

Design Resource

## Pandavleni - Nashik

The oldest caves of Maharashtra

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Rakshitha

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/pandavleni-nashik>



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2. History
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4. Trirashmi Buddha Vihar
5. Video
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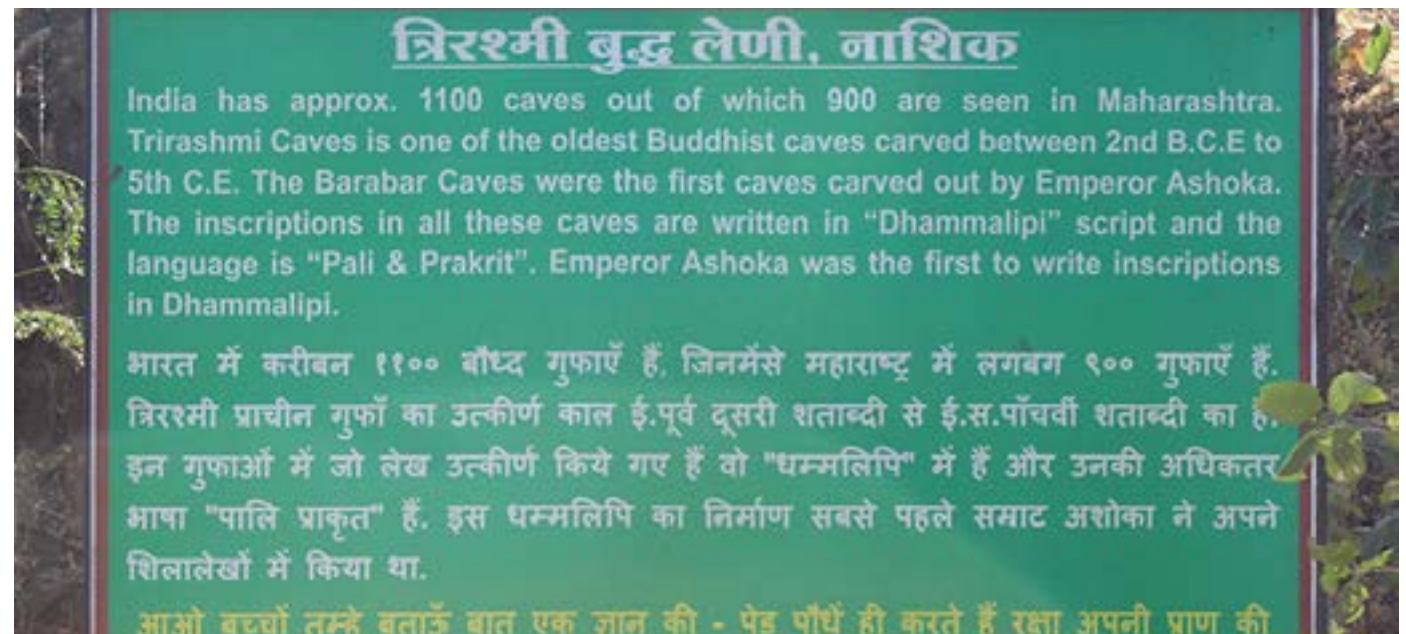
Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/pandavleni-nashik/place>

## Place

Pandavleni caves belong to the city of Nashik, are situated at a distance of 8kms towards its south. It is one of the numerous Buddhist caves built during the flourishing days of religion in the country. The caves date back to the 1st century B.C. and 2nd century A.D. These caves are also called "Pandu Lena". Based on the name of the Trirashmi Leni hills on which these caves are situated, it is also named "Trirashmi Leni". Towards the north side of the tabletop of the Trirashmi Leni hills, these caves are located. The caves are hewn at the height of nearly 60-70m from the surrounding plains. Probably the hill is known as Trirashmi due to the location of three independent hill groups that marks the end of the Trimbak-Anjenri range of Sahyadris. The word "Trirashmi" means "triple royal". It consists of twenty-four rock-cut caves. All these are monasteries except for cave 18.

The city Nashik in which Pandavleni caves are located is well mentioned in ancient Indian literature of the pre-Christian era. It was the major city during an ancient period as it is located on an ancient trade route that connects the ports of the west, north, and south cities of India. The excavation carried out in Nashik indicates the presence of continuous habitation from around the 5th century B.C. The existence of Northern Black Polished Ware that approximately started around 6th century B.C. and increased during the Mauryan period indicates its contracts with its northern cities.



The description board at Pandavleni caves.

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Pandavleni caves, though not being located very far from the city, remain a peaceful place and gives a breathtaking panoramic view of the city.



A glimpse of tourists at Pandavleni caves.

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Tourists.



The path way of the Pandavleni caves.



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## History

Jain Kings financed to build Pandavleni caves in favor of Jain saints for their stay. Initially, though it was started by Jains later, it turned into a significant center of Buddhism. Being 2000-year-old caves, it represents both the Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism. Caves served as temples for early Buddhists and probably even as teaching centers. It has shrines, icons of Buddha, Jain Teerthankara Vrishabhdeo, Veer Manibhadraji, and Ambikabevi with the figures of Bodhisattva. There are skillfully chiseled water tanks that are very attractive on the rock with an overall good water management system. The inscription indicates that these excavations belong to Satavahana and Kshatrapa periods, spanning 2nd century B.C. to 3rd century A.D., whose capital was Pratishtana (modern Paithan of Aurangabad). The inscriptions mention the Kings like Krishna (c.205-187B.C), Gautami Putra Satakarni (c.106-130A.D), Vasisthiputra Pulumavi (c.130-158A.D), Sri Yajna Satakarni (c.171- 201A.D) of the Satavahana dynasty, and Nahapana (c.119-125A.D), his son-in-law Usabadatta of the Kshatrapas and a Saka family of contemporary Satavahanas. Later in the 5th century to 6th century, Buddha icons were added to many of these caves. Until the 6th to 7th centuries A.D., the occupation at this region has been noted, but later the subsequent periods saw very little excavation and alterations of the earlier ones.

The current name of these caves is linked to mythological adventurous brothers Pandavas from the Hindu epic Mahabharata. According to the local mythology, Pandavas made these caves to hide away from their enemies and relatives and spent some time here. Thus it is known as Pandavas caves. In the Marathi language, "Pandav Leni" means "Pandava caves". Many caves in India are linked with the legends of Pandavas.



Chaitya and umbrellas in Cave number 10.

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12, 13, 20 number entrances of Pandavleni caves.



Cave number 10 is one of the most important and largest among all the caves of Pandavleni caves.



Jain reliefs in Cave number 11.

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## About Pandavleni

The uniqueness of these Pandavleni caves is their spectacular sculptures and marvelously carved doorways. The caves can be reached through the steps that follow from the base of the hill to the middle of the excavations/ caves. Climbing to caves is not too hard, and the atmosphere around the caves is so pleasant that it enables the visitors to enjoy the beauty of nature peacefully. The hill's peak can be reached within thirty minutes by trekking, but this path is considered dangerous. Intricately stone-cut steps also connect these caves.

Most of the Pandavleni caves are monasteries which also include Chaityagrahas, viharas, and water cisterns. Caves 3, 10, 18, and 20 are the most significant and fascinating caves among these 24 caves that are well known for their magnificent sculptures. Cave 18 is a Chaityagraha which is the most eminent and important one here. Towards the left of this caves group at Pandavleni is the only Chaitya hall (cave 18). It has shrines, icons of Buddha, Jain Teerthankara, Vrishabhdeo, Veer Manibhadraji, and Ambikabevi with the figures of Bodhisattva. The excavation of this cave was initiated in 1st century B.C as indicated by an inscription, and the excavation was completed in the present form during 1st century A.D. The early character of this cave is attested by the imitation of wooden work on an elaborate entrance. The upper part of the entrance is entirely decorative, the Chaitya hall is consecrated, the front portion of rock mass is given shape, and the staircases are provided.

### Cave No.18

The entrance of the 18th cave is lavishly carved with chaitya windows, railings, pillars with octagonal shafts, beams with the end of rafters, bell-shaped members below the stepped abaci. The entrance is mounted by a horseshoe-shaped arch containing ribs interspersed with auspicious emblems and animals. A single guardian stands on the left. The inner hall is apsidal with dimensions 12m in length and 6.5m in width and divided into a central nave and side aisles by a row of 17 pillars. The back of the nave is a stupa placed that measures 3.6m in height.

Chaitya hall has decorative Ghata placed on a stepped pedestal of the pillars. Some of the pillars are plain with just octagonal columns with pot-shaped bases. The drum (Medhi) of a stupa is exceptionally high on which a semi-circular stupa (Anda) with a railing rests. This stupa (Anda) is topped by a Harmika and an inverted stepped pyramidal. On either side of this cave are two monasteries located, cave 17 and 20 that are linked by the access of staircases, preserved on the left side from Cave 18.

Three inscriptions are found in this cave 18. The first inscription is over the entrance door below the arch, which records the gift of the residents' Dhambikagama of Nasik'. The second inscription is found on the moulding above the figure of yaksha that is towards the left side of the doorway. The third inscription is on the octagonal face of two pillars of the hall that states that Chaityahall was built by Maha Hakusiri Bhattapalika, wife of the Royal Officer Aghetyana and daughter of the Royal Officer Arahataya.



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### Cave No. 3

Cave 3 is the largest Vihara among these caves, and it is the most elaborate monastery. It is located towards the right end of the group. It has octagonal columns in the verandah. These are bell-shaped capitals with the images of seated elephants, bulls, and other animals with the riders. The balcony walls have dwarfs to support railing reliefs. The ceiling inside the cave has railings and imitation rafters. The doorway to the hall is framed by a relief representation of a decorated wooden gateway with rolled ends in the form of Torana. On either side of the cave has the guardian figures and panels inscribed above. Small cells with a rock-cut bed in each open off to the big hall. A stupa in relief that female worshippers flank is made on the rear wall of the hall.

Cave 3 was the contribution of Gautami Balasri, the mother of Gautamiputra Satakarni, who was known as the most powerful among Satavahanas. The inscription found here confirms that the work of this cave was started during the reign of Gautamiputra Satakarni and was completed in the 19th year of his son Vasishtiputra Pulumavi. The cave is embellished with paintings by the donation of a village. The cave consists of a hall with cells, pillared verandah, benches in front on three sides, and relief of stupa is on the center of the back wall. The pillars of the verandah are similar to Cave.10 in terms of design and execution. The only difference is the low parapet wall with the figures of yaksha and the railing pattern. These pillars support a parapet imitating a balcony with all the details of wooden rafters and tie-beams.

### Cave No. 10

Cave 10 is a Vihara that is finer and older than Cave.3. It is the contribution of Saka Ushabhadata and his wife Dakshamitra, daughter of King Nahapana of the Kshaharata family. The inscriptions of this family are on the porch wall and the wall of the verandah with large letters. The cave consists of pillars in verandah that are highly decorative with a cell on either side, and there are 16 cells with rock beds on three sides of a spacious hall. Octagonal shafts are resting on Ghata base on a stepped pedestal, crowned by an inverted Ghata followed by compressed Amalaka in oblong frames, inverted stepped abaci. The Buddha figure is cut into the stupa panel into the wall of the hall. The capitals consist of two pairs of addorsed animals like bull, ram, sphinx, lion, and composite figures.

### Other Caves

Cave 15 consists of the inscriptions that mention the last Sathvan King Sri Yajna Satkarni. As the king ruled western Maharashtra thus, it was possible to carve in the early 3rd century A.D.

Cave 16 is known as the high Vihara that has 16 cells.

Cave 17 has an inscription that says Indragnidatta and his son Dharmarakshit excavated this Vihara together with a shrine and the cisterns. Later many additions and alterations were made, and relief of Buddha was added.

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Cave 19 is located very near to cave 20, is a small monastic excavation. It has pierced windows in the porch and decorated railing and arches over the cell doorways. It is one of the earliest excavated caves during the reign of Satavahana King Krishna by a monk from Nashik.

Cave 20 is a monastery that was initially started by an ascetic but was completed during the 7th regnal year of Satavahana King Gautamiputra Yajnasri Satakarni by the wife of a Mahasenapathi Bhavagopa. The cave also witnessed many additions in the later period in the form of a shrine, cells, enlargement of the hall during the 6th-7th centuries A.D with the images of teaching Buddha and Bodhisattvas were added in the shrine. The pot-like bases and capitals of the porch columns are original features of this cave. Under the impressive horseshoe arch is an inscription expressing the gift of villagers to conserve the chaitya.

Cave 23 contains the most significant number of Buddha and Bodhisattva reliefs, female deities, etc. It also has a panel depicting Mahaparinirvana.

### Coin Museum

Coin museum is situated against the backside of the fascinating Ajneri Hill. The museum has a collection of re-searched and well-documented history of Indian currency. It also contains photographs, line drawings, real coins, articles, replica, and a detailed analysis of various currency systems in India for centuries.



Pandavleni caves are 2000-year-old, and it was built by Jain kings.



Cave number 3 has a large vihar fascinating sculptures.



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Trirashmi Buddha Leni (Pandav Leni), Pathardigaon.



The inside view of Pandavleni caves.



Cave 14 has legible inscriptions displayed inside.

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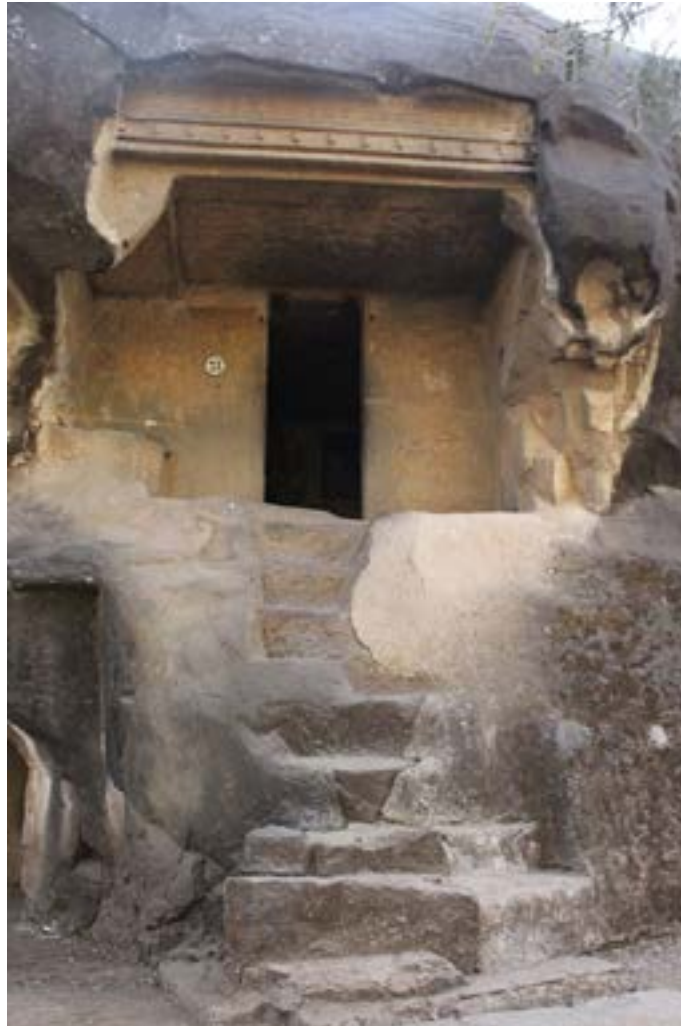
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The caves are located high in the mountains of Trirashmi.



A woman idol carved in stone.



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The caves lodge idols of Buddha and Bodhisattva.



Buddha relief partially damaged.



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Buddha relief is carved inside the cave.



The reliefs sculpture inside the Pandavleni caves.



View of the relief sculptures at Cave no.2.

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The main cave, which is the chaitya prayer hall, has a beautiful stupa.



Top view of stupa.



The pillars of Pandavleni caves support a highly decorated and ornamented parapet with all the details.



Hanuman sculpture engraved on the cave's rocks.

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## Trirashmi Buddha Vihar

Trirashmi Buddha Vihar is located at the foothills of Pandavleni. A Buddhist temple along with a Buddhist training centre. It is also known as Buddha Vihar. One can see a huge Lord Buddha statue in the Abhaya Mudra pose inside the Vihar. The place is so quiet that one can meditate peacefully. The place has image gallery describing the history of Lord Buddha.



Outer view of Buddha Vihar.



Buddha Vihar.



Image displayed at the Buddha Vihar.



Image at Buddha Vihar.



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The description board at Buddha Vihar.



Visitors viewing the photos displayed at Buddha Vihar.



Pleasing idol of Buddha located at the hall of Buddha Vihar.



The over look of Biddha Vihar where the center of hall is beautified with Buddha idol and pillars.

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You can get in touch with Prof. Bibhudutta Baral at [bibhudutta\[at\]nid.edu](mailto:bibhudutta[at]nid.edu)

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