

Design Resource

Elephanta Caves

Rock-cut Architecture

by

Abhey Singh

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/elephanta-caves>

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/elephanta-caves/introduction>

Introduction

Elephanta Caves are situated on Elephanta Island, locally known as Gharapuri - the city of caves. The caves contain sculptures dedicated to Lord Shiva and Buddha. These rock-cut sculptures are estimated to be carved between 5th to 8th centuries and the identity of builders is still disputed. In 1987 UNESCO recognized the place as a World Heritage Site and said that - "the caves represent a masterpiece of human creative genius" and "bear a testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared."



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Journey

Elephanta Island is located 10 km east of the city of Mumbai. Ferries to the island are available from Gateway of India starting from 9 am until 5pm. The journey from Gateway to the Island takes about an hour. To reach the mainland, you can either walk or take the toy train operated by Maharashtra Tourism. If you walk from the dockyard towards the village you can see various food stalls. There is an ascent of around 100 stairs from the village, which you can cover by walking or riding in a Palki (palanquine) - an ancient Indian way of carrying people. The stairway to the caves is lined with stalls selling different types of kitsch.



View from a Kaali-Peeli cab. You can take a shared cab or a private one from CST to Gateway of India.

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The New and old Taj Mahal hotel with ferry to Elephanta Island in the front. Ferries to Elephanta Island are available from Gateway of India. Typically, there is one every 10 minutes, starting from 9 am.



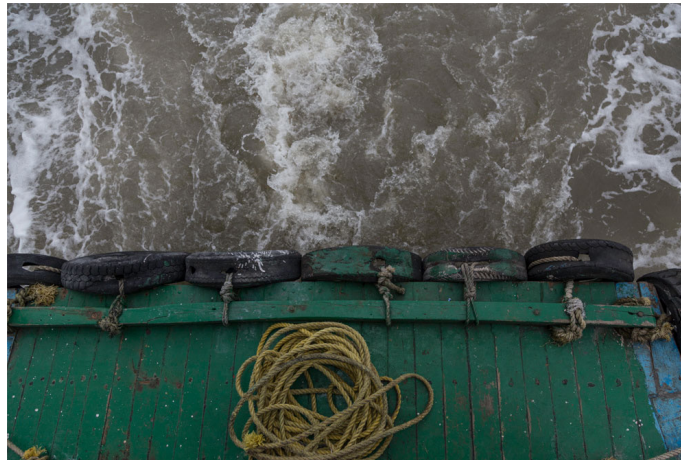
View of a ferry going to Elephanta Island. Due to high tides during monsoon there might be some problems in travelling through ferry.

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View from the upper deck of a ferry sailing from Gateway of India to Elephanta Island.



Passengers sitting on the upper deck of a ferry sailing from Gateway of India to Elephanta Island.

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Mumbai skyline as seen from the ferry sailing from Gateway of India Elephanta Island.



Panel installed by Maharashtra tourism at the entrance of Elephanta Island.



Natives of Gharapuri village selling fruits to the tourists on their way to the Elephanta caves.



The toy train operated by Maharashtra tourism to facilitate movement of people from the ferry wharf to the foothills of caves.

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Natives of Gharapuri village selling fruits to the tourists on their way to the Elephanta caves.



Tourists taking photographs with Elephanta Island in the backdrop.



Native of Gharapuri village selling corn on to the tourists on their way to the Elephanta caves.



Panoramic view of Elephanta Island.

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The way across the village towards the Elephanta caves.



Shops along the way to the Elephanta caves.



Palki (palanquin) for elderly to take them up the hill on which Elephanta caves are situated.



Shops along the stairway to the Elephanta caves selling various souvenirs.

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Shops selling various souvenirs.



Shops along the stairway to the Elephanta caves selling religious idols.

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Notice board installed by the Village administration warning the tourists of monkey menace.



Monkey.

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View of ferry wharf from the Elephanta caves.

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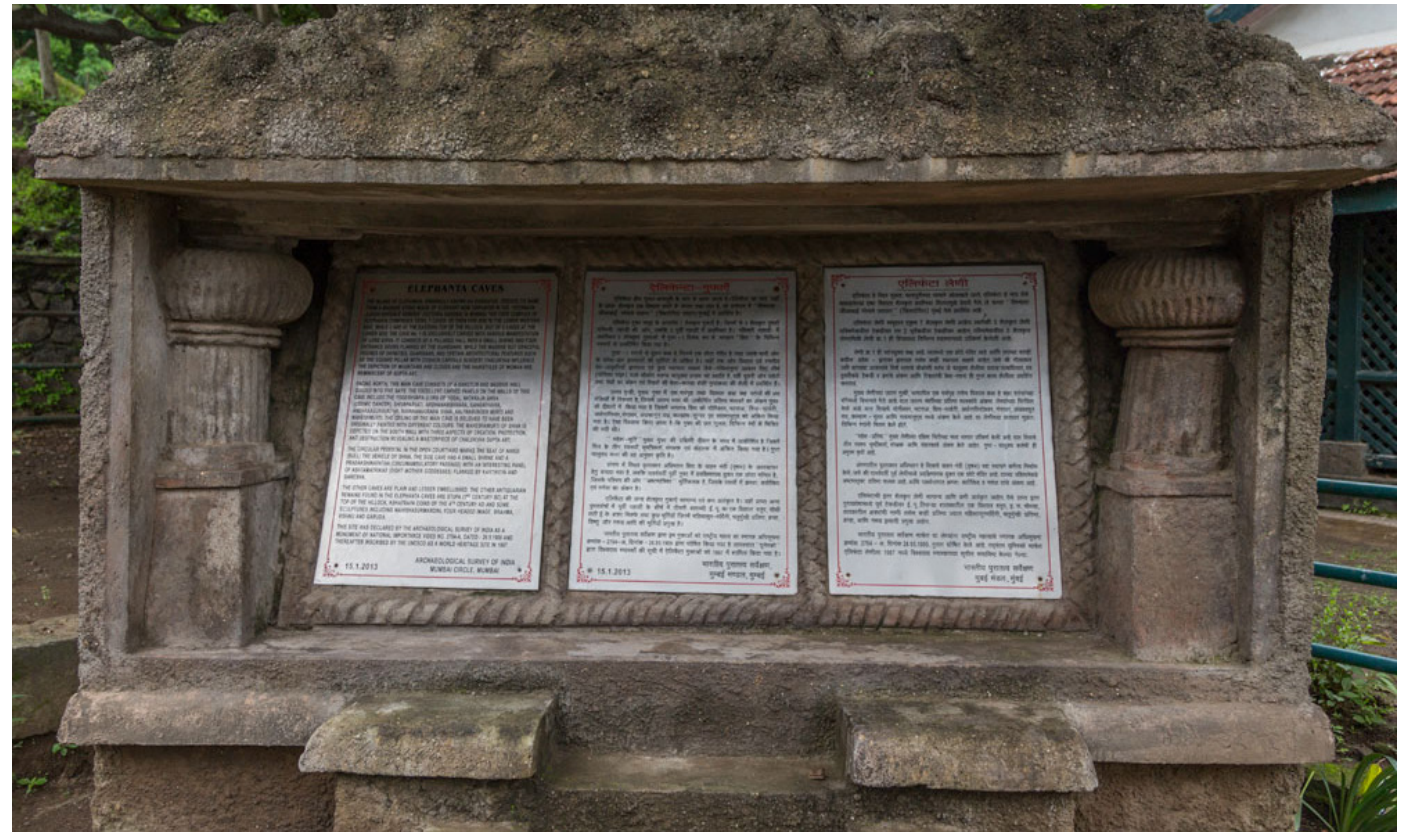
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Caves

Elephanta Caves are divided into two groups - one larger group with 5 caves all of which are dedicated to Shaiva sect and the other one is the smaller group dedicated to Buddha. The rocks are made of solid basalt. They were painted in past but only traces of paint are left now. The main cave, containing the sculptures of Lord Shiva in different forms and acts, was a place of worship for Hindus until Portuguese came in 1534 after which the caves suffered severe damage. In 1970s Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) started the renovation work. The Main cave which has 13 panels depicting various acts of Shiva, most famous of which - Trimurti has been adopted by Maharashtra Tourism in their logo, benefitted most from this renovation work done by ASI. Other caves are still in a terrible state. Prayers were performed here in ancient times and even today people gather to pray to Shiva on Mahashivratri.

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Description stones of Elephanta caves installed by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) at the entrance of the caves.

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North side gate to Cave 1 of the Elephanta caves (the great cave).



Sculpture of Shiva as Yogisvara - The Lord of Yoga. Shiva is shown seated in Padmasana yogic posture penancing after the death of his first wife Sati. The figure of Shiva is surrounded by divinities from above and attendants from below.



Sculpture of Shiva as Natraja - The Lord of Dance, performing Tandava (cosmic dance).



Dwarpalas on the East side of Shiva Lingam in the main cave.

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Dwarpalas on the South side of Shiva Lingam in the main cave.



Dwarpalas on the West side of Shiva Lingam in the main cave.



Dwarpalas on the North side of Shiva Lingam in the main cave.



Foreign tourists praying to Shiva outside the Shiva Lingam in the main cave on Elephanta Island.

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Panel depicting the wedding of Shiva and Parvati, also known as Kalyanasundara, in the presence of divinities and attendants.



Panel depicting the wedding of Shiva and Parvati, also known as Kalyanasundara, in the presence of divinities and attendants.



Sculpture of Shiva in the form of Bhairava (frightful form of Shiva) killing the demon Andhaka.



Sculpture carved on the pillar in the Elephanta caves.

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Sculpture of Shiva as Gangadhara depicting the descent of river Ganga.



Sculpture of Shiva as Gangadhara depicting the descent of river Ganga.



Sculpture of Shiva as Trimurti, the three heads represent the three features of Shiva- Creation, Protection and Destruction.



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A foreign tourist taking a selfie with the Trimurti sculpture in the Elephanta caves.



Sculpture of Shiva as Ardhanarishvara- a half man half woman representation of Shiva.



Sculpture of Shiva as Ardhanarishvara- a half man half woman representation of Shiva.



Sculptures carved on the space between the panels.

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Sculpture of Shiva-Parvati on Mount Kailash playing dice.



Panel showing demon king Ravana lifting Mount Kailasha with Shiva on top.



Panel showing demon king Ravana lifting Mount Kailasha with Shiva on top.

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View of the entrance to the East wing from the main cave.

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Pillars in the courtyard of the main cave of the Elephanta caves.



Foot of a Dwarpala sculpture.

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Tourists taking photographs in the east wing of the main cave.



Disfigured sculptures in the east wing of main cave.

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Four-armed gatekeeper in the East wing of main cave.



Ganesha sculpture in the East wing of main cave. Also visible is a partial view of Astha-Matrikas (the eight goddesses).



Kartikeya (God of War) sculpture in the east wing of main cave.



Leogriffs sculptures originally placed outside the temple-portico of the east wing are now placed inside the cave.

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Leogriiff sculpture in the east wing of main cave.



Cave 2.



Cave 2.



Cave 2.

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Cave 3.

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Cave 3.



Cave 3.



Cave 4.



Cave 4.

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Cave.



Cave 4.



Cave 5.



Cave 5.

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