovered at Chāndā Dēvṭēk, district Chāndā, confirms antiquity of Paunī. On the paleographical basis these caves can be assigned to c. 2 B.C. to 2 A.D.

<sup>56</sup> Pitaḷkhōrē or the Brazen Glen is situated a mile and a half from the deserted village of Patna in Khandesh district.

<sup>57</sup> ..... y bhicuniyā dānam th(bhō)

<sup>58</sup> This place is two miles north of the small town of Talegaon Dabhade near Pune. These excavations are found in the Gārōdī hill and are at a height of 400-500 feet above the plain.

<sup>59</sup> Prākṛta -Brāhmī c. 200 A.D. Sidham! thēraṇam bhayata Sihāṇa ateāsiniya pavaītikāya Ghap(rā) ya bālikā saghāya Buddha a cha chetiyyharō deyadhama mātāpitā udisa sah(ch) savēhī bhikh(khu) kulēhī sahā ch āchari(ya)hi bhātvirāehī samāpitō

<sup>60</sup> This paper is inspired by my doctoral research (“Position of Women in Deccan as Gleaned Through Inscriptions: 200 B.C.-1200A.D.”) that compiles and evaluates more than 1500 women recorded in the inscriptions of ancient Deccan of which 333 are patrons of Buddhism—lay, nuns, royals as well as courtesans. Though this paper takes into account the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha dwelling only in the rock-cut caves of Western Deccan, there is an urgent need to compile, analyze, and present a holistic view of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in all of ancient India in the light of the epigraphical data. Duly recognizing the contributions and achievements of these remarkable yet very real women of India will help to claim the rightful space belonging to them.

<sup>61</sup> A very early and brief monograph was written by B. C. Law (Bhikshunis in Indian Inscriptions).

<sup>62</sup> Gregory Schopen has expressed similar concern in the article, “On Monks, Nuns and the Vulgar Practices, the Introduction of the Image Cult into Indian Buddhism,” in *Bones, Stones and the Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India*, 256.

<sup>63</sup> Arvind Sharma, “How and Why Did the Women in Ancient India Become Buddhist Nuns?”, *Sociological Analysis*, Vol 38, Autumn 1977, 239-251. This article is solely based on the accounts narrated in the Thērigāthā. The article, “On Thēra and Thēri” (17-37), an article by Kumkum Roy, incorporated in the book *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Explorations in Early Indian History*, also explores the Thērigāthā. Meena Talim, in her work, *Women in Early Buddhism*, and I.B. Horner, *Women Under Primitive Buddhism*, offer a similar treatment.

<sup>64</sup> Rekha Daswani, *Buddhist Monasteries and Monastic Life in Ancient India (From the Third Century B.C. to the Seventh*

Century A.D.), Āditya Prākāśan, New Delhi, 2006. In her work, Rekha Daswani takes care to elaborate all the aspects of early monastic life in ancient India, but once again bhikkhunīs fail to find required space in the work. Most of the attention is paid to the development of the Bhikkhu Saṅgha.

<sup>65</sup> Uma Chakravarty and Kumkum Roy in their article, “In Search of our Past: A Review of the Limitations and Possibilities of the Historiography of Women in Early India,” delve much into the development of the gender historiography of India and explain the socio-political conditions that perhaps resulted in the Altekarian paradigm. This term was explained by them as “glorification the Vedic Period of ancient India” by early historians like Altekar, Indra (The Status of Women in Ancient India. Motilal Banarasidass Publication, Benaras, 1955, (II Edition.), and Shakuntala Rao Shastri, Women in Vedic Age, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1954. Kumkum Roy in the elaborate introduction to the collected papers titled “Women in Early Indian Societies,” continues her search for the corrective methodology. Uma Charkravarti’s article (published in the same book, 73-81) “Beyond the Altekarian Paradigm: Towards a new Understanding of Gender Relations in Early Indian History,” is a continuation of the same problem. The bhikkhunīs once again fail to gain their rightful space in the succeeding articles in the book. It must be noted that all these works are concerned about the Vedic Civilization.

<sup>66</sup> Position of Women in Hindu Civilization by A. S. Altekar is a famous work on the history of women in India.

<sup>67</sup> Observations of Gregory Schopen in “On Monks, Nuns and Vulgar Practices: The Introduction of the Image Cult into Indian Buddhism” in Bones, Stones and the Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India, (238-257) can be compared in this respect.

<sup>68</sup> Inscriptions also reveal certain titles of the nuns. At Sānchī the titles used are Sutakitini (woman reciter of Suttanata or Sutras - Epigraphia Indica, X, p. 93 ), dharmakanthikā (woman reciter of the Dharma- Epigraphia Indica, X, p. 93), and pancanikāyikā (which also occurs at Bhārhut- Epigraphia Indica, X, p. 93 and which Dr. Hultzsch translates as one who knows the five Nikāyās).

<sup>69</sup> Epigraphia Indica, XXV, p.33

<sup>70</sup> Nancy Barnes, “The Nuns at the Stūpa: Inscriptional Evidence for the Lives and Activities of Early Buddhist Nuns in India,” in Women’s Buddhism Buddhism’s Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal, ed. Ellison Banks Findley, Wisdom Publication, Boston, 2000, 17-36 A mention also can be made of an article, “Women and Men Donors at Sanchi: A Study of the Inscriptional Evidence at Sanchi,” (38-52) by Kumkum Roy in the book The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Explorations in Early Indian History, that again explores the votive inscriptions at Sanchi. Sanchi has attracted the attention of the researches because of its large repository of donative records.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 23

<sup>72</sup> This inscription also mentions the nunnery of Sivayapālīka which closely reminds us of the Suī Vihāra Copper Plate Inscriptions (Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum, II-I, n. LXXIV) and the donation of Princess Puṣyadattā. (Epigraphia Indica, XXVIII, p. 43). Both the donors refer to the vihāra financed by them as their property. In the first inscription, Bālānaṅdī a Kuṭumbinī and an upāsikā who donated along with her mother, is recorded as “Vihāraswāminī.” In the Mathura Stone Image Inscription, Devatā is addressed as “Vihāraswāminī.” (Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum –III 263-264)

<sup>73</sup> The word strīdhan is derived from the words strī meaning woman and dhana meaning property. Strīdhan is defined as that portion of a woman’s wealth over which she alone has the power to sell, gift, mortgage, lease or exchange—whole or in parts. Usually, strīdhan is passed from mother to daughter, unless the woman decides otherwise. Besides the ornaments and trousseau given at marriage, strīdhan also includes all the gifts of money, property, jewelry, and so on received by the woman before, during, and after marriage from her family, her husband’s family, friends, and even strangers.



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