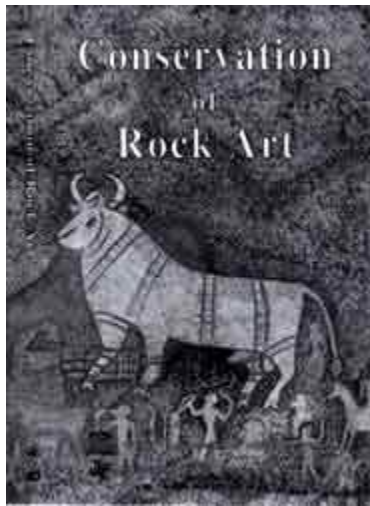


## Book Review

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### Early Man's Musings on Rock

Conservation of rock art in India is a subject of recent scholarship and very few scholars have made commendable contribution to this field. In IGNCA, however, this has been part of the programme of the Janapada Sampada Division, under its project *Adi-Drasya* (primeval Sight). The Centre has had a major role to play in the securing of the World Heritage Monument status to Bhimbetka. This is the site of pre-historic rock art paintings, in Madhya Pradesh. IGNCA had hosted an international seminar and exhibition on the subject.

"Conservation of Rock Art" is a compilation of papers presented by scholars at an international seminar organized by IGNCA on February 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> 1996. It provides descriptive information about the state of rock art conservation in India and focusses on the climatic and human factors that are causes of deterioration and destruction of these heritage art. It is edited by Dr. B.L. Malla, Sr. Research Officer in IGNCA.

In deciphering rock art paintings, the conclusions have largely been conjectures, as we have no way of knowing what was the motivation. However, as of the known history, it may be considered as the first ever manifestation of art. Most authorities, however believe that the majority of the art works of the Paleolithic people had magico-religious significance. This hypothesis is mainly based on the fact that no effort seems to have been made to preserve such works of art by the Paleolithic artists themselves, and further they were done in such places which were not easily accessible, were uncomfortable due to constant dampness, and were shrouded in awful, bizarre darkness. Under such conditions, the artist intended his works to remain forever. It seems that such cave dolmens were selected for artistic work to protect them from human vandalism. India may have the third largest concentrations of this heritage after Africa and Australia. Ten million figures or motifs of rock paintings or engravings have been found worldwide and many others are being discovered by researchers every year.

Alexander Cunningham in 1861 and Robert Bruce Froote in 1863 began exploration and documentation of material culture of India. However, it was not until Wakankar came into the scene that the study of rock painting formally began as a new discipline. He was the first who made systematic survey on the basis of a) Physical condition, b) Classification of successive superimpositions, c) Subject matter, and d) Co-relation of the datable material found in excavation. He also identified as many as 20 different styles and patterns. Yashodhar Mathapal saw these paintings altogether in a different way.

The book provisionally conceptualizes ways and means for the conservation/preservation of rock paintings and proposes a national data bank to disseminate knowledge to the users/researchers. The *Adi-Drasya* programme documents and promotes research on the rock art forms of India. The seminar itself was organized to find appropriate modus operandi for the implementation of such programmes. The seminar was followed by exhibition titled *Mriga* (Deer; Early images). It revealed the continuity of deer motif in Indian and European Rock art traditions.

Shri. M.C. Joshi, former DG, Archaeological Survey of India in his paper presented a historical analysis of rock art and has suggested many valuable ways of systematizing the present system of conservation. He also mooted the idea of compiling a detailed and illustrated inventory of rock paintings in accordance with their situation in different states or regions. He primarily focussed on the poor condition of conservation of rock art and how natural weathering devastated it to such an extent that restoration had

to be done immediately. To popularize rock painting among the public, Shri Joshi proposed a Global Rock Art Gallery of reproductions.

V.H. Sonawane appreciated the attention paid to problem of conservation by Getty Conservation Institute and UNESCO and emphasized on the need for an integrated system of rock art preservation and site management in India. He said that Australian experts can be invited and associated with Indian conservators because they have done prolific work in this field and climate condition of Australia itself is almost similar to India.

B.B. Lal's paper on conservation technique provides valuable suggestions on different methodologies for the conservation of rock art in tropical countries, which are very important in Indian context. He elaborates on the various reasons of physical disappearance of painting due to hot, humid, cryptogamic growth, and chemical decomposition etc. over the centuries. He dwells at length on the different geological/geographical areas and location of rock art centres.

B.N. Tandan has given a descriptive detail of different medium used in different kinds of paintings of India. This analysis of the nature of the colour pigments covers a long period from the early painting of Bagh and Ajanta to 18<sup>th</sup> century paintings of Chamba and even about 19<sup>th</sup> century wooden polychromes.

Archaeologist B.M. Pande's paper on Management of Bhimbetka and Adamgarh presents a remarkable approach as it emphasizes on the need to conserve the whole plateau ecology of these regions by planting trees within the area enclosed by barbed-wire fencing. B.L. Malla, the editor, has synchronized the idea of conservation of the rock art with the management of sites also. The deteriorating effects caused by natural factors form a significant part of his paper. He has also described about visitor's management for the purpose of protecting the sites from human vandalism and to cultivate awareness among visitors.

The last chapter penned by Baidyanath Saraswati is a new vision on rock art as in his opinion rock art was not individually inspired; but it is revelation of the collective memory. He has also highlighted the continuity of such tradition in folk art of India. He called the preservation and restoration of cultural heritage that includes rock art also as cultural engineering because a thing of art is not a dead object but a living entity capable of illuminating eternal values of human creativity.

Several recent researches have pointed to the presence of cattle domestication in Chattaneshwar, Kapildhara, Chaturbhujnath Nala and Pibheda, the appearance of humped cattle in Indus art and the interesting presence of Chariot in Kanyadesh. Similar motifs have been sighted in Post-Harappan graffiti and Brahmi scripts. These are interesting examples of continuation of motifs of rock art in later Indian scripts. This book is a fundamental guide to anyone who wants to pursue rock art studies. Even for a non-scholarly reader, this books offers excellent introduction to rock art.

Book Reviewed by **K. Sanjay Jha**, Kala Darshana IGNC

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