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## Junnar: Evidence of Dharmottariya Nunnery or Bhiksuni Vihara in Rock-cut Architecture of Western India

### Abstract

*Unfortunately, we have very few evidences of bhikūñèsañghas, which actually existed in ancient India. Most of it has come from a combination of two sources: ancient texts and study of contemporary devotional practices. Archaeology has seldom been utilized in this process.*

*In recently published work of Garima Kaushik, she has tried to make an attempt to identify nunnery or bhikūñèvihāra. The most important specimen of rock architecture can be seen at Tulja cave, Junnar, Pune with circular variety of caityagriha. Garima Kaushik has identified Tulja cave as bhikuunesangha on the basis of its circular architecture.*

*Another important evidence of Nunnery is in the another group of caves in Junnar. Inscription in cave 33 in Sivaneri Hills, Junnar records the donation of the cave and a cistern to the nunnery of the Dharmottareya in the town.*

In this paper I intend to study:

1. If Tulja cave Junnar is the nunnery which is mentioned in the inscription
2. And also possibility of influence of the Philosophy of Dharmottareya School on Architecture of Tulja cave, Junnar.

**Key Words:** Buddhist Architecture, Rock Cut Architecture, Bhiksuni

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Sangha, Nunnery, Junnar Caves, Tulja Caves, Sivaneri Hills Caves, Dharmmottariya school, Circular Buddhist Caves, Caityagriha.

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### सारांश

प्राचीन भारतीय भिक्षुणी संघ के अस्तित्व के दुर्भाग्यवश बहुत कम प्रमाण आज उपलब्ध हैं। यह विशेषतः दो स्रोतों में पाए जाते हैं (1) प्राचीन साहित्य और (2) समकालीन धार्मिक प्रथा। इस प्रक्रिया में पुरातत्वशास्त्र का बहुत कम उपयोग किया गया है। हाल ही में प्रकाशित श्रीमती गरिमा कौशिक की पुस्तक में उन्होंने इन भिक्षुणी संघों की पहचान करने का प्रयास किया है।

जुन्नर स्थित तुलजा गुम्फा का उनकी गोलाकार रचना के कारण भारत की प्राचीन बौद्ध गुम्फाओं में महत्वपूर्ण स्थान है। इसी गोलाकार रचना की वजह से श्रीमती गरिमा कौशिक ने इसे भिक्षुणी संघ की जगह निश्चित किया है। इसी जुन्नर स्थित शिवनेरी गुम्फा क्रमांक 33 में लिखित शिलालेख में भिक्षुणी संघ का उल्लेख किया गया है।

प्रस्तुत शोधालेख में मेरा यह प्रस्तुत करने का प्रयास है कि:

1. तुलजा गुम्फा ही वह गुम्फा है जिसका शिवनेरी के शिलालेख में उल्लेख किया गया है।
2. क्या धर्मोत्तरिय शाखा के तत्वज्ञान का तुलजा गुम्फा के स्थापत्य पर प्रभाव पाया जा सकता है?

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**प्रमुख शब्द:** बौद्ध स्थापत्यकला, भिक्षुणी संघ, जुन्नर गुम्फा, तुलजा गुम्फा, शिवनेरी गुम्फा, धर्मोत्तरिय, गोलाकार बौद्ध गुम्फा, चैत्यगृह

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### Introduction

Buddha was strongly opposed to the creation of the order of nuns. However, he could not withstand the well-reasoned Ananda's arguments and unfailing persistence of Mahaprajapati Gautami and finally consented to the formation of the Order of nuns. *Cullavagga* of *Vinaya Pitaka* mentions about the establishment of Nunnery.

In view of the position of women prevailing at that time, several restrictions were imposed on the movements of the nuns. As a general rule, the nuns were not allowed to dwell in forests. They could live in *audosita* (out house), *upassaya* (hermitage), *navakamma* (Cottages specially built for them) (Sankriyayana, 1994: *Vinaya Pitaka*, Buddha, Aakar Granthamala, 538). The mode of life prescribed for them was

substantially the same as that of the monks. The *Patimokkha* rules, however differed partially from those of the monks.

For centuries, ordained women have practiced, realized, and upheld the Buddha's teachings, benefiting not only themselves but also the societies in which they lived. There have been numerous women who have been linked to Buddhism in different ways and in different contexts, as *upasikas*, *theris*, teachers and so on.

Unfortunately, we have very few evidences of *Bhiksunisanghas*, which actually existed in ancient India. Most of it have come from a combination of two sources: ancient texts and study of contemporary devotional practices. Archaeology has seldom been utilized in this process.

#### **Earlier Works**

From earlier times, inscriptions are a significant source for history of Buddhism. B.C.Law has tried to put together the evidence which, Indian inscriptions bear to the existence of the Buddhist *bhiksuni* order in India and to examine how far they tally with the facts may be gathered from literature and foreign travels.

In recently published work of Garima Kaushik, she has tried to make an attempt to identify nunnery or *bhiksunivihara*. Though there are innumerable references to monasteries in the literary as well as the epigraphic records for monks there are hardly any for the nuns. She has tried to identify and locate and document the literary evidence on nunneries and tried to corroborate it with actual archaeological evidence. Ethnographic data from present-day nunneries and the lives of the *bhiksunis* have also been incorporated in her studies.

Most of the Nunneries were located in the villages or in their close vicinity. Most of them were temporary, short-term settlements that failed to make their presence felt in the historical records of the period. Most of the (*donation*) that came to the *sangha* was made to the

*bhikshu* community.

Garima Kaushik has analysed various Buddhist monastic sites *e.g.* Nalanda, Sanchi, Nagarjunakonda, Shravasti, Junnar etc. Circular structures can be seen at many of these sites. She has identified these circular structures as Nunnery or *bhikshunisangha*.

The most important specimen of rock architecture can be seen at Tulja Lena, Junnar with circular variety of *caityagriha*. Garima Kaushik has identified Tulja cave as *Bhikshunisangha* on the basis of its circular architecture.

Another important evidence of Nunnery is in the caves of Junnar. Inscription in cave 33 in Sivaneri Hills Junnar records the donation of the cave and a cistern by one Giribhuti of the Apaguriyas. For these and the nunnery of the Dhammottareya in the town, a perpetual endowment of some *karsapanas* was made. (Nagaraju, 1981: Buddhist Architecture of Western India, Agama Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 332). It also mentions name of the Dharmottariya School.

In this paper I intend to study:

1. If Tulja cave Junnar is the Nunnery which is mentioned in the inscription
2. And also possibility of influence of the Philosophy of Dharmottariya School on Architecture of Tulja cave, Junnar.

### **About Circular Architecture of Nunnery**

Women have played a very important role in the patronage of Buddhism. Women patronised Buddhism as lay followers as well as nuns. We get various inscriptional evidences of donations by female members of Royal families, *theris, upasika*.

Apart from the large number of donor inscriptions from sites which happen to be the direct evidence of female participation at these sites, another indirect indication of non-monastic, lay (female) presence at the site can be the profusion of sculptural data with depictions of

women, *mithuna* couples, *Jatakas* with lay themes and the like at all these sites (Garima, 2016: Women and Monastic Buddhism in Early South Asia-Rediscovering the invisible believers, 332).

Gaima Kaushik has associated certain circular structures based on the contextual findings and associated antiquities with the feminine gender (*Ibid.*:22) Circular structures are represented in early reliefs of Sanchi, Bharhut and Amaravati. One of the earliest structures is excavated on top of the hill known as Bijak-ki-pahadi at Bairat. As per her analysis, sites of circular structure have a considerable number of female patrons and a distinctive female presence at the site (*Ibid.*: 24). Both Apsidal and circular types of *caitya* co-existed around same period (*Ibid.*:24)

Recent excavation has revealed a circular platform at Sui *vihara* near Bahawalpur with sun dried bricks and supporting walls to hold the platform and the cylindrical structure. Earlier from the same place, Kaniska's inscription was found which mentions word *viharaswamini* (*Ibid.*:26)<sup>i</sup>. On the basis of inscription found at this place she has identified it with *bhikshunisangha* (*Ibid.*:26)

It was laid down in the canons that a *bhikshunivihara* should preferably be located within the bounds of city/village unlike a monastery, which should be neither far nor very near to the city. Two orders could not remain entirely separate for various reasons enumerated below . There are numerous rules pertaining to the location of *bhikshuniviharas*. *Bhikshunivihara* should be located close to a *vihara* for various reasons like security, observance of common rituals like *uposatha* and for the sharing of the proceeds of *dana* as *bhikshusangha*

<sup>i</sup>. "(during the reign) of the Maharaja RajatirajaDevaputraKanska, in the eleventh year... on this day, when the friar (bhikū) Nagadatta, the preacher of the law(dharmakathi) the disciple of the acaryaDamatrata (acaryaDamatratisya) the disciple's disciple of the teacher Bhava (acaryaBhavaprasisya) raised the staff here in Damana, (for??) the mistress of the Vihāra (vihāraswamini), the lay votary (upasika) Balanandi, and her mother, the matron, the wife of Bala (BalanandiKutumbiniBalajayamata) in addition to this foundation of the staff, subsequently given this enclosure. May it be conducive to welfare and happiness of all beings."

was inclined to receive more donations from the lay community.

### **About Junnar**

Junnar was an important ancient centre of Theravada Buddhism as it is clear from the number of Buddhist caves. Now it is the chief town in Pune District of Maharashtra, India. It is among the largest religious establishment of Buddhism in Maharashtra. There are around 300 rock-cut excavations. All these caves are spread in the surrounding hills in an area of three miles.

River Mina is not far from Junnar and therefore ancient Minnagara, the capital of Nahapana, is identified with Junnar (Dhavalikar, 1984: Late Hinayana Caves of Western India, Deccan College, Pune, 12). The name Junnar is said to be a corruption of Junanagara "The ancient city". History has also been linked to Tagara but Tagara has been identified with Ter in the Osmanabad district of Marathwada (Nagaraju, 1981: Buddhist Architecture of Western India, Agama Kala Prakasan, Delhi, 133). Some scholars have also identified Junnar with ancient Dhenukakata (*Ibid*: 12).

Most of the Junnar caves have been carved during the Satavahana period- various phases from the earliest Satavahana phase (around 1<sup>st</sup> Cent. B.C.E) to later Satavahana period (second century C.E.) (*Ibid*: 12). But later Junnar lost its importance and hence no architectural activity continued after this period. Dr. Dhavalikar dates them to later Satavahana period. Except the Tulja Leni circular *chaitya* which can be dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> Century B.C.E. These Buddhist caves are spread in different directions and for convenience have been distributed into five different groups based on localities:

1. In the scarp of the Sivaneri hills fort to the west-south-west of the town
2. The group known as Tulja cave to the west
3. The Ganesha cave in the Sulaiman hills to the north of the town
4. The second group of the Sulaiman hills about a mile from the Ganesh

cave

## 5. The caves in the Manmodi hill south of Junnar

### **About Tulja Caves, Junnar**

This group of caves is in the Tulja bai hill, about 5 km. west of Junnar. It is approachable by a small path from the Junnar-Nanaghat road by a deviation near the northern tip of the Sivaneri hill. All the caves are together in a row over the head of a valley and face roughly east-north east (*Ibid*: 133).

This attracted the attention of historians who believe it as an important specimen of rock architecture which depicts the earliest attempts to copy simple wooden structures in stone and shows a type of *chaityagriha* from the later apsidal *chaityagriha* when vaulted roof were evolved.

Cave 3 of Tulja cave has a circular hall having in its centre a *stupa* surrounded by twelve octagonal columns. Between the pillars and the wall running all around is an aisle 1 meter wide. The *stupa* is very plain and of early type and has only two parts extant, the drum and the dome. The dome is very damaged now, but the head of the dome still retains its flat surface with a hole in its centre. It is likely that a *harmika*, either structural or made of wood, stood on the flat surface and the square hole was meant to receive the staff of probably a wooden umbrella. The cave front is now broken.

Many of the excavations of the Tulja cave group have faced severe damage by the undercutting of the scarp ruining their fronts. Its unique design itself is sufficient to show that it belongs to a period when standardization of the form, in plan, elevation and decoration of the vault-roofed *chaityagrihas* had not yet been achieved (*Ibid*: 134) It was still the age of experiment and emulation. It is interesting to note further that the majority of the caves are single celled (1,6,7,8,9,10,11,12, 13,14,15,16), placed in a row and are all without stone benches (*Ibid*:

138). The cells are generally provided with stone benches in the rock-cut architectural tradition and are seen from other rock cut architecture from Bhaje, Bedsa, Ajanta, etc. Dr. Nagaraju pointed out that similar evidence is found at Jivadan-Virar that these were meant for monks who were still rigorously following or were expected to follow the rules prescribed by early *Vinaya* texts (*Ibid*: 138). Secondly it could be observed that these caves are all cubical cells, with the height, length and breadth equal which is generally not seen with such regularity in later caves (*Ibid*: 138). These caves are absolutely devoid of any decoration. From such metrics, an important architectural stage resulted in a new plan of making the caves by hewing the cells around an interior hall. Such caves not only provided good places for them *bhiksunis* to sleep, but also security and warmth, compared to single open cells (*Ibid*: 138).

Dr. Nagaraju (*Ibid*: 139) considering sequence of monuments in the Tulaja cave has divided them in groups and has placed cave 10, 11 and 3 in one group. Cave 10 and 11 are single cubical cells but with a front wall and door. Incidentally the two examples in the group have plainly cut façade, an item present in *caitya* 3 also.

#### **Inscriptional Evidence of Dharmottariya School**

Junnar, Sivaneri Hill cave 33 (*Ibid*: 181):

The cave no. 33 is located in the Sivaneri hill about 3 kilometers west of Junnar town. The group in which the cave is located is also known as Baragadad. All the caves are in a cluster located almost adjacent to each other along a south-north scrap and all the caves face east.

An inscription<sup>ii</sup> is cut on the back wall of the verandah high up on the wall to the left of the doorway. It records the donation of the cave and a cistern by one Giribhuti of the Apaguriyas. For these and the nunnery of the Dharmottariya in the town, a perpetual endowment of some *karsapanas* was made (*Ibid*: 332).

ii. It is not dated as per Luders List (Luders, 1152) But on the basis of its style Dr. Nagaraju has dated it to 230 CE.



**Karle Cave 8:** This inscription is in the large *chaitya* hall near Lonavala, Pune, India in side on the fifth pillar of the left row(*Ibid: 337*)<sup>iii</sup>.

“The gift of the cost of a pillar by Satimita from Soparka, out of respect for his maternal uncle the BhadantaDharmmottarèya by his disciple and sister's on Satimita, the son Nanda, with his mother and father” (Burgess, 1976: Inscription from the Cave Temples of Western India, Delhi, 31).

In the same inside, on the same 5<sup>th</sup> pillar below No.8<sup>iv</sup>

“The gift of a pillar containing relics, by Satimita from Soparaka sister's son of Bhadanta Dharmottariya.” (*Ibid: 32*).

### **About Dharmottariya**

Vasumitra skips over the special doctrines of Dharmottariya, Bhadrayaniya and Chan-Nagarika schools of Buddhism mentioning in verse only that they differed regarding the attainments of an arhat, and the consequent chances of his fall from arhathood. It seems that in other matters, these three schools agreed with views of the Sammitiyas(Dutt, 1978: Buddhist Sects in India, Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi, 207).

All the traditions concur in considering these as the first of the schools to emerge from Vatsiputryas. According to the sources from the northwest, they would have appeared in the middle of the third Century (Bareau, 2015: The Buddhist Schools of Small Vehicle, (A. Bareau, Ed., & Sara Boin-web, Trans.) Dev Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 162).

Dharmottara means 'those who are superior (*uttara*) with regard to the Teaching (*dharma*).' According to Kuiji(*Ibid: 162*), they got the name from their teacher Dharmottara, who was purportedly a Vinaya-master. Or it means it has transcendental (*lokottara*) teaching (*dharma*), they were superiour (*uttara*) to beings (*sattva*), hence their name: superior with regard to the Teaching (*Ibid: 162*). The

iii. “*SoparakabhayātanaDhamutarayanasa(má)nathasatherasa (A) tulasā (am)tevasisabhaia kasaNadipatisaSatimitasasaha... tiyathabodanammu.*”

iv. “*Soparakabhayamtanam Dhamutareyanambhaiaikasa Satimitasasarero thabodanam.*”

*ManjusriPariprcchasutra* and *Bhavya* (first list) also assert that their name came from their founder Dharmottara, Vinaya-master (*Ibid*: 162).

According to Parmartha, the Dharmottariyas were one of the four sub-schools which completed the *Abhidharma-pitaka* of the Vatsiputriyas, also called *Sariputrabhidharma* or *Dharmalakṣa nabhidharma* in nine parts, with treatises (*Sastra*) by relying on the meaning of the sutras (*Ibid*: 162).

The Sammitiya tradition cited by Bhavya classifies them along the side of the Bhadraniyas in the subgroup of Mahagiriyas, those who reside in the great mountains (*mahagiri*) (*Ibid*: 162).

Inscriptions from the Second Century C.E. attest their presence in Karle, Soparaka and Junnar, which should doubtlessly be identified with Mahagiris just mentioned. We know little of their doctrine (*Ibid*: 162).

### **Conclusion**

Inscription at cave 33 of Sivaneri Hill mentions existence of nunnery belonging to Dharmottariya school in the town and not in cave 33 where it is written. So it is very difficult to prove that philosophy of Dharmottariya school can have influence on architecture of a particular cave. No other inscription at Junnar mentions about the Dharmottariya School. Karle inscriptions which are on the pillars of *caityagriha* mention about donation from *thera* or *bhikṣu* from Sopara who belongs to Dharmottariya School. But another inscriptional evidence has proved that *caityagriha* at Karle belongs to Mahasanghikas and is dated to a later period (Nagaraju, 1981: *Buddhist Architecture of Western India*. Delhi: Agama Kala Prakashan, 226). Earlier scholars have not dated inscriptions of Junnar but Dr. Nagaraju, on the basis of style, has dated inscription of Junnar to around 230 C.E. (*Ibid*: 181). Hypothetically, we do not have concrete monumental evidence of existence of Dharmottariya school at Sopara of a particular period except these inscriptions which are not in Sopara but at other places. Unlike other



Fig. 1: Tulja Cave, Junnar

Figure: The Author

schools of Buddhism, we do not have much evidence of their actual philosophy or *vinaya* rules on the basis of which architecture can be studied. But it proves that Dharmottaraya monastery must have existed during this period.

Garima Kaushik has identified Tulja cave as Bhiksuni sangha on the basis of its circular structure. It is the only circular *caitya* with pillars found in Rock Cut Architecture of Western India. (Kondivate is also circular but without pillars). All scholars agree that it belongs to the early phase of Theravada Architecture. Dr. Nagaraju has also identified cave 10 and cave 11 of Tulja Cave belonging to the same period. These are cubical cells with doors. He agrees that it may be for security and warmth. We can hypothetically say that it may have been for the security of nuns who were staying there during that time.

It is very difficult to say whether the location of nunnery was near

the town in absence of archaeological evidence. If we have to take into consideration the safety point of view that nunnery should be near bhikkhusangha. Then Present nearest evidence is Sivaneri Hills but are not that near if we have to take it in a safety point of view. Maybe at that time this nunnery was near or part of town itself. Or there was some other monastery nearby or in a Tuljacave itself which presents a possibility of existence of nunnery.

Dr.Nagaraju also pointed out that there are no benches in the cells of nuns. He believes that it must be some *vinaya* rule or we can assume that nuns who stayed here did not use benches to sleep or were using wooden benches to sleep.

Earlier scholars have not dated these inscriptions but Dr.Nagaraju has dated inscription of SivaneriHill, which mentions this nunnery to 230 CE, and the date of Tuljacave is 1<sup>st</sup> Cent.BCE. If we decide to agree with this date it means that there will be almost a 300 years gap between the actual circular architecture and the date of our inscription. Or we can assume that the Dharmmottariya School was still popular around 3<sup>rd</sup> Cent CE and Nunnery was still in existence or was in use. Or it could have been the case that donation was given to build some other cave of same Tulja cave or to another group of caves which existed at that particular period for which we don't have any evidence. Hence we can assume hypothetically that Nunnery of Dharmmottariya School was still flourishing at that time or may be Nunnery of Junnar existed from earlier times but at the time of donation it was under the influence of Dharmmottariya School of Buddhism.

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