



National Seminar  
on  
**Prehistory and Ethno-archaeological  
Background of Rock Art with Emphasis on  
Assam and Adjoining States**

(26<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2015)



Organized By  
**Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi**  
in Collaboration with

**Tripura University & Gauhati University**



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## IGNCA's Contribution in Rock Art Studies

Rock art is one of our greatest surviving art treasures. It is a vital archaeological source to study and analyse the cognitive evolution of the human intellect across the world. As the written word had not yet been conceived, the urge to articulate, document and preserve ideas and events found expression through pictorial representations. **IGNCA is one of few Indian Institutions working in the field of rock art studies in a holistic perspective. While looking into the importance of this earliest artistic activity of human being the IGNCA has taken up its documentation, study and dissemination very seriously.** The Centre has conceived a major academic programme, which relates to explore artistic manifestations emanating from man's primary sense perceptions. Amongst the senses that lead to aesthetic experience are vision (*Drshya*) and hearing (*Shravya*). The rock art forms a crucial component of the *Adi Drshya* programme. Its conceptual plan aims to open the doors to the realization that rock art is pure and absolute and hence capable of dispensing great experience beyond its original culture and time.

Rock art study is an emerging discipline in India. IGNCA has initiated many projects/programmes for its study and research and its outreach. A number of Survey and Pilot Study programmes are being organised as a part of IGNCA to encourage the scholars to work in this emergent discipline and keep them updated about the status of Rock art research in global perspective and to encourage Indian scholars to take up this new discipline very seriously as it is directly related to the primeval vision of man and is perhaps the first creative act of human being. Its proper study can take our civilization thousands of years back.

IGNCA under its programme – *Adi Drshya* (primeval vision of man) has initiated field documentation at national level for preserving the rock art sites/data, which is otherwise open to human vandalism and natural factors beyond one's control. While recognising the importance of the Rock art for the present generation and posterity, the phase wise field documentation has been planned in different states of India with Rock art concentration. The main objective of the project is to make textual, contextual video, photo documentation and communicate with people in the hinterland for archaeological research, and to build up a biocultural map, a mental and ecological atlas of the rock art landscape, on the basis of documentation of related folklore and natural and manmade features. Based on the research and documentation etc., the publications are being brought out both in print and electronic media.

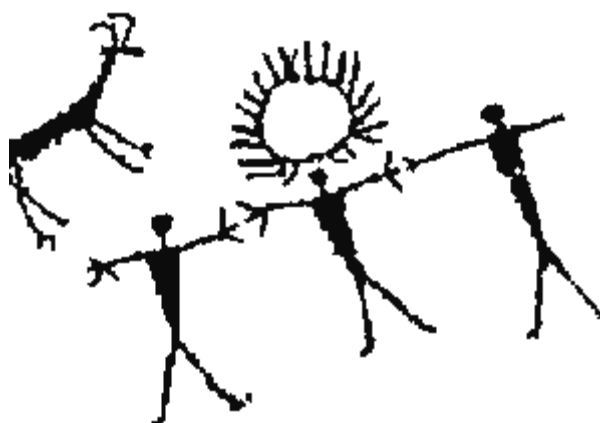
As a part of its outreach programme, IGNCA is organising different programmes for capacity building like organisation of special lectures and orientation workshop for researchers and university students; for the creation of general awareness among the school/ college students and general masses; temporary and mobile exhibitions, children workshops are being organised at the national /state/international levels. General awareness workshops are also being organised at different tehsil/block levels for the local administration and for the community members around the rock art site.

**The impact of projects/programmes launched and undertaken by IGNCA are immense and overwhelming. It can be assessed by the responses of the children, scholars and general masses participating/visiting in these programmes/events throughout India. The reviews in professional journals and its wide coverage in both print and**

electronic media (National/ Vernacular) are quite encouraging. Some of the universities have started taking the subject very seriously. Briefly, the goal to be set is not merely the development of a database and multimedia gallery/displays but also to establish *Adi Drishya* into a school of thought and research on alternate means of understanding prehistoric art. For achieving all the goals, the outreach/ general awareness programmes inventorisation and interpretive research of rock art is going on hand in hand.

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*(Concept Note)*

**National Seminar on Prehistory and Ethno archaeological Context of Rock  
Art with Emphasis on  
Assam and Adjoining States**

Agartala, 26<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2015

Assam and adjoining region of India consisting of the seven states is a vast tract with marked ecological and ethnic diversities. Geographically its location is significant since it is bordered by China, Burma and Bangladesh and bridges the mainland India with territories of Eastern and Southeast Asia – a situation which is significant from anthropo-archaeological consideration. Investigation in the realm of prehistory and archaeology is still in its nascent stage in Assam with little effort for application of advanced techniques of understanding the past. Repetitive studies and reports based on typological attributes and literary sources have made archaeological reading a monotonous exercise. Moreover, a good number of sites with striking architectural and artifactual traits have been studied and reported in isolation with less effort to piecing them together. Being the earliest expression of human aesthetic desire and an important cultural marker the multifaceted dimensions of Rock Art together with its allied areas like rock sculpture, rock monuments, megalithic structures, tribal art have always intrigued the scholars. Large number of sites with treasures of Rock Art and allied subjects have been reported from different parts of the world and our country is also no less a territory to reckon. Archaeological repositories of rock art together with its fascinating ethnographic context reported from different territories across the country has raised the academic significance of this unique

indigenous heritage. As Rock Art is an intricate and complex domain covering material and cognitive aspects of culture, a multidisciplinary approach is advocated to decode and understand it in all its dimensions. The role of scholars from many disciplines for the scientific study, documentation and research of rock art has been highly desirable for a holistic understanding. While disciplines like geology, geography and other branches of natural sciences takes care of materialistic and scientific basis of the subject the humanities and social sciences can well be utilised to decipher the aesthetic, cultural and historical aspects. Rock Art research has been in the formative stage in the eastern boundary of India particularly in Assam and adjoining states. To have a better understanding of the existence of rock art tradition in this part of the country it is necessary to view it in the broader context of the Indian subcontinent and south-eastern territories on the whole. With this backdrop it is proposed to organise a national seminar on Prehistory and Ethno-archaeological Background of Rock Art in the month of October, 2015. The sub theme of the seminar has been outlined as follows; however, more sub theme can be accommodated depending on the paper to be presented:

1. Prehistoric and Ethno-archaeological context of Rock Art
2. Anthropological context of Rock Art
3. Prehistoric and Archaeological background of Assam and Adjoining States
4. Rock Art and allied studies

The seminar is proposed to be organised in Agartala the capital city of Tripura a tiny state with Bangladesh on its border. Archaeological Survey of India protected rock cut sculpture sites of Unakoti is situated near Kailashsahar in Tripura. Near Unakoti several unprotected sites are reported with rock engravings and similar petroglyphic markings. The city of Agartala is well connected through air to major cities of India particularly Kolkata and Guwahati.

## **Programme Schedule**

### **26<sup>th</sup> November, 2015**

**Inaugural Session:** 10.30 am - 12:00 pm  
**Chairperson:** Prof. Anjan Kumar Ghosh  
Vice Chancellor, Tripura University

**Chief Guest:** Dr. Mridul Hazarika  
Vice Chancellor, Gauhati University

**Tea Break:** 12:00 pm - 12.15 pm

**1<sup>st</sup> Session:** 12.15 pm - 2.15 pm

**Lunch Break:** 2.15 pm - 3.00 pm

**2<sup>nd</sup> Session:** 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm

### **27<sup>th</sup> November, 2015**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Session:** 10:30 am - 12:00 pm

**4<sup>th</sup> Session:** 12:00 pm - 1:30 pm

**Lunch Break:** 1:30 pm - 2:15 pm

**Panel discussion and Valedictory session: 2:15 pm - 4:00 pm**



## **Archaeological Research in Northeast India: Historical Developments and Current Status**

**Jonali Devi**

Archaeology of Northeast India started with the first reporting of a Neolithic polished stone artefact by Sir John Lubbock in 1867. Since then, systematic explorations as well as stray discoveries have provided a rich archaeological repertoire in the region. Sites like Ambari, Daojali Hading, Nongpok Keithelmanbi, Pynthorlangtein, Sarutaru, Sekta, Selbalgiri 2, and Vadagokugiri have proved immense potential in studying the prehistory and history of the area. Rock Art studies is a very recent trend in this region and no literature on the rock art of the region is available as such. This paper is an attempt to scrutinise the nature of the studies done so far on Northeast Indian prehistory as well as archaeology and assess the development, together with the recent theoretical developments in the discipline. Future research directions will be highlighted.

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## **Geological Background of the Rock Art Sites of Assam**

### **Sarat Phukan**

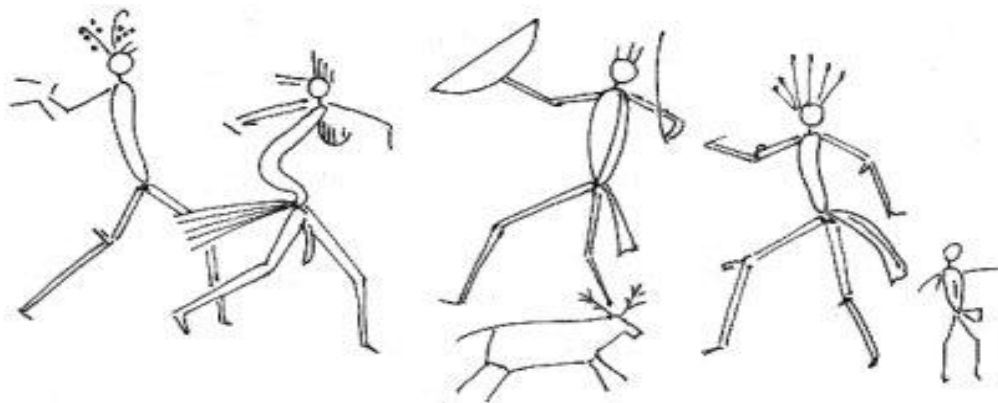
The rock art sites of lower Assam valley from Biswanath Ghat in the extreme east and Deka Dhowa near Goalpara in the extreme west shows some remarkable geological phenomenon. All the sites except Tukreswari fall along the bank of the Brahmaputra River. Mayang falls on the bank of the Kopili river which is a large tributary of the river Brahmaputra. Geologically most of the sites are situated on Precambrian residual hills made up of gneissic rocks and granite intrusions, except for Kanai Borosi, Deka Dhowa, which are found on eroded pediments.

For engraving rock arts or sculptures the fine grained granites were most preferred as they supported engraving finer details. The fine grained granites are highly resistant to weathering and still preserving the art and sculptures very well. The coarse grained variety of granites and gneissic rocks were least preferred and only used when finer rocks were not available locally. However, in case of the Tukreswari Temple, it was seen that fine grained granites were brought from distant areas for the above purpose since these kinds of rocks were not available locally. In Surya Pahar and Deka Dhowa, gneissic rocks and coarse grained granites were used for rocks arts and sculptures, as there were no fine grained rock varieties available locally. The dimensions of sculptures or rock arts in Surya Pahar are, therefore, usually large since the coarse grained granites and gneisses could not support small scale art works. In most of the cases these rock art sites are associated with temples.

After observation of the rock art sites it seemed that for selection of suitable sites for construction of temples and engraving rock arts, ancient people

preferred a location on the bank of a large river the most, as it was a suitable site for transportation of tools, materials and man. Presence of suitable rocks and elevated topography came next in order of preference for selection of suitable sites.

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## **Prehistoric Context and Occurrence of Rock Art in Northeast India**

**Dwipen Bezbaruah**

From the prehistoric perspective Assam and adjoining states present a much diversified scenario. The most prolific prehistoric sites in this region have been reported from Garo Hills districts of Meghalaya where more than a dozen sites have been reported from Rongram Ganol valleys. Although the early Palaeolithic assemblages of Garo Hills have to be established the late Pleistocene to Early Holocene geochronology has been confirmed by scholars. Manipur exhibit altogether different situation. The recovery of Palaeolithic elements along with Hoabinhian artifacts in areas around Ukhrul, Tangkhul and Thoubal in Manipur have opened up altogether a new scenario. The presence of Hoabinhian artifacts in Garo Hills along with Manipur has indicated the culture contact with Southeast Asian territory. Neolithic assemblage has been confirmed from Assam, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. The sole work on Tripura has indicated the presence of Palaeolithic implements along with artifacts on fossil wood resembling the Anaythian of Burma. The development of metal ages as such is not confirmed but the occurrences of megalithic remains in different parts of the territory and its continuation indicate the development of a well developed megalithic phase. The occurrence of petroglyphic evidences and engravings in the historical period reported from different parts of the state of Assam mainly the Brahmaputra Valley and Dima Hasao district and Manipur is another point of significance that needs in depth discussion and elaboration. The rock art form of Assam recorded so far consists of simple and complex geometric designs, human figures, animal and bird figures, symbols and indeterminate objects. The occurrence of engravings is another characteristic that has similarities with the territories of Southeast Asia.

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## **Rock Art in Dima Hasao, Assam: Recent Survey and Discovery**

**Tilok Thakuria**

The Upper Palaeolithic is characterized by the first appearance of artistic and aesthetics expression in the human history. Those were in the forms of images drawn in rocks, engravings either on rock or organic materials like ostrich eggshell and ornaments made on shells, ostrich eggshells and bones. Among these, evidence of rock art is numerous. They are reported from most parts of the world covering Australia, Africa, Europe and Asia. These prehistoric art forms, besides their artistic significance, are considered as evidence to analyze the social and cultural behaviour of the prehistoric people.

India is having a respectfully position in terms of rock art as those have been reported from all most all the parts of India beginning from upper Palaeolithic to historical period. However, the position of Northeast India in the map of rock art is not prominent for the non-finding of sufficient evidence. Rock art can be divided into two board categories as ‘pictography’ and ‘petroglyphs’. Pictograph is common form of rock art and found extensively. It is line drawing made on the surface of stone using pigment. Petroglyph can be created by scratching the stone surface. Both forms of rock art are rare in Northeast India, however there are some recent reports on the discovery of rock art in form petroglyphs.

During our archaeological investigation in Dima Hasao, we could locate petroglyphs at three localities in association with stone jars. The stone jars were unique prehistoric archaeological evidence found in Northeast India and especially in Dima Hasao district of Assam. Those were made as ancestral bone repository perhaps by Austro-Asiatic speaking group of people who entered to Northeast India from Southeast Asia. At Derebore, petroglyphs were found on

circular stones arranged in clusters. There were two clusters noticed. One cluster having around 20 to 23 such circular stones. The petroglyphs are in forms of engravings. At Kobak they were made on the outer surface of the jars itself. At Bolosan, those were found made both on jars and elongated semi-circular stone blocks. Interestingly patterns of engravings are different at each site. This paper will discuss the distribution of the petroglyphs in Dima Hasoa, their patterns, cultural association and techniques.

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## **Rock Art in the Tharon Area**

**P. Binodini Devi**

Manipur is a small hilly state where various ethnic groups are distributed. The Liangmai tribe is one of the indigenous and oldest tribes of this state. They are good artisans. Rock art is a creative urge of mankind. Study on the rock art is a young discipline. This new field is important both for archaeology as also ethnology and lifestyle studies. In India extensive researches have been carried out on rock art exploring various avenues of growth. Till date no extensive research on the rock art of Northeast Indian states has been done. With this concept in mind, the present author has proposed to conduct research work in this field to highlight the different art forms in Tharon area particularly the engraving works on the megaliths and also on other rocks as far as the materials allow.

The author has selected the Tharon area, where varied art forms abound. This area is directly associated with the present inhabitants. Hence, the ethno-archaeological approach is being employed while conducting the field work. The methods adopted are: village survey method, observation method, and interview method.

Different art forms are found in this village site, which belong to Liangmai tribe of Manipur. Of them mention may be made of the line drawings, carvings, and paintings.

The aesthetic sense of the people is reflected in their rock arts. Various art forms are found in the Tharon village site, Liangmai, areas in Manipur. These different art forms need a thorough exploration, excavation, and analysis to come to a definite conclusion of the rock arts of this region.

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## **Some Comparable Rock Art Pictures from Assam region and Karnataka: their Significance**

**A. Sundara**

For better understanding in a wider perspective of relative significance and importance of archaeological remains of particular kind and context from a given region it is necessary to compare them with similar relics of other regions, near or far. This is equally true with regard to rock art sites.

With regard to rock art sites/pictures, prehistoric and historical, classifications of various kinds such as environment, situation, category, technique, style, period, etc. are resorted to for reasonably different purposes. In order to appreciate especially the mobile tradition and significance of the rock art pictures of a given region, it is necessary to make a comparative study. For this purpose in the first place pictures will have to be classified into three categories: 1. Pictures commonly found in most of the sites of different regions as for example bull, deer, horse,; 2. pictures of unusual types and kind found only in a given region and 3. Pictures, particularly certain geometrical designs as for example the labyrinth infrequently found far and wide.

An attempt therefore is made to make a comparative study on these lines of the pictures period-wise and category-wise from Karnataka and Assam region (i.e. the region of “Seven Sisters”) as far as possible.

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## **Rock Art of Odisha: An Ethno-archaeological Perspective**

**Sadasiba Pradhan**

In the absence of any universally accepted method for interpretation of rock art an attempt is made in this paper to show how ethnographic data drawn from primitive tribal societies that exploit similar environment may serve useful tool for interpreting rock art of bygone days. Lanjia Saura (Hill Sauras) living in Southern Odisha practice a great deal of religious art of magical significance as continuity of tradition in their struggle for existence and sustenance. When the primitive mind fails to comprehend the cause of unnatural tragedies and illness attribute the cause to malevolent spirits who need to be propitiated and appeased by drawing icons. Such icons prepared on regular basis are highly standardized and held in great veneration that ensures peace and prosperity to the family as well as the community.

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## **Chandravati Engraved Core and Rock Art: An Ethno-archaeological Case Study**

**V. H. Sonawane**

One of the fluted chert cores found in the microlithic assemblage at Chandravati (District Sirohi, Rajasthan) stylistically belonging to the Upper Palaeolithic period bears interesting evidence of an engraving executed on one of its flat surfaces. The design engraved on this semi-rectangular patinated platform of the core appears to be like a spiral rhomboid. It consists of a pair of parallel lines moving clock wise from the center forming two intertwining spiralling arms. One of these arms bears a series of short diagonal lines whereas the other one is significantly left plain to render a foreground and background effect of the sign. The engraver has made painstaking efforts to make these infinitesimal yet distinguishable marks. This precisely indicates the specific intention of the artist to ensure that the significance and visual effect of the engraved design should not go unnoticed. So far as the engraving is concerned, it clearly demonstrates the artistic ability of the engraver who has produced such a sharp and accurate geometric motif. The engraving is undoubtedly the testimony of a skilled artist and probably classed as one of the finest works of its kind so far the prehistoric mobility art is concern.

This paper, thus assesses the plausible interpretation of the design engraved on the fluted chert core found at Chandravati in the light of high profile and continuity of rock art in the backdrop of Indian perspective supported by archaeological, literary, ethnographic and even oral traditions.

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## **Multidisciplinary Approaches to the study of Rock Art Research in India**

**G. L. Badam**

Rock art is a global phenomenon found almost everywhere in the world and its diversity, temporal and spatial distribution is much above the level of any work of fine art known so far. The study of rock art provides rich and realistic insights into the cultural history of man which was hitherto known by stone implements, skeletal remains and fossils of various types. Secondly, it is not generally easy to identify and interpret these evidences as it involves the thought process of Early Man which is difficult to judge as it varies from person to person. Some scholars consider the thought process of Early Man a subject for the future. This is what really makes the study of rock art challenging.

It is well known that artists express their thought process in any activity including during the course of paintings and engravings, thus indirectly trying to depict the lifestyle of the people. This aspect of cognitive archaeology (understanding the nature of human mind) is one of the greatest challenges faced by science. Some evolutionary psychologists are of the opinion that the way we think, remains largely conditioned by the lifestyle of our prehistoric hunter-gatherer ancestors. In fact the last decade has seen radical advancements in the way we approach and understand the prehistory and evolution of human mind. Naturally, trying to reconstruct past ways of thinking, as they emerge and take shape in the different cultural manifestations of our species, has been a great challenge for archaeology. Neuroarchaeology and archaeology of mind are the new areas which will have a strong bearing on the rock art research in future. During the earlier periods when people were living in shelters they

made numerous social based figures indicating the association of rock art with social and natural sciences. Animals are the most frequently drawn figures and humans come next. Then there are symbols, designs and other kinds of expressions which help in reflecting their social fabric, religious beliefs and lifestyles. Such studies of the multidisciplinary nature as outlined above, if taken in totality, would give a comprehensive account of rock art research in India.

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## **Archaeology and Ethnography of Rock Art in Andhra Pradesh**

**N. Chandramouli**

Andhra Pradesh is one of the richest areas of Prehistoric habitations in the Indian subcontinent. Material evidences right from the Lower Palaeolithic up to the megalithic are extensively found in a variety of ecological contexts, some of the lithic tool-types being the text book specimens. It is also the region inhabited by as many as 33 tribal groups, twelve of which are classified as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTG), occupying the plateau regions as well as the plains. Ethno archaeological studies (indirect analogical approach) in this region have revealed significant continuities between the ethnographic present and prehistoric past in terms of mortuary practices, settlement patterns and subsistence selections at an intra site and inter site level.

The rock art of Andhra Pradesh revealed striking regional features in terms of thematic composition, styles and archaeological context. On tentative grounds the rock art in Andhra Pradesh can be dated from the Mesolithic to the Megalithic/Early Historic. A comparative-analogical study of the ethnographic information such as the hunting methods of the tribal groups will help in understanding the context and meaning some prehistoric rock art themes particularly the geometric representations.

This paper will discuss the ethnographic and archaeological context of the rock art in Andhra Pradesh and propose some interpretative avenues.

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# **A Multidisciplinary Approach to the Study of Rock Art: A Case Study of Karnataka**

**Mohana R**

In Karnataka, the recent past begun to illustrate a wider distribution of rock art sites is being traced. The Majority of the rock art sites discovered and studied in the Malaprabha, Tungabhadra and Vedavati (Hagari) river basins. In the Kaveri river basin of southern most of Karnataka, only two sites are reported. Another important geographical zone is the Costal area where eight sites of petroglyphs are been reported. The author attempted to gather details of all the rock art sites till now reported and new discoveries so far come to total 150 sites including pictographs, petroglyphs and cupules. In this paper, a multidimensional approach is made to the rock art research e.g. type, style, ecological model, chronology of the rock art, by making line drawing and using soft ware's and by studying river catchment, distribution pattern of rock art sites against the background of geology and geography with respect to site formation and landscape archaeology.

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## **Art Heritage: A Mirror of Nature-Human Relationship**

**B. L. Malla**

Artistic traditions of India are one of the oldest and richest in the world. Beginning with the prehistoric rock paintings, and finding expression in a vigorous school of modern art, the tradition spans in thousands of years. Many great schools of hereditary craftsmen flourished under the patronage of the royal courts within the classical or monumental tradition. But the arts and skills of village societies operated through the vernacular form of artisan guilds. Indian philosophies, irrespective of ethnic considerations, view man and nature in a holistic perspective. The experience of the culture is codified in its thought-currents, astrology, and *ayurvedic* system of medicines, etc.

Rock art being the earliest expression of human aesthetic desire and an important cultural maker, having multifaceted dimensions together with its allied subjects have always intrigued the scholars. The archaeological repositories of rock art with its ethnographical context reported from different territories across the country have raised the academic significance of this unique indigenous heritage. Rock art being an intricate and complex domain covering material and cognitive aspects of culture, a multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary approach is advocated to decode and understand it in all its dimensions. To study prehistory of the Northeast in this context becomes equally important.

Archaeological research is generally based on the material remains of past human society. The material remains or the archaeological records are carefully examined and studied to obtain a possible scenario of the past ways of

life of human beings. If the archaeological record is insufficient for the reconstruction of the past human society, other sources such as ecological, geographical, and ethnographical sources become very helpful for archaeological interpretation.

In Indian context both vernacular and classical forms of art have its roots in nature and are in fact it is the reflection of nature - human relationship. The present paper will focus on the conceptual framework of all the forms of arts in India.

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