

# INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MULTIMEDIA FOR HUMANITIES

## MULTIMEDIA IN EDUCATION : ROCK ART

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In the present scenario of school education, the primary source of teaching is the text book: sometimes supplementary reading material is available for certain subjects, apart from, of course, the reference books. By and large, however, students have to rely upon text books and depending on their interest as well as availability of material, they try to acquire more information through supplementary material and reference books. This is applicable - let us admit - even in case of teachers; in fact, they are faced with the problem of non-availability of material for teaching for which they have to necessarily rely on text books.

In institutions with better resources, classroom teaching is supported by video and if possible, educational tours combined with visits to places of archaeological or historical importance.

The situation as obtaining at present is however much different: the fact remains that in our country most if not all schools are functioning without even the basic teaching material.

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Notwithstanding the above, one would agree that our system is based essentially on teaching and learning through books and is bound to remain so in future too. This system has several limitations, particularly in the context of teaching of history, geography, or other subjects which come under the ambit of humanities.

We shall restrict ourselves to archaeology/history since our presentation is about the C.D. on Rock Art for school children of the age group between 10 and 14 years.

As already stated earlier, the system of book learning or teaching through books has several limitations: likewise, it may not be possible for school children to visit sites due to variety of constraints, the main constraint being financial. Thus, in this teaching process, the basic tool is the text book in which the contents of the subject or theme are structured in a linear manner and the learner follows a charted course. Besides, the information contained in the text book usually tends to be inane and sometimes full of cumbersome details, thereby detracting the learner. Added to this is the fact that in class room learning environment, both bright students as well as slow learners are taught together as a result of which, at times, either of them feels out of place.

Multimedia has enormous potential from the point of view of self-based learning and it can serve as an independent complementary tool for enhancing the learning process. Instead of going through the inane, straitjacketed information as contained in the text book, through multimedia the learner is exposed to a variety of information which helps in a clearer understanding of the subject as well as in whetting the appetite to know more. The user can make use of the information contained in the programme, which could comprise of different levels of information, from basic to complex or advanced.

The CD on rock art has been prepared keeping in view all these factors in mind. This is the first version for children of the age group between 10 and 14 years. It has been prepared keeping in view the age group as well as the level of learning of the user. The content structure of this programme is user friendly

and is designed in a manner which is different from the structure of a book. Unlike a book where the arrangement is linear, following a well laid out sequence, the programme that has been developed has multiple entry points or perspectives of the subject matter with the facility to return to the previous content and move to a related theme. At each stage, interactive response is required from the user to move further into subject details for which the facility of hypertext linking has been provided.

Briefly, the main menu comprises of six modules: Introduction, Site, Theme, Colour, Dating and Style, apart from quiz and glossary.

In order to give the feel of the environment, the introduction module contains audio as well as video about rock art sites. Questions like what is rock art, what it constitutes, where is it found and such other questions have been addressed in this module. Video clippings of rock art sites with experts answering some of the questions have also been included. We have also tried to focus on the need to preserve this heritage which is getting destroyed due to developments activities and vandalism. This obviously is not possible in case of conventional classroom text book teaching\learning. Of course we must also admit here that just as the C.D. cannot be a replacement of a teacher it cannot be a substitute for a site visit and no amount of description by words can explain rock art.

The site module covers six States, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Representative examples from some of the rock art sites in each of these States have been included with brief description and period where there is no ambiguity. Due to lack of non-availability of the required material, some of the State with rock art sites have not been included. It is hoped that this information will be incorporated in a future version.

The theme module provides for options such as flora and fauna, human figures, group activities, musical instruments, weapons, designs and symbols as represented in rock art. In colour module, the user can view images done in different colours in rock art. The dating module gives an idea to the user of examples of rock art of different periods: we have taken care to include only such examples where there is near unanimity about their dating. A style module has also been included since determining and separating different rock art styles is basic to the study of the subject. In this version we have followed style classification of V.S. Wakankar whose work on rock art is considered to be seminal.

Each learning exercise has as its end the evaluation. For this, nothing could be more exciting for the user to evaluate himself or herself. For this purpose we have included a quiz module. A glossary with definition of terms used in the programme, note pad, slide show and site view are some of its other features.

Although it has not been attempted in this version, it is possible, through graphics and animation to make the user simulate the process of prehistoric tool making, drawing on the rock surface like the early man did and several other activities.

We would also like to mention the limitations and challenges faced during the preparation of the programme like the paucity of information, dearth of illustrative material and a standardized documentation system which is imperative for a work of this kind.

Before concluding, we would also like to mention two points: one, that the end users in our case are schools which may not necessarily have the desired infrastructure by way of hardware and software and second, that such programmes should be bilingual if not multilingual with a clear stress on intelligibility. We would also like to submit that in order to enhance learning and understanding it has to be viewed from the perspective of a total package comprising of a text book, a C.D. and an activity set up. An ideal combination of course would be C.D. supported by internet browsing facility which may not remain a dream in the not too distant future.