

YAVANA (IONIAN) DONORS OF THE BUDDHIST CAVE ARCHITECTURE IN WESTERN INDIA [A.D.100-A.D.250]

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Abstract

Rise of Buddhism during the 6th century B.C. was a significant event in the history of India. Buddhists have greatly contributed to evolution of rock cut architecture. Buddhist cave architecture in India grew in response to certain specific needs of the Buddhist community. The needs were two fold, residential and devotional. The **Viharas** were the residential places. Major requirements for the devotional needs were creation of a **stupa**-the dome structure which became the early Buddhist object of veneration, a circumambulatory path and free space i.e. the Congregational hall for occasional gathering of the fraternity and the laity. Such work of excavation was difficult and time consuming requiring anywhere from a few years to a few decades. Obviously it needed royal patronage and financial support from the people.

The epigraphic data throws a welcome light on the fact that activity of creating rock cut monuments in western India received a generous patronage and the rulers and people from all walks of life came forward. The **Yavanas**, i.e. Ionian Greeks in western India also patronized this activity. Originally, the term *Yavana* is applied to the people who came from Ionian Islands to India. In course of time, it was loosely applied to the **Greeks, Romans, Shakas and the Parthians**.

During the first two centuries of the Christian era, there was a direct maritime trade between India and the Roman Empire. This was a period of remarkable progress in trade and industry in India. It was during this time the western coast of India witnessed the growth of brisk foreign trade with the western world including Roman Empire. There were a good number of the Yavanas in western India.

The present paper aims at focusing on the Indo Greek trade, and the traders, their colonies in western India and their contribution for the cause of the rock cut architecture by the critical evaluation of the inscriptional data of the Yavana donors from the archaeological sites.

This paper will show how Buddhism in western India received generous donations from the rich **Yavanas** who came here in pursuance of their trade. Some of their gifts in form of rock cut monuments are still visible. The Yavana donors and their donations are recorded in the inscriptions at Nasik, Karle and Junner sites. Interestingly, the rock cut excavations show the impression of the Greco-Roman art brought in by traders in the form Chaitya hall (congregational hall). The motif as triskelion, centaur and persipolitan pillars and their capitals at these sites owe their existence to the Yavana donors and were carved probably by Yavana artists. Their existence in the socio economic life is attested by their donative inscriptions at the Buddhist rock cut caves in western India.

Keywords: Rock cut Monuments in western India, Indo-Greek trade and traders, Yavana traders and their donations.