



## Kanheri Caves

**For Prelims:** Kanheri Caves, Buddhism, Vajrayana, Satavahana, Hinayana and Mahayana

**For Mains:** Significance of the Buddhist architecture

### Why in News?

Recently, the Ministry of Tourism has inaugurated the amenities in Kanheri Caves on the occasion of Buddha Purnima.



### What are the Kanheri Caves?

#### ▪ About:

- The Kanheri Caves are a group of caves and rock-cut monuments located on the western outskirts of Mumbai. The caves are located within the forests of the **Sanjay Gandhi National Park**.
- The name **Kanheri** is derived from 'Kanhagiri' in Prakrit and occurs in the **Nasik inscription** of the **Satavahana** ruler Vasisthiputra Pulumavi.
- Kanheri was **mentioned in the travelogues of foreign travellers**.
  - The earliest reference of Kanheri is ascribed to **Fa-Hein** who visited India during **399-411 CE** and later by several other travellers.

#### ▪ Excavations:

- The Kanheri caves comprise more than 110 different rock-cut monolithic excavations and is

one of the largest single excavations in the country.

- The scale and extent of excavations, with its numerous water cisterns, epigraphs, one of the oldest dams, a stupa burial gallery and excellent rainwater harvesting system, **indicate its popularity as a monastic and pilgrim centre.**

▪ **Architecture:**

- These excavations were **primarily undertaken during the [Hinayana phase of Buddhism](#)** but also has several examples of the **Mahayana stylistic architecture** as well as few printings of the [Vajrayana order](#).

▪ **Patronage:**

- Kanheri flourished under the patronage of Satavahana, Traikutakas, Vakatakas and Silaharas and through donations made by the wealthy merchants of the region.

▪ **Significance:**

- Kanheri caves are part of our ancient heritage as they provide evidence of evolution and our past.
- The architectural and engineering marvel of heritage sites like Kanheri caves or the [Ajanta Ellora caves](#) signify the **knowledge about art, engineering, management construction, patience and perseverance that people had back then.**
  - Many such monuments back then took **more than 100 years to be built.**
- Its importance is **heightened by the fact that it is the only centre where a continuous progression of Buddhist faith and architecture is observed** as an unbroken legacy right from 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE to 9<sup>th</sup> century CE is observed here.

## What is Hinayana and Mahayana?

▪ **Hinayan:**

- Literally Lesser vehicle, also known as Abandoned Vehicle or Defective vehicle. It believes in the original teaching of Buddha or Doctrine of elders.
- It does not believe in Idol worship and tries **to attain individual salvation through self discipline and meditation.**
- Theravada is a part of Hinayana sect.

▪ **Mahayana:**

- This sect of **Buddhism believes in the heavenliness of Buddha and believes in Idol Worship.**
- It originated in northern India and Kashmir and then spread east into **Central Asia, East Asia and some areas of Southeast Asia.**
- Mahayana **believes in Mantras.**
- Its main **principles were based on the possibility of universal liberation from suffering for all beings.** That's why, **this sect is called Mahayana (The Great Vehicle).**
- Its principles are **also based on the existence of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas embodying Buddha nature.** It allows salvation through having faith and committing oneself to Buddha.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions

**Q. With reference to the religious history of India, consider the following statements: (2016)**

1. The concept of Bodhisattva is central to Hinayana sect of Buddhism.
2. Bodhisattva is a compassionate one on his way to enlightenment
3. Bodhisattva delays achieving his own salvation to help all sentient beings on their path to it.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only  
(b) 2 and 3 only

- (c) 2 only  
(d) 1, 2 and 3

**Ans: (b)**

**Exp:**

- The term Bodhisattva is literally a living being (Sattva) who aspires to enlightenment (Bodhi) and carries out altruistic practices.
- Bodhisattva ideal is central to the Mahayana Buddhist tradition and is portrayed as the individual who seeks enlightenment both for him or herself and for others. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct and statement 3 is correct.**
- Compassion, an empathetic sharing of the sufferings of others, is the Bodhisattva's greatest characteristic. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

**Source: PIB**

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