



CHAPTER III.

KANHERI CAVES.

The Island of Salsette, or Shatshâshthi, at the head of the Bombay harbour, is peculiarly rich in Rock-Temples, there being works of this kind at Kânheri, Marôl, Magathana, Mandapéswar, and Jogés-wari. The most extensive series is the group of Buddhist caves at Kânheri, a few miles from Thâna, in which are about 109 separate caves, mostly small, however, and architecturally unimportant.

From their position, within easy access from Bombay and Bassein, they early attracted attention, and were described by Portuguese visitors in the 16th century,¹ and by European voyagers and travellers like Linschoten, Fryer, Gemelli Careri, Anquetil, Du Perron, Salt, and others.²

They are about six miles from Thâna, and two north of the Tulsi lake, recently formed to increase the water supply of Bombay, and, as described by Mr. Fergusson,³ "are excavated in one large bubble of a hill, situated in the midst of an immense tract of forest country. Most of the hills in the neighbourhood are covered with the jungle, but this one is nearly bare, its summit being formed by one large rounded mass of compact rock, under which a softer stratum has in many places been washed out by the rains, forming

¹ Diogo de Couto (1603), *Da Asia* Dec. vii., liv., iii., cap. 10 (Ed. Lisboa), tom. vii. Translated in *Jour. Bom. B. R. A. Soc.*, vol. i. pp. 34-41.

² J. H. Van Linschoten (1579), *Discourse of Voyages*, Book I., ch. xliv. p. 80; Fryer (1673), *New Account of East India and Persia*, Let. ii. ch. ii. pp. 72, 73; Gemelli Careri (1693), *Voyage* (Fr. ed. 1727), tom. ii. pp. 51-75; A. Du Perron, *Zend Avesta*, Prel. Disc. cccxciv., ccccxiii., ccccxix.; Hunter in *Archæologia*, vol. vii. pp. 299-302; S. Lethieullier, *ib.*, pp. 333-336; H. Macneil, *ib.*, vol. viii. pp. 251-263; Salt, *Trans. Bom. Lit. Soc.*, vol. i. pp. 46-52; Erskine, *ib.*, vol. iii. p. 527; Wilson *Journ. Bom. B. R. A. Soc.*, vol. iii. pt. ii. pp. 39-41; Stevenson, *ib.*, vol. iv. pp. 131-131; vol. v. pp. 1 ff.; West, *ib.*, vol. vi. pp. 1-14, 116-120, 157-160; Bhau Dâji, *ib.*, vol. viii. pp. 227 ff.; Bird, *Jour. A. S. Beng.*, vol. x. p. 94; *Histor. Res.*, pp. 10, 11; Hamilton's *Desc. of Hindustan*, vol. ii. p. 171; Heber's *Journals*; Fergusson, *J. R. A. Soc.*, vol. viii.

³ *Rock-cut Temples*, p. 34.



natural caves; it is in the stratum again below this that most of the excavations are situated.”¹ The rock in which the caves are is a volcanic breccia, which forms the whole of the hilly district of the island, culminating to the north of the caves in a point about 1,550 feet above the sea level.

In so large a group there must be considerable differences in the ages of some of the excavations. These, however, may generally be at least approximatively ascertained from the characters of the numerous inscriptions that exist upon them. Architectural features are necessarily indefinite where the great majority of the excavations consist of a single small room, usually with a little verandah in front, supported by two plain square or octagonal shafts, and stone-beds in the cells. In the larger and more ornate caves they are, of course, as important here as elsewhere. Their style is certainly primitive, and some of these monks' abodes may date from before the Christian era. One small cave of this type (No. 81) in the ravine, consisting of a very narrow porch, without pillars, a room with a stone bench along the walls, and a cell to the left, has an inscription of Yajña Śri Śātakarṇi² of the Andrabhṛitya race, whose date is still undetermined (*ante*, page 265), and it is probable that numbers of others in the same plain style may range from the second to the fourth century. Others, however, are covered inside with sculpture of a late *Mahāyāna* type, and some have inscriptions which must date as late as the middle of the ninth century.

The existence of so many monastic dwellings in this locality is partly accounted for by the neighbourhood of so many thriving towns. Among the places mentioned as the residences of donors to them, occur the names of Surpāraka, the Supara of Greek and the Subara of Arab writers, the ancient capital of the northern Koṅkaṇ; Kalyāṇ, long a thriving port; Chemūla,³ the Samylla of Greek

¹ *J. B. B. R. A. Soc.*, vol. vi. pp. 171, 172.

² Bird's Plate XLIV., No. 14; Stevenson, *J. B. B. R. A. Soc.*, vol. v. p. 23, and No. 13 of Brett's copies; West's No. 44, *J. B. B. R. A. S.*, vol. vi. p. 10.

³ It is mentioned as Chemulī in a grant of the Śilāhāras of 1095, A.D. Mas'ūdi (*Murūju'l Zahab*) says he visited Seymūr in A.D. 916, which was one of the dependencies of the Balharā, and the ruler of the port was called Janja; now we find a Jhañjha, one of the Śilāhāra princes, mentioned in copper-plate inscriptions found at Thānā and the neighbourhood (*J. R. As. Soc.*, vol. iv. p. 109; *Asiat. Res.*, vol. i. p. 358; *Ind. Ant.*, vol. v. pp. 276, 279) who must have been alive at this very date, his grandfather having been alive in 877 A.D. under Amoghavarsha, the Rashtrakūta king (*J. B. B. R. A. S.*, vol. xiii. pp. 11, 12.); see also *Ind. Ant.*, vol. vi. p. 72.