



The World of Rock Art

AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIVE CONTINENTS

Edited by
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Rock art is one of the richest cultural resources in the world, which depicts the earliest expressions of humankind. The proximity of this art and its affinity with the art of many living communities of the world today makes it all the more significant and valuable. Rock art images can be treated as a source of cultural communication between the past, present and the future.

The present volume gives an overall status of rock art in the different continents of the world. It is based on special lecture series organised by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) as a part of the International Conference on Rock Art 2012. These special lectures are delivered by internationally renowned scholars in the field.

It is clear from the vast spectrum covered by this volume that although there has been a history of research on rock art, it is still exploring various avenues of growth. This volume provides an in-depth information and analysis of subjects/themes which are important while keeping in view the future development of the conceptual academic programmes designed to encapsulate primeval vision or *Adi Drishya* of human beings. In magnitude, vividness and richness, this is an outstanding volume. It aims to enhance and promote rock art research, especially in those countries where it is a young discipline.

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Introduction

Rock art is one of the richest cultural resources in the world, which depicts the earliest expressions of humankind. This prehistoric art perhaps comes to signify the underlying philosophies and worldview of ancient people, and tells us about the soul of a community and its thoughts, beliefs and emotions. It is associated with cultural values, particularly in countries like India, Australia and some in Africa, where this art is a part of the living cultural heritage of its native population. Rock art images can be treated as a source of cultural communication between the past, present and the future. Fortunately, India has one of the world's six major prehistoric rock art concentrations of the Stone Age era. The other places which have prehistoric rock art concentrations of the Stone Age era are South-Western Europe, Russia, North Africa, South Africa and Australia.

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) has conceived a major academic programme, which relates to exploring artistic manifestations emanating from man's primary sense perceptions. The classification of arts in Indian tradition is based on different primary senses. Amongst the senses that lead to aesthetic experience are vision (*drishya*) and hearing (*shravya*). Architecture, sculptures and paintings originate from vision, music and poetry originate from hearing, and theatre from the two together. Hence, Indian aesthetics is a well-experimented psychoanalytical process of judgement. Most probably, man's first awareness of the world around him came through his primeval sense of sight and his ability to hear. Thus, rock art forms a crucial component of the *Adi Drishya* programme.

IGNCA's concern with prehistoric rock art is not restricted to archaeologists or prehistorians' concern with establishing its linear chronological order; it is also not



restricted to identifying styles and schools as criteria for establishing chronology. Instead, it is a concern for man's creativity across time, space, civilisations and cultures through the perception of sight.

While keeping in view the aims and objectives of the *Adi Drishya* programme, IGNCA has taken up an ambitious project on the survey, documentation, and multidisciplinary study of rock art. The present rock art project was initiated in 1989-1990. Major fieldwork/projects undertaken before 2005 were: project on rock art of the Kumaon Hills in northern India, Kerala in south India and Jhiri in central India. The multidisciplinary field-based study and documentation work on a large scale started in 2005-2006. So far documentation work has been initiated and is in progress in north India in the states of Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir; in central India in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand; in eastern India in Odisha. In western India, the work has been initiated in the state of Rajasthan and in southern India documentation work has been initiated in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Field documentation is being done in collaboration with local experts and institutions in the areas/zones concerned. All the data is collected and compiled in a uniform format developed by IGNCA especially for rock art. In this process, till now a huge database has been compiled. An international conference (1993) and three national seminars (1991, 1996 and 2004) have been conducted on the subject. An exhibition on the 'Deer in Rock Art of India and Europe' was held in 1993. Briefly, the goal to be set is not merely developing a huge database or multimedia displays but to establish *Adi Drishya* into a school of thought and research on alternate means of understanding prehistoric art.

IGNCA has, so far, produced seven well-received publications under the **IGNCA Rock Art Series**—*Rock Art in the Old World* (editor Michel Lorblanchet), *Deer in Rock Art of India and Europe* (editors G. Camuri, A. Fossati and Y. Mathpal), *Rock Art in Kumaon Himalaya* (Yashodhar Mathpal), *Rock Art in Kerala* (Yashodhar Mathpal), *Conservation of Rock Art* (editor B.L. Malla), *Global Rock Art* (editor B.L. Malla and V.H. Sonawane.), *Rock Art of Andhra Pradesh: A New Synthesis* (N. Chadramouli) and a CD ROM. We have great pleasure in bringing out this 8th publication titled *The World of Rock Art: An Overview of the Five Continents*. The present volume is based on papers from the *Special Lecture Series*, giving an overall status of rock art in the different continents of the world. This lecture series has been organised by the IGNCA as a part of the International Conference on Rock Art 2012. These special lectures are delivered by internationally renowned scholars in the field.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE LECTURES

Dr. Anne Solomon in her paper on 'African Rock Art' highlights the importance of Africa as the 'cradle of humankind' and home to the evolution of modern human behaviour. It is not surprising that Africa has material perhaps dating to the origins of mark-making, as well as rock art dating back to the Pleistocene. The making of some traditional rock art persisted until the 19th century and, in some places, it is still a living tradition (albeit in much altered cultural and social contexts). The focus of her paper is on the range of recorded material and the variety of contexts in which African rock art is thought to have



Australian cave art, open air rock art, analytical studies, the ethnography of Australian rock art and the management and protection of Australian rock art. He also takes into account analytical studies of rock art pioneered by Australian scientists, who have made a significant contribution to the development of this global discipline. The two other aspects of Australian initiatives in this field are extensive ethnographic studies that have been conducted for well over a century and the emphasis on the preservation and management of rock art. According to Professor Bednarik, despite great improvements in the latter, there remain significant instances of concern where poor management and racism have marred Australia's performance and where political support for rock art protection has been lacking.

Prof. Emmanuel Anati, in his paper on the 'Prehistoric Art in Europe', gives a general overview which intends to fit European prehistoric art into a world frame. According to him, understanding messages that prehistoric man could easily understand 30,000 years ago is a starting point of a major challenge for us. In his paper, he discusses in detail the different dimensions of heritage, the goals of research, beginning of art in Europe and the categories of prehistoric art. His paper also illustrates the elementary aesthetic and conceptual values of humankind.

It is clear from the vast spectrum covered by *The World of Rock Art: An Overview of the Five Continents* that although there has been a history of research on rock art, it is still exploring various avenues of growth. This volume provides in-depth information and analysis of subjects/themes which are important while keeping in view the future development of the conceptual academic programmes designed to encapsulate primeval vision or *Adi Drishya* of human beings. In magnitude, vividness and richness, this is an outstanding volume. It aims to enhance and promote rock art research, especially in those countries where it is a young discipline.

Today, all rock art researchers are concerned with exploring the 'future of the past' and looking beyond the obligation of discovering, protecting and educating others about archaeological treasures. The concern for exploring innovative ways and means for rock art research and for deciphering rock art has opened a fresh chapter in the history of research in prehistoric and tribal art, with further scope being added through a collaboration of archaeology with anthropology, art history, philosophy, semiotics, psychology, psychiatry, history of religion and cultural history.

This illustrated volume will certainly contribute in enhancing our vision of rock art. It will not only interest scholars but also the public at large. It is an important step in the journey of exploring together, globally, the source of creative energies and modes of expressions of our ancestors.

Bansi Lal Malla

