

## = Elephanta Caves =

Elephanta caves are a network of sculpted caves located on Elephanta Island , or Gharapuri ( literally " the city of caves " ) in Mumbai Harbour , 10 kilometres ( 6 @. @ 2 mi ) to the east of the city of Mumbai in the Indian state of Maharashtra . The island , located on an arm of the Arabian Sea , consists of two groups of caves ? the first is a large group of five Hindu caves , the second , a smaller group of two Buddhist caves . The Hindu caves contain rock cut stone sculptures , representing the Shaiva Hindu sect , dedicated to the Lord Shiva .

The rock cut architecture of the caves has been dated to between the 5th and 8th centuries , although the identity of the original builders is still a subject of debate . The caves are hewn from solid basalt rock . All the caves were also originally painted in the past , but now only traces remain .

The main cave ( Cave 1 , or the Great Cave ) was a Hindu place of worship until Portuguese rule began in 1534 , after which the caves suffered severe damage . This cave was renovated in the 1970s after years of neglect , and was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987 to preserve the artwork . It is currently maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India ( ASI ) .

## = = Geography = =

Elephanta Island , or Gharapuri , is about 11 km ( 6 @. @ 8 mi ) east of the Apollo Bunder ( Bunder in Marathi means a " pier for embarkation and disembarkation of passengers and goods " ) on the Mumbai Harbour and 10 km ( 6 @. @ 2 mi ) south of Pir Pal in Trombay . The island covers about 10 km<sup>2</sup> ( 3 @. @ 9 sq mi ) at high tide and about 16 km<sup>2</sup> ( 6 @. @ 2 sq mi ) at low tide . Gharapuri is small village on the south side of the island . The Elephanta Caves can be reached by a ferry from the Gateway of India , Mumbai , which has the nearest airport and train station . The cave is closed on Monday .

The island is 2 @. @ 4 km ( 1 @. @ 5 mi ) in length with two hills that rise to a height of about 150 m ( 490 ft ) . A deep ravine cuts through the heart of the island from north to south . On the west , the hill rises gently from the sea and stretches east across the ravine and rises gradually to the extreme east to a height of 173 m ( 568 ft ) . This hill is known as the Stupa hill . Forest growth with clusters of mango , tamarind , and karanj trees cover the hills with scattered palm trees . Rice fields are seen in the valley . The fore shore is made up of sand and mud with mangrove bushes on the fringe . Landing quays sit near three small hamlets known as Set Bunder in the north @-@ west , Mora Bunder in the northeast , and Gharapuri or Raj Bunder in the south .

The two hills of the island , the western and the eastern , have five rock @-@ cut caves in the western part and a brick stupa on the eastern hill on its top composed of two caves with a few rock @-@ cut cisterns . One of the caves on the eastern hill is unfinished . It is a protected island with a buffer zone according to a Notification issued in 1985 , which also includes " a prohibited area " that stretches 1 kilometre ( 0 @. @ 62 mi ) from the shoreline .

## = = History = =

Since no inscriptions on any of the island have been discovered , the ancient history of the island is conjectural , at best . Pandavas , the heroes of the Hindu epic Mahabharata , and Banasura , the demon devotee of Shiva , are both credited with building temples or cut caves to live . Local tradition holds that the caves are not man @-@ made .

The Elephanta caves are " of unknown date and attribution " . Art historians have dated the caves in the range of late 5th to late 8th century AD . Archaeological excavations have unearthed a few Kshatrapa coins dated to 4th century AD . The known history is traced only to the defeat of Mauryan rulers of Konkan by the Badami Chalukyas emperor Pulakesi II ( 609 ? 642 ) in a naval battle , in 635 AD . Elephanta was then called Puri or Purika , and served as the capital of the Konkan Mauryas . Some historians attribute the caves to the Konkan Mauryas , dating them to the mid @-@ 6th century , though others refute this claim saying a relatively small kingdom like the Konkan

Mauryas could not undertake " an almost superhuman excavation effort , " which was needed to carve the rock temples from solid rock and could not have the skilled labor to produce such " high quality " sculpture .

Some other historians attribute the construction to the Kalachuris ( late 5th to 6th century ) , who may have had a feudal relationship with the Konkan Mauryas . In an era where polytheism was prevalent , the Elephanta main cave dedicates the monotheism of the Pashupata Shaivism sect , a sect to which Kalachuris as well as Konkan Mauryas belonged .

The Chalukyas , who defeated the Kalachuris as well as the Konkan Mauryas , are also believed by some to be creators of the main cave , in the mid @-@ 7th century . The Rashtrakutas are the last claimants to the creation of the main cave , approximated to the early 7th to late 8th century . The Elephanta Shiva cave resembles in some aspects the 8th @-@ century Rashtrakuta rock @-@ temple Kailash at Ellora . The Trimurti of Elephanta showing the three faces of Shiva is akin to the Trimurti of Brahma , Vishnu and Mahesh ( Shiva ) , which was the royal insignia of the Rashtrakutas . The Nataraja and Ardhanarishvara sculptures are also attributed to the Rashtrakutas .

Later , Elephanta was ruled by another Chalukyan dynasty , and then by Gujarat Sultanate , who surrendered it to the Portuguese in 1534 . By then , Elephanta was called Gharapuri , which denotes a hill settlement . The name is still used in the local Marathi language . The Portuguese named the island " Elephanta Island " in honour of a huge rock @-@ cut black stone statue of an elephant that was then installed on a mound , a short distance east of Gharapuri village . The elephant now sits in the Jijamata Udyaan zoo in Mumbai .

Portuguese rule saw a decline in the Hindu population on the island and the abandonment of the Shiva cave ( main cave ) as a regular Hindu place of worship , though worship on Mahashivratri , the festival of Shiva , continued and still does . The Portuguese did considerable damage to the sanctuaries . Portuguese soldiers used the reliefs of Shiva in the main cave for target practice , sparing only the Trimurti sculpture . They also removed an inscription related to the creation of the caves . While some historians solely blame the Portuguese for the destruction of the caves , others also cite water @-@ logging and dripping rainwater as additional damaging factors . The Portuguese left in 1661 as per the marriage treaty of Charles II of England and Catherine of Braganza , daughter of King John IV of Portugal . This marriage shifted possession of the islands to the British Empire , as part of Catherine 's dowry to Charles .

Though the main cave was restored in the 1970s , other caves , including three consisting of important sculptures , are still badly damaged . The caves were designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987 as per the cultural criteria of UNESCO : the caves " represent a masterpiece of human creative genius " and " bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared " .

= = Overview = =

The island has two groups of caves in the rock @-@ cut architectural style . The caves are hewn from solid basalt rock . All caves were painted in the past , but only traces remain . The larger group of caves , which consists of five caves on the western hill of the island , is well known for its Hindu sculptures . The primary cave , numbered as Cave 1 , is about 1 @.@ 5 km ( 0 @.@ 93 mi ) up a hillside , facing the ocean . It is a rock @-@ cut temple complex that covers an area of 5 @,@ 600 m2 ( 60 @,@ 000 sq ft ) , and consists of a main chamber , two lateral chambers , courtyards , and subsidiary shrines . It is 39 metres ( 128 ft ) deep from the front entrance to the back . The temple complex is the abode of Shiva , depicted in widely celebrated carvings which reveal his several forms and acts .

On the eastern part of the island , on the Stupa Hill , there is a small group of caves that house Buddhist monuments . This hill is named after the religious Stupa monument that they display . One of the two caves is incomplete , while the other contains a Stupa made in brick .

= = Main cave = =

The main cave , also called the Shiva cave , Cave 1 , or the Great Cave , is 27 metres ( 89 ft ) square in plan with a hall ( mandapa ) . At the entrance are four doors , with three open porticoes and an aisle at the back . Pillars , six in each row , divide the hall into a series of smaller chambers . The roof of the hall has concealed beams supported by stone columns joined together by capitals . The cave entrance is aligned with the north - south axis , unusual for a Shiva shrine ( normally east - west ) . The northern entrance to the cave , which has 1 @, @ 000 steep steps , is flanked by two panels of Shiva dated to the Gupta period . The left panel depicts Yogishvara ( The Lord of Yoga ) and the right shows Nataraja ( Shiva as the Lord of Dance ) . The central Shiva shrine ( see 16 in plan below ) is a free @-@ standing square cell with four entrances , located in the right section of the main hall . Smaller shrines are located at the east and west ends of the caves . The eastern sanctuary serves as a ceremonial entrance .

Each wall has large carvings of Shiva , each more than 5 metres ( 16 ft ) in height . The central Shiva relief Trimurti is located on the south wall and is flanked by Ardhanarisvara ( a half @-@ man , half @-@ woman representation of Shiva ) on its left and Gangadhara to its right , which denotes the River Ganges ' descent from Shiva 's matted locks . Other carvings related to the legend of Shiva are also seen in the main hall at strategic locations in exclusive cubicles ; these include Kalyanasundaramurti , depicting Shiva 's marriage to the goddess Parvati , Andhakasuravadamurti or Andhakasuramardana , the slaying of the demon Andhaka by Shiva , Shiva @-@ Parvati on Mount Kailash ( the abode of Shiva ) , and Ravananugraha , depicting the demon @-@ king Ravana shaking Kailash .

The main cave blends Chalukyan architectural features such as massive figures of the divinities , guardians , and square pillars with custom capitals with Gupta artistic characteristics , like the depiction of mountains and clouds and female hairstyles .

Layout :

= = = Shiva @-@ Parvati on Kailash and Ravana lifting Kailash = = =

The carving on the south wall to the east of the portico depicts Shiva and Parvati seated on their abode Mount Kailash . The four @-@ armed Shiva is seen with a crown and a disc behind it ( all damaged ) , the sacred thread across his chest , and a dressing gown covering up to the knee . Parvati , dressed in her finery with her hair falling to the front , looks away . Behind her at the right is a woman attendant holding the child , identified with her son Kartikeya , the war @-@ god . Many male and female attendants are seen behind the main figures . Shiva 's attendant , the skeleton @-@ like Bhiringi , is seated at his feet . Other figures , not distinct , depict , among others , a royal @-@ looking tall person , ascetics , a fat figure , a dwarf , a bull ( the mount of Shiva ) , features of a Garuda , and two monkeys . The scenic beauty of the mountain is sculpted with the sky background amidst heavenly beings showering flowers on Shiva @-@ Parvati . This scene is interpreted as a gambling scene , where Parvati is angry as Shiva cheats in a game of dice .

The carved panel facing this one is a two @-@ level depiction of Ravana lifting Kailash . The upper scene is Mount Kailash , where Shiva and Parvati are seated . The eight @-@ armed , three @-@ eyed Shiva wears headgear with a crescent and disc behind it . Most of his arms are broken , two of them resting on attendants ' heads . The Parvati figure , seated facing Shiva , remains only as a trunk . The panel is flanked by door keepers . Attendants of Shiva are also seen in the relief but mostly in a damaged state . Bhiringi is seated near Shiva 's feet and to his left is the elephant @-@ headed son of Shiva , Ganesha . In this ensemble , the ten @-@ headed demon @-@ king Ravana is seen , with only one head left unscathed , and out of his twenty arms , only a few are discernible . Around Ravana are several demons . Numerous figures are seen above Shiva : the god Vishnu , riding his mount Garuda , to his left ; a skeleton @-@ figure ; and in a recess , Parvati 's mount , a tiger is depicted .

A legend relates to both these panels . Once , Parvati was annoyed with Shiva . At this moment , Ravana , who was passing by Mount Kailash , found it as an obstruction to his movement . Upset , Ravana shook it vigorously and as a result , Parvati got scared and hugged Shiva . Enraged by Ravana 's arrogance , Shiva stamped down on Ravana , who sang praises of Shiva to free him of

his misery and turned into an ardent devotee of Shiva . Another version states that Shiva was pleased with Ravana for restoring Parvati 's composure and blessed him .

= = = Trimurti , Gangadhara and Ardhanarishvara = = =

Described as a " masterpiece of Gupta @-@ Chalukyan art " , the most important sculpture in the caves is the Trimurti , carved in relief at the back of the cave facing the entrance , on the north @-@ south axis . It is also known as Trimurti Sadashiva and Maheshmurti . The image , 6 m ( 20 ft ) in height , depicts a three @-@ headed Shiva , representing Panchamukha Shiva . The three heads are said to represent three essential aspects of Shiva : creation , protection , and destruction . The right half @-@ face ( west face ) shows him as a young person with sensuous lips , embodying life and its vitality . In his hand he holds an object resembling a rosebud , depicting the promise of life and creativity . This face is closest to that of Brahma , the creator or Uma or Vamadeva , the feminine side of Shiva and creator of joy and beauty . The left half @-@ face ( east face ) is that of a moustached young man , displaying anger . This is Shiva as the terrifying Aghora or Bhairava , the one whose anger can engulf the entire world in flames , leaving only ashes behind . This is also known as Rudra @-@ Shiva , the Destroyer . The central face , benign and meditative , resembles the preserver Vishnu . This is Tatpurusha , " master of positive and negative principles of existence and preserver of their harmony " or Shiva as the yogi Yogeshwar in deep meditation praying for the preservation of humanity . The aspects Sadyojata and Ishana ( not carved ) faces are considered to be at the back and top of the sculpture . The Trimurti sculpture , with the Gateway of India in the background , has been adopted as the logo of the Maharashtra Tourism Department ( MTDC ) .

The Gangadhara image to the right of the Trimurti is an ensemble of divinities assembled around the central figures of Shiva and Parvati , the former bearing the River Ganges as she descends from heaven . The carving is 4 m ( 13 ft ) wide and 5 @. @ 207 m ( 17 @. @ 08 ft ) high . The image is highly damaged , particularly the lower half of Shiva seen seated with Parvati , who is shown with four arms , two of which are broken . From the crown , a cup with a triple @-@ headed female figure ( with broken arms ) , representing the three sacred rivers Ganges , Yamuna , and Sarasvati , is depicted . Shiva is sculpted and bedecked with ornaments . The arms hold a coiling serpent whose hood is seen above his left shoulder . Another hand ( partly broken ) gives the semblance of Shiva hugging Parvati , with a head of matted hair . There is a small snake on the right hand and a tortoise close to the neck , with a bundle tied to the back . An ornamented drapery covers his lower torso , below the waist . Parvati is carved to the left of Shiva with a coiffured hair dress , fully bedecked with ornaments and jewellery , also fully draped , with her right hand touching the head of a female attendant who carries Parvati 's dress case . The gods Brahma and Indra , with their mystic regalia and mounts , are shown to the right of Shiva ; Vishnu , riding his mount Garuda , is shown to the left of Parvati . Many other details are defaced but a kneeling figure in the front is inferred to be the king who ordered the image to be carved . There are many divinities and attendant females at the back . The whole setting is under the sky and cloud scenes , with men and women , all dressed , shown showering flowers on the deities .

In the chamber to the east of the Trimurti is the four @-@ armed Ardhanarishvara carving . This image , which is 5 @. @ 11 m ( 16 @. @ 8 ft ) in height , has a headdress ( double @-@ folded ) with two pleats draped towards the female head ( Parvati ) and the right side ( Shiva ) depicting curled hair and a crescent . The female figure has all the ornamentation ( broad armlets and long bracelets , a large ring in the ear , jewelled rings on the fingers ) but the right male figure has drooping hair , armlets and wristlets . One of his hands rests on Nandi ? s left horn , Shiva 's mount , which is fairly well preserved . The pair of hands at the back is also bejewelled ; the right hand of the male holds a serpent , while the left hand of the female holds a mirror . The front left hand is broken but conjectured as holding the robe of the goddess . The central figure is surrounded by divinities .

= = = Shiva slaying Andhaka and Wedding of Shiva = = =

The engraved panel in the north end of the aisle is considered to be a unique sculpture , and shows

Bhairava , or Virabhadra , a frightful form of Shiva . In the carved panel Shiva 's consort is seen sitting next to him , looking terrified . A female attendant is next to her . The central figure , which is much ruined below the waist , is 3 @. @ 5 m ( 11 ft ) high and posed as if running . His headgear has a ruff on the back , a skull and cobra over the forehead , and the crescent high on the right . His facial expression is of intense anger discerned from his furrowed brow , swollen eyes , and tusks . The legs and five of the eight arms are broken , attributed to Portuguese vandalism . The smaller broken image Andhaka is seen below Bhairava 's image . It is interpreted that Shiva is spearing him with the front right hand , as conjectured by the spear seen hanging without any hold . Also seen is the back hand lifted up and holding an elephant 's skin as a cover ; the elephant 's head , carved tusk , and trunk are seen hanging from the left hand . The second left hand depicts a snake coiled round it . The hand holds a bowl to collect the blood dripping from the slain Andhaka . Furthermore , pieces of a male and two female forms , figures of two ascetics , a small figure in front , a female figure , and two dwarfs are also seen in the carved panel . An unusual sculpture seen above the head of the main figure of Shiva is of a " very wide bottle with a curved groove in the middle of it " , which can interpreted variously as : the aum or the linga or a Shiva shrine .

The niche image carved on the south wall is an ensemble of divinities assembled around the central figures of Shiva and Parvati shown getting married ( Kalyanasundara icon ) . Parvati is seen standing to Shiva 's right , the ordained place for a Hindu bride at the wedding . The carvings are substantially damaged ; only one of Shiva 's four hands is fully seen and the right leg is missing . Shiva has a headdress with a shining disc attached to it . His garments are well @-@ draped , and well @-@ tied at the waist . The sacred thread is seen across his chest . Parvati is carved as a perfect figure with coiffured hair dress , well adorned with jewellery and is draped tightly to display depressions below the waist only . She is seen with a coy expression and is led by her father who has his right hand on her shoulder . Even though both her hands are damaged , it is inferred that her left hand clasped Shiva 's right hand as a mark of holy alliance . Brahma is sitting as the officiating priest for the marriage . Vishnu is witness to the marriage . Mena , the mother of Parvati , is seen standing next to Vishnu . The moon @-@ god Chandra , seen with a wig and a crescent , is standing behind Parvati holding a circular pot with nectar for the marriage ceremony . Just above the main images , a galaxy of divinities , bearded sages , apsaras ( nymphs ) , Vidyadharas , Yakshis , Gandharvas , Bhringi , and other male and female attendants are seen as witness to the marriage ceremony showering flowers on the divine couple .

= = = Yogishvara and Nataraja = = =

The panel to the east of the north portico is Shiva in a Yogic position called Yogisvara , Mahayogi , Dharmaraja and Lakulish . Resembling a Buddha , Shiva is in a dilapidated condition with only two broken arms . Shiva is seated in padmasana yogic posture ( cross legged ) on a lotus carried by two N?gas . His crown is carved with details adorned by a crescent , a round frill at the back , and hair curls dropping on either side of the shoulders . His face is calm in mediation , his eyes half @-@ closed . This represents Shiva in penance sitting amidst the Himalayan mountains after the death of his first wife Sati , who was later reborn as Parvati . He is surrounded by divinities in the sky and attendants below . Also seen is a plantain with three leaves already open and one opening , as well as a sunflower blossom . These are flanked by two attendants . Other figures discerned from a study of the broken images are : Vishnu riding Garuda on a plantain leaf ; the Sun @-@ god Surya riding a fully saddled horse ( head missing ) ; a saint with a rosary ; two female figures in the sky draped up to their thighs ; a faceless figure of the moon with a water container ; three identical figures of a male flanked by two females ; the skeleton of a sage ; Brahma ( without one arm ) riding a swan ; and Indra without his mount ( elephant missing ) .

The panel carving in the west niche opposite Yogishvara depicts Shiva as Nataraja performing the Tandava ( cosmic dance ) . The niche is 4 m ( 13 ft ) wide and 3 @. @ 4 m ( 11 ft ) high and set low on the wall . He wears well @-@ decorated headgear . The Shiva image displays a dance pose and had ten arms , but the first right and third left hands are missing . The remaining first right arm is held across the breast and touches the left side , the second right hand that is seen damaged with

an out @-@ flaying pose is broken at the elbow . The third arm is damaged at the elbow , and the fourth is also broken but inferred to have held a Khatvanga ( skull @-@ club ) . The left arms , seen hanging , are damaged near the wrists . The third hand is bent ( but broken ) towards Parvati standing on the side and the fourth hand is raised up . The right thigh ( broken ) is lifted up , and the left leg is not seen at all , the elaborate armlets are well @-@ preserved and a skirt round the waist is tied by a ribbon . A tall figurine of Parvati stands to the left of Shiva , which is also seen partly broken but well bejewelled . An airborne female figure is seen behind Parvati . Other figures seen in the relief are : Vishnu riding a Garuda ; Indra riding his elephant ; the elephant @-@ headed Ganesha ; Kartikeya ; Bhrngi ; sages and attendants .

= = = Main cave shrine = = =

The central shrine is a free @-@ standing square cell , with entrances on each of its sides . Each door is flanked by two dvarapalas ( gate keepers ) . The Linga , the symbol of Shiva in union with the Yoni , and the symbol of Parvati together symbolise the supreme unity that is deified by the shrine . The Linga is set on a raised platform above the floor of the shrine by 1 @.@ 8 m ( 5 ft 11 in ) . Six steps lead to this level from the floor level . The height of the eight dvarapalas varies from 4 @.@ 521 ? 4 @.@ 623 m ( 14 @.@ 83 ? 15 @.@ 17 ft ) . All are in a damaged condition except those at the southern door to the shrine . The southern gate statue has many unusual features ? unusual headgear ; a large skull above the forehead ; lips parted with protruding teeth ; statues adorned with a single bead necklace , earrings , plain twisted armlets and thick wristlets ; a stooped right shoulder ; a globe held at navel level ; the robe is held at the right thigh by the left hand , and the legs are shapeless .

= = = East wing = = =

Several courtyards to the east and west of the main cave are blocked , though there is a 17 m ( 56 ft ) -wide courtyard that is accessible by entering the eastern part and climbing nine steps . A temple on the southern wall of the court depicts a well @-@ preserved fresco . The circular pedestal seen in the courtyard in front of the Shiva 's shrine near the east end , in the open area , is said to be the seat of Nandi , Shiva 's mount .

On each side of the steps leading to the temple @-@ cave portico is a winged lion , or leogriff , each seated with a raised forepaw . The portico has chambers at each end and a Linga @-@ shrine at the back . Five low steps and a threshold lead into the central Linga @-@ shrine which is 4 @.@ 2 m ( 14 ft ) wide and 5 m ( 16 ft ) deep and has a circumambulatory path ( Pradakshina @-@ path ) around it . At the back of the portico , near the east end , is a gigantic statue of a four @-@ armed doorkeeper with two attendant demons . At the north end is a standing figure holding a trident . His left hand rests on a defaced demon @-@ figure . The west wall depicts the Ashta @-@ Matrikas ( eight mother goddesses ) , flanked by Kartikeya and Ganesha , the sons of Shiva . Some of Matrikas are depicted with children , but all of them are shown by their respective mounts ( bull , swan , peacock , a Garuda , etc . ) which identify them . At the east end of the portico is another chapel with a plain interior and sunken floor . Water drips in this chapel .

= = = West wing = = =

The west wing , entered through the main cave , is in a semi @-@ ruined state . It has a small chapel and a cistern enclosed within the pillared cave , which is believed to be Buddhist . Another shrine to the west of the courtyard , with a portico , has carvings of Shiva in a yogic pose seated on a lotus carried by ? two fat , heavy , wigged figures ? . This carving also depicts a three @-@ faced bearded Bramha and several other figurines . Entering through the back door of the portico is a cave enshrined with a multifaceted Shiva Linga erected over roughly hewn salunkhs . At the door entrance on both flanks , statues of gatekeepers standing over demons and two fat , poised figures are seen . On the southern side of the door is an ensemble of a number of statues . Prominent

among these is the Shiva carving , which is depicted with six arms and the third eye in the forehead . Though in a partly ruined state , the carving shows Shiva with an ornamented crown fixed with a crescent , seen carrying a cobra in the left hand , a club in another hand , and discerned to be in a dancing pose . Next to this image are a figure under a plantain tree and a Shiva image ( Yogishvara ) seated on a lotus . Also seen in the panel are a male figure riding a bull with a bell fastened to its neck , a female figure and another carving to left of Shiva , a female figure with a jewel on her forehead with neatly looped headdress , Indra riding an elephant , Vishnu with four arms , holding a discus in one of his left hands and riding on Garuda flanked by a small flying figure , and a male figure with crescent in his hair .

= = Other notable caves = =

To the south @-@ east of the Great Cave is the second excavation , which faces east @-@ northeast . It includes a chapel at the north end . The front of this cave is completely destroyed ; only fragments of some semi @-@ columns remain . The interior has suffered water damage . The portico is 26 m ( 85 ft ) long and 11 m ( 36 ft ) deep . The chapel is supported by eight eight @-@ cornered columns and two demi @-@ columns and is irregular in shape . At the back of the portico are three chambers ; the central one has an altar and a water channel ( pranalika ) , though the Linga is lost . The shrine door has some traces of sculpture ( a boy , a fat figure , alligators on the frieze , and broken animal figures at the head of a doorjamb ) . The door @-@ keepers of the shrine are now in fragments .

A little to the south of the last cave is another cave in worse condition , with water damage . It is a portico in which each end probably had a chapel or room with pillars in front . Two of them have cells at the back . The central door at the back of the portico leads to a damaged shrine . The shrine door has door @-@ keepers at each side , leaning on dwarfs with flying figures over the head , with door @-@ keepers and demons on the jamb and architrave . The shrine is a plain room 6 m ( 20 ft ) deep by 5 @. @ 7 m ( 19 ft ) wide with a low altar , holding a Linga . South of this cave is a cavern that may be used as a cistern .

Above these caves is a tiger sculpture , which was worshipped as the tiger goddess Vaghesheri . This sculpture may be a guardian of the north entrance of Cave 1 . A Linga is also found near a small pond at top of the hill . Sculptures depicting a stone with a sun and a moon and a mother suckling a child ( now moved ) were also found nearby .

Across the top of the ravine from Cave 1 is large hall known as Sitabai 's Temple ( cave ) . The portico has four pillars and two pilasters . The hall has 3 chambers at the back , the central one a shrine and the rest for priests ( both are plain rooms ) . The door of the central shrine has pilasters and a frieze , with the threshold having lion figures at the end . The shrine has an altar , a water channel , and hole in the centre , in which a statue of Parvati may have been worshipped . A 17th @-@ century record states that " this cave [ has ] a beautiful gate with a porch of exquisitely wrought marble " and two idols , one of goddess Vetāl Candi and a head being in a large square seat .

Passing along the face of the eastern hill to the north of Sitabai 's cave is a small Hindu excavation with a veranda , which was probably to be three cells , but was abandoned following the discovery of a flaw in the rock . Towards the east of hill is a dry pond , with large artificial boulders and Buddhist cisterns along its banks . At the end of the north spur of the main hill is a mound that resembles a Buddhist stupa .

= = Preservation = =

The threats to Elephanta Caves have been identified as the following : developmental pressures ( mainly due to its location within the Mumbai harbour ) , anthropogenic pressure due to growth of population of the communities residing on the island , industrial growth of the port facilities close to the island , no risk preparedness plan to address natural calamities such as earthquake , cyclones and terrorist attacks , unsustainable tourism and tourist facilities on the island , and poor

management of the heritage monument .

Preservation of Elephanta Island as a whole with its monuments has been ensured both through legislation and by physical restoration of the caves and its sculptures . The basic legislations enacted are : The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act of 1958 and Rules ( 1959 ) ; The Elephanta Island ( Protected Monument ) Rules of 1957 , which prohibits mining , quarrying , blasting , excavation and other operations near the monument ; the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act promulgated in 1972 with its Rules promulgated in 1973 ; a Notification issued in 1985 declaring the entire island and a 1 @-@ kilometre ( 0 @.@ 62 mi ) area from the shore as " a prohibited area " ; a series of Maharashtra State Government environmental acts protecting the site ; the 1966 Regional and Town Planning Act ; and the 1995 Heritage Regulations for Greater Bombay .

The Archaeological Survey of India ( ASI ) , Aurangabad Circle , on the basis of the above legislation and rules , maintain and manage the monuments . The physical measures undertaken for conservation cover include stabilisation of the rock face , construction of supports to the cave structures where pillars have collapsed , and consolidation of cave floors and construction of a parapet wall surrounding the site . In addition , visitor facilities at the site have been upgraded ( such as toilet facilities , railing construction , pathways , and a flight of steps from the jetty to the caves ) . An on @-@ site museum has been established and a conservation plan has been put in place . Overall , conservation of the property is stated to be good . The site receives approximately 25 @,@ 000 visitors per month . Public information brochures are also available at the venue of the monuments . During the World Heritage Day on 18 April and World Heritage Week between 19 and 25 November there are special events held at the caves . Another popular event organised is an annual traditional dance festival that attracts many visitors .

After declaring the caves a World Heritage Site , UNESCO granted \$ 100 @,@ 000 to document the site 's history and draw up a site plan . A part of the grant was used for conservation of the caves . Based on assessments by UNESCO , management plans include : better communication and collaboration between the ASI , on @-@ site staff , and other responsible government departments ; improved public information and awareness programs ; monitoring environmental impact of tourists on the cave and island environment ; greater attention to the maintenance of the rocks to address water leakages into the caves ; and daily monitoring of both structural and chemical conservation measures .

The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage ( INTACH ) is also involved with the Archaeological Survey of India in improving the local conditions at the cave site . A book has been published jointly by UNESCO , INTACH and the Government of India which presents a comprehensive site plan for restoration and a brief history of each sculpture constructed inside the caves .