



## Rock Art (Part-1)

### About

- Rock Arts are ancient, human-made markings/paintings/sculptures made on natural stone.
- Rock art consists of paintings, drawings, engravings, stencils, prints, bas-relief carvings and figures in rock shelters and caves, on boulders and platforms.
- India houses one of the largest, richest and most diverse repositories of rock art.
  - **Prehistoric rock paintings, rock-cut architectures of caves & temples and sculptures** carved out of rock are some examples of rock art in India.
- It is often divided into three forms:
  - **Petroglyphs:** These are carved into the rock surface
  - **Pictographs:** These are painted onto the surface
  - **Earth figures:** These are formed on the ground

### Significance of Rock Art

- **Spiritual and cultural heritage:** Rock art reflects humankind's rich spiritual and cultural heritage and has great significance to its creators and their descendants.
  - It also has great significance to humanity generally. Its beauty, its symbolism, and its rich narrative means that it is widely appreciated and treasured internationally, regionally, and locally.
- **Diverse cultural traditions:** Its continued existence is important to help global communities recognize and learn about the diverse cultural traditions, their ancient origins and relationships to the landscapes they have inhabited.
  - Tribal communities rely on the rock arts for deriving their cultural connections by following the customs engraved in the rock art.
- **Source of history:** The rock arts serve, as a **“historical record”**, detailing the hunting habits and ways of life of the local communities.



## Prehistoric Rock Paintings

- **Prehistoric:** It can be defined as events that occurred before the existence of written records in a given culture or society.
  - The prehistoric paintings were generally executed on rocks and these rock engravings are called **Petroglyphs**.
- **Discovery in India:** The first discovery of rock paintings in India was made in **1867-68** by an archaeologist, **Archibald Carlleyle**.
  - Remnants of rock paintings have been found on the walls of the caves situated in several districts of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttarakhand and Bihar.
- **Major phases:** There are three major phases of prehistoric paintings:
  - Upper Paleolithic Paintings
  - Mesolithic Paintings
  - Chalcolithic Paintings
- **Petroglyphs:**
  - Petroglyphs depicting hunting scenes, processions of animals and dancing human figures are the main themes in the rock art of Jammu and Kashmir.
  - In Uttarakhand, paintings of rows of anthropomorphic figures are a common motif.
  - South India has both pictographs as well as petroglyphs.
  - Petroglyphs are also seen in Karnataka where carvings depicting figures of humped cattle, deer and hunting scenes are found on boulders.

## Upper Palaeolithic Paintings

- **Upper Palaeolithic period:** The Upper Paleolithic Age began 40,000 years ago.
  - In this time period, the primitive man made greatest cultural progress. It was characterized by the **emergence of regional stone tool industries** with tools made up of **bone, teeth, and horns**.
  - In India its sites were discovered in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Central Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, southern Uttar Pradesh, and South Bihar Plateau.
- **Painting techniques:** The paintings of the Upper Palaeolithic phase are linear representations, in green and dark red.
  - The walls of the rock shelter caves were made of quartzite and hence, minerals were used for pigments.
    - One of the most common minerals was **ochre** or **geru (Haematite) mixed with lime and water**.
  - They used different minerals to make colours like red, white, yellow and green.
    - The white, dark red and green were used to depict large animals.
    - Red was used for hunters and the green mostly for dancers.
- **Depiction of animals:** The paintings mainly depict huge animal figures, such as bisons, elephants, tigers, rhinos and boars besides stick-like human figures.

## Mesolithic Paintings

- **Mesolithic period:** The phase describes specific cultures that fall between the Paleolithic and the Neolithic Periods.
  - While the start and end dates of the Mesolithic Period vary by geographical region, it dates approximately from **10,000 BCE to 8,000 BCE**.
  - This period mainly saw the use of red colour.

- It has a larger variety of themes but the paintings are smaller in size.
- **Themes of paintings:** The **hunting scenes predominant in the period.** The paintings depicts:
  - People hunting in groups
  - Hunting armed with barbed spears, pointed sticks, arrows and bows.
  - Primitive men with traps and snares probably to catch animals.
- **Depiction of animals:** The Mesolithic artists **loved to paint animals.**
  - Depicted animals include elephants, bison, tiger, boar, deer, antelope, leopard, panther, rhinoceros, fish, frog, lizard, squirrel and at times birds.
- **Social life:** The young, old, children and women equally find place in these paintings.
  - In many of the rock-shelters we find hand prints, fist prints, and dots made by the fingertips.

### Bhimbetka Rock Paintings

- **Location:** It is located south of Bhopal in **Vidhyan ranges** of Madhya Pradesh with rock shelters having more than **500 rock paintings.**
  - The caves of Bhimbetka were discovered in 1957-58 by V. S. Wakankar
  - It was declared a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) in 2003.
- **Timeline:** The oldest paintings are estimated to be **30,000 years old** and have survived due to its location deep inside the caves.
  - There is marked continuity in occupancy of the caves from **100,000 BC to 1000 AD** with many paintings being painted on top of another.
    - In some places, there are as many as **20 layers of paintings**, one on top of another
  - The paintings at Bhimbetka belong to Upper Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Chalcolithic, early historic and medieval period.
    - However, most of the paintings belong to the **Mesolithic age.**
- **Painting techniques:** Various colours like red ochre, purple, brown, white, yellow and green are used, obtained from natural resources.
  - Haematite ores were used for red colour and white probably from Limestone.
  - Green prepared from a green coloured rock called Chalcedony.
  - The Brushes were made of plant fibre.
- **Themes of the paintings:** Every-day life of prehistoric men often in **stick-like human figures.**
  - Various animals like elephant, bison, deer, peacock and snake are depicted.
  - Hunting scenes and war scenes with armed men.
  - Simple geometric designs and symbols.

### Chalcolithic Paintings

- **Chalcolithic period:** The period between the late Neolithic and the early Bronze Age, during which human societies started experimenting with **metal tools** and slowly **reorganizing their societies**, is called the Chalcolithic period.
- The Chalcolithic period saw the increase in the number of paintings using the **green and yellow colour.**
  - The set of paintings from this period are at **Narsingharh in Maharashtra.**

- These cave paintings show skins of spotted deer left drying.
- Thousands of years ago, paintings and drawings had already appeared on the seals of Harappan civilization.

▪ **Predominant themes:** Most of the paintings concentrate on depicting **battle scenes**.

- There are many paintings of men riding horses and elephants with men carrying bow and arrow, indicating preparedness for skirmishes.
- Other paintings from this period also have depictions of **musical instruments** like the harp.
- Some of the paintings have **complex geometrical shapes** like the spiral, rhomboid and circle.

▪ **Paintings of Chhattisgarh:** Chhattisgarh is also home to the variety of caves in the district of Kanker like the shelter of Udkuda, Garagodi, Khaperkheda, Gotitola, Kulgaon, etc depicting the human figurines, animals, palms, prints, bullock carts etc.

- Some of the paintings from the later period are in the **Jogimara caves** in the Ramgarh hills in Surguja district of Chhattisgarh.

- **Jogimara cave paintings** were created before the Ajanta and Bagh Caves and belong to Pre-Buddha caves.

- These are dated to be painted around **1000 BCE**.

- Similar paintings can be seen in the **Ghodasar and Kohabaur rock art sites** in the district of Koriya.
- Another interesting site is in **Chitwa Dongri (Durg district)** where a chinese figure riding a donkey, pictures of dragons and agricultural sceneries are found.

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