

Rock Art of Jammu and Kashmir

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The state of Jammu and Kashmir is located in the north-western region of India, in a complex of the Himalayan ranges with marked relief variation, snow-capped summits, antecedent drainage, complex geological structure and rich temperate flora and fauna. The vast mountain range of Himalayas from time immemorial stirred the imagination of the human mind and engaged the human psyche. The Hindu *Rishis* of India coined the word “Himalaya”—for *Him*, “snow” and *Alaya*, “the abode” for this mountain system and this name has rightly persisted in lexicon in human imagery. The Himalaya has exerted a personal and profound influence on generations of our people and continues to do so. It has given us mighty rivers, large wetlands, dense forests, etc. Himalaya has shaped our mythology, folklore, music, creativity and forms of worship. Its impact is both on social life and spiritual consciousness. India’s most outstanding poet Kalidas has called Himalaya the ‘measuring rod of the earth’, in one of his famous lyrical drama, *Kumarasambhavam*:

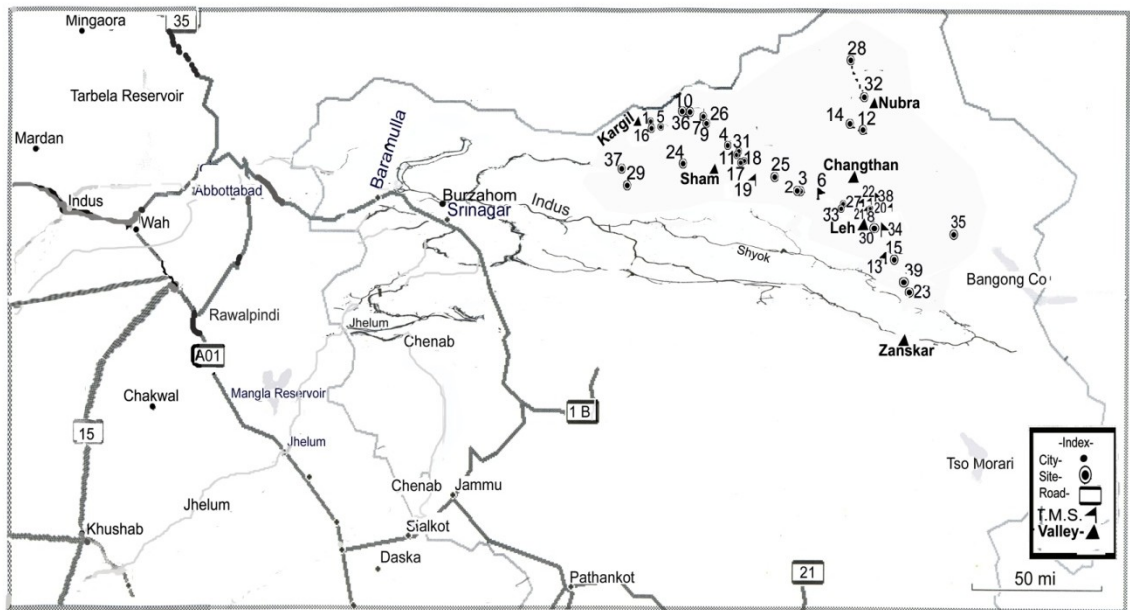
In the north (of India), there is a mighty mountain by the name Himalaya—the abode of perpetual snow, fittingly called the Lord of mountains, animated by divinity and its soul and internal spirit. Spanning the wide land from the eastern to the western sea, he stands as it were like the measuring rod of the earth.

Geomorphology

The territories of Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh and Gilgit form the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The entire State lies between 32.17" and 36.58" North altitude and East to West, the State lies between 73.26" and 80.30" longitude. The state is about 640 kms. in length from north to south and 480 kms. from east to west. To its north lie Chinese and Russian Turkistan. On its east is Chinese Tibet. On the South and South-West lie the states of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. On the west is the North West Frontier Provinces of Pakistan, China, Russia and Afghanistan.



Fig. 39 Map of Jammu & Kashmir



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|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| 1. Akshamal | 7. Bema | 13. Hemis(Monastery) | 19. Lay | 25. Nurla | 31. Skhuchuen | 37. Tilmarchey |
| 2. Alchi-1 | 8. Chilling Valley | 14. Hunder | 20. Leh-1 | 26. Sanken | 32. Sumur | 38. Tsemo(Monastery) |
| 3. Alchi-2 | 9. Dha | 15. Karu | 21. Leh-2 | 27. Santistupa(Stupa) | 33. Taru | 39. Upshi |
| 4. Alchinathan | 10. Darchik | 16. Kere | 22. Leh Fort | 28. Sasoma | 34. Thiksay | |
| 5. Apati | 11. Dhomkhar | 17. Khalsi | 23. Likkse | 29. Shankhu | 35. Thongtse | |
| 6. Bazgo(Monastery) | 12. Diskit | 18. Khalsi Bridge | 24. Mulbek | 30. Shey | 36. Tiger hill | |

* T.M.S.-(T-Temple, M- Monastery, S- Stupa)

The Geology of the territories of the state has been divided into three different structural Zones: (i) The Panjal (ii) The Zaskar (iii) The Tertiary Groups. It has been divided on the basis of the four physical divisions of the State. The Panjal forms the Outer plain, the Outer Hills and the Middle Mountains. The Zaskar includes the whole of the eastern region from Spiti and Lahol (32.170N. Latitude) and to the lofty Karakoram mountains in the north. The Tertiary Groups include the valley of Kashmir and other river Valleys. Himalayan ranges of mountains are basically formed from the base material of Indian plate. Zaskar range consists of layers of sediment from the ocean floor. While the Ladakh range of granite is born out of the immense heat generated by the friction between the two plates. Some scholars believe that the canvas for petroglyphs selected by the rock art authors of the Ladakh area was the rocks with dark patina, called "desert varnish". The varnish is formed by a combination of autochthonous process of iron and manganese, leaching from the action of wind blown sand and dust in the arid mountain desert environment, which creates a shiny exterior polish. Even estimates have been worked out for the repatination of the desert varnish, which vary widely from place to place, rock to rock, depending on geology and orientation to the sun. Some scholars believe that a light coat of desert varnish can be formed roughly in 300 years, and a dark coat in about 1500 years, based on the patterns of glacial activity in the Hind Kush of Afghanistan. Another scholar estimates that full repatination of petroglyphs takes three or four millennia. But all these propositions need further scientific investigations.

The mountains have a special geographical importance to the State of Jammu and Kashmir. There are Siwalik Hills towards the south and very lofty mountains in the north, the peaks of which always remain covered with snow. There are volcanic mountains too in the State. They have caused havoc in Kashmir in the past. Some of the famous mountains and their passes are: (i) Karakoram and Kyunlun Ranges- Karakoram pass (5352 metres) and Nubra pass (5800 metres) leads to Chinese Turkistan and Khattan. One can reach Tibet from Ladakh via Kharudangala pass (5557 metres) and Changla pass (5609 metres). (ii) Zaskar Range- At Zojila pass (3529 metres) Ladakh region terminates and from here begins the valley of Kashmir. Poat pass (5716 metres) of this range is also a famous pass in this range. (iii) Nun Kun Range- To reach Leh (Ladakh) from Kulu one has to pass through Bawalocha pass (4891 metres). (iv) Nanga Parbat Range (utterly devoid of vegetation)- The height of the range is 8107.68 metres above the sea level and is spread in the Gilgit region. (v) Harmukh Mountain - This Himalayas range is situated at a height of 5141.3 metres above sea level towards Bandipore between the rivers Jhelum and Kishan Ganga valley. (vi) Burzil Mountain- Burzil pass is situated at a height of 3200 metres above sea level. It bifurcate Kashmir and Ladakh valleys. (vii) Amarnath Mountain- At a height of 5372 metres above sea level. One has to pass through Mahagunas pass (1475 metres) to reach there. (viii) Toshmaidan- Toshmaidan (4270 metres) and Kajinag (3700 metres) mountains lie in the Inner Himalayas. They remain clad with snow throughout the year. (ix) Afarwat- The

Mountain spreads through the Gulmarg valley. (x) Pirpanjal Range- Banihal pass (2832 metres) lies in the shape of a tunnel and separates Kashmir valley from the outer Himalayas. On the other end of this range lies Baramula pass (1582 metres) and Hajipir pass (2750 metres). (xi) Siwalik Range- The hills varying from 600 metres to 1500 metres above sea level, extends from the north of the outer plains to middle mountains of the State, in this range. The state has many low lying valleys like Tawi Valley, Chenab Valley, Poonch Valley, Sind Valley and Liddar Valley, but the river Jhelum with its tributaries flows through Kashmir Valley. The ancient

capital city Leh at an attitude of 3,500 meters lies off the banks of the River Indus (Sindh). The famous city of Jammu lies on the banks of river Tawi.

The forests are one of the most important resources of Jammu and Kashmir, which are spread over 2,236 sq. kms. of the demarcated area forests accounts for 20% of the total geographical area of the state on this side of the Line of Control. More than 99% of forest area is confined to the provinces of Jammu & Kashmir only, with largest area of 5848 sq. kms. In district of Doda and smallest are of 481 sq. kms. In the district of Budgam. The forests are found in the areas where there is sufficient rainfall or along the banks of the rivers where sufficient water is available. In the State of Jammu and Kashmir forests are mainly found where annual rainfall is about 100 cms. However, scrub forests are found, where rainfall is even less than 100 cms.

Archaeological Perspective

In comparison to the rich rock art tradition in Ladakh, the traces of rock art unearthed in the Kashmir and Jammu valleys is quite negligible. In the Kashmir valley, a petroglyph of deer hunt of Neolithic period has been reported from Burzahom, Srinagar (Fig.1).

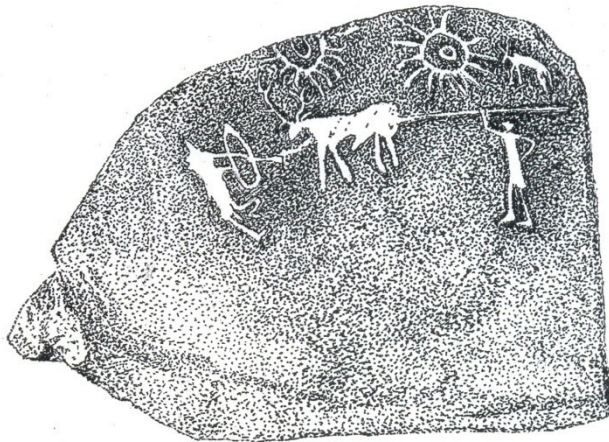


Fig. Neolithic Engraved Slab, Burzahom

The excavations at Burzahom (or at Gufkral) have revealed definite clues on the first settled life of early Kashmiris. Other petroglyph is reported from Bomai Sopore in the district Baramulla (Fig. 2). Archaeologically speaking, Kashmir had a highly developed Neolithic culture spread throughout the length and breadth of the valley. It seems that there is a succession of Stone Age industries going back to Paleolithic times in Kashmir. The Neolithic cultures also show distinct signs of evolution, spatial differentiation and technological affinities with the preceding Stone Age cultures. It is said that the archaeological research in respect of explorations and excavation has revealed similarities between Kashmir and various parts of Central Asia. The research in this field needs a thorough examination. Although the different layers of loess-paleosol sequence in Central Asia, Potwar region of Pakistan, Afghanistan, China has yielded Paleolithic tools, but the recently discovered exposures in the Kashmir has not yet been examined or excavated. In such circumstances one has to rely on the surface collections only.

Ladakh region has produced unique rock engravings on the faces of huge magnetite rocks and boulders. The volume of the rock art in Ladakh is enormous. Rock art of the area is spread in the elaborate mountain system of Karakoram and Himalaya. These two ranges determine the course of various valleys and river system of Ladakh in which small oasis-like villages and hamlets are spread. The importance of the rock engravings from Ladakh region lies in the fact that there is no historical records of the earliest immigrants or civilisation in Ladakh, except for various petroglyphs found from Zaskar, Kargil, Changthang, Nubra, etc. These depict an array of activities of their culture, day to day life, economic activities, customs and belief system. The archaeological studies and discovery of Paleolithic tools from Potwar region in Pakistan, Tajikistan in Central Asia, Kashmir and Nubra valley indicates the cultural contacts between the lower Indus valley (in Pakistan), Kashmir and Central Asia in the prehistoric times. Ladakh as a kingdom was established around end of the first millennium A. D. There was Dard occupation in the Ladakh region prior to its Tibetanisation. Ladakh is seen as a cultural periphery of Tibet today.

Rock Art Distribution in Ladakh Region

Ladakh is divided into two districts of Leh and Kargil administratively. But for the rock art documentation and study it may be divided into five sub-regions (i.e. Leh, Nubra, Sham, Changthang, Kargil and Zaskar), based on its physical geography. Rock art is traced both in plain and hill areas. It is found in cliffs, river banks, high pasture land (*dok*), villages, along the local and abandoned ancient routes, etc. While keeping in view the geographical and weather conditions the rock art authors of the area depicted petroglyphs only.

As per the proposed sub- regions, the region of Leh comprises of Leh proper and small towns (etc.) around the Leh within 40km east-west axis along the Indus and its tributaries. It includes areas like Chilling, Nemo, Basgo, Hemis, Upshi, Sakti and Kharu (upto Kere). Nubra valley is formed by the mighty Karakoram range on its north and Ladakh range to the south. Ladakh range divides the Nubra valley with that of Indus valley. A couple of major passes connect Indus valley with the Nubra valley. A subsidiary route connects the Nubra valley with Yarkand (China), which further leads to connect the silk route, was a major connection until independence. A route leads to Skardu down the Shayok river. Shayok is a tributary of the Indus River, which flows north-west to enter Baltistan (Pakistan), where it finally merges in Indus. In the Nubra sub-region the rock art sites Sasoma and Deskit area are included. In the Sham sub-region, the rock art sites from Khaltse Bridge to Domkhar, Domkhar sanctuary, Bema, and Alchi-Saspol have been included. Sham is the lower area of Ladakh along the Indus. The Changthang sub-region includes rock art sites from Tangtse, Gonpa, and Kharu-Kere. Changthang area is located in the eastern region of Ladakh, bordering Tibet and China. In the Kargil and Zaskar sub-region, the rock art sites in the Kargil by-pass and Hardas areas have been included. Zaskar is predominantly a Buddhist region with some historic pre-Tibetan Buddhist rock art all along the Doda River. At Padum and its adjoining areas magnificent rock art sites like Shagam, Phey, Stongde, etc. have been reported. At a remote valley hamlet, Char, prehistoric rock art has been found. The present author, who was leading a multidisciplinary team for the survey, documentation and study of rock art in the Ladakh region under the National Project of Rock Art undertaken by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (New Delhi), was not able to document all the sites of the area in its first phase of documentation in 2006. The

remaining sites are expected to be covered in the second phase of documentation proposed to be taken up in the near future. There are reports that there are some more petroglyphs, including ancient rock art, in the Kargil and in its adjoining areas like Hardas, Dras, Samra, etc. The investigations of these petroglyphs may give a glimpse of the early history of these areas. These images show that how the interest and emphasis of the people of the area changed from time to time.

Location and Subject Matter of Rock Art Sites of Ladakh

Sites	Coordinates	Subject
Alchinathan	N34 28.328 E76 40.393	Anthropomorphic figures: Hunting scene of ibex, dancing scene, mother carrying child; Zoomorphic figures: Ibex, wild goat, bird.
Chilling Valley	N34 09.799 E77 35.194	Anthropomorphic figures: Human figures in groups, horse rider, elephant rider; Zoomorphic figures: Dog, ibex and wild goat; Others: Sun flower, half moon pattern, wavy lines, peacock, and tree motif.
Dha	N34 36.520 E76 30.029	Anthropomorphic figures: Hunting scene of ibex, human figures holding some unidentified object; Zoomorphic figures: Ibex, different birds; Others: Palm impression.
Hunder	N34 34.763 E77 28.816	Anthropomorphic figure: A figure of Buddha is carved on the rock face on the river bank, facing towards west. The figure is locally known as Chamba. The height of the statue is 145 inch (visible part from top to bottom).
Liktse	N33 45.419 E77 53.544	Anthropomorphic figures: Hunting scene; Zoomorphic figures: Dog, ibex, wild goat and bull.
Nurla	N34 18.461 E76 58.488	Zoomorphic figures: Dog, ibex and wild goat; Others: Tibetan Inscriptions.
Sanken	N34 34.539 E76 31.720	Anthropomorphic figures: Outline drawing of a six feet human figure; Zoomorphic figures: Wild goat, different bird figures.
Shey	N34 04.197 E77 37.986	Anthropomorphic figures: Four Bodhisattva images are in different <i>Mudras</i> .
Skhubuchen	N34 25.526	Anthropomorphic figures: Hunting scene of ibex, a

	E76 43.994	group of human figures, dancing scenes; Zoomorphic figures: Ibex, wild goat; Others: wavy patterns.
Sumur	N34 42.728 E77 34.211	Zoomorphic figures: Dog, ibex, stag, horse, yak and wild goat.
Taru	N34 09.554 E77 26.203	Zoomorphic figures: Dog, ibex, yak and wild goat.
Upshi	N33 47.161 E77 51.209	Zoomorphic figures: Dog, ibex, yak and wild goat.

SHAM AREA

Khalsi	N34 20.115 E76 50.058	Zoomorphic figures: Stag, wild goat, ibex.
Dhomkhar	N34 23.473 E76 45.662	Zoomorphic figures: Yak, ibex, tiger, stag, <i>barasingha</i> , wild goat, dog, galloping horse and deer.
Bema	N34 36.796 E76 29.786	Anthropomorphic figures: Hunting scene of ibex, human; Zoomorphic figures: Ibex, different birds.
Khalsi Bridge	N34 19.432 E76 51.478	Anthropomorphic figures: Hunting scene of ibex; Zoomorphic figures: Ibex; Others: <i>Stupas</i> .
Alchi	N34 14.377 E77 09.025	Anthropomorphic figures: Human figures; Zoomorphic figures: Dog, ibex and wild goat.
Alchi Bridge	N34 14.408 E77 08.975	Anthropomorphic figures: Hunting scene of ibex; Zoomorphic figures: Dog, ibex and wild goat; Geometric designs: Also depicted.

NUBRA AREA

Sasoma Bridge	N34 54.011 E77 28.953	Anthropomorphic figures: A human figure holding bow and arrow to hunt ibex; Zoomorphic figures: Dog, ibex yak,, stag, deer, fox, wild goat and sheep horse, humped bulls, double humped camel.
Diskit	N34 32.760 E77 33.354	Anthropomorphic figures: Hunting scenes, Male moving towards left; Zoomorphic figures: Tiger, stag, <i>Barasingha</i> , wild

		goat, dog; Geometric design: Square design.
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CHANGTHANG AREA

Kere	N34 32.571 E76 08.445	Anthropomorphic figures: Human figures, hunting scene; Zoomorphic figures- Dog, ibex, wild goat, sheep, yak, horse and bull figures; Geometric design: Also found.
Kharu	N33 55.505 E77 44.100	Zoomorphic figures: Dog, ibex, yak, philine (Snow Leopard) and wild goat.
Tangtse	N34 01.476 E78 10.678	Anthropomorphic figures: Hunting scene of ibex, horse rider; Zoomorphic figures: Dog, ibex, stag, <i>barasingha</i> , deer, horse, bull, yak and wild goat; Others: Sun flower, half moon pattern.

KARGIL AND ZANSKAR AREA

Apati	N34 33.806 E76 12.604	Anthropomorphic figure: Standing Maitriy. Geometric design: Horizontal line and a rectangular design.
Akshamal	N34 33.763 E76 08.827	Anthropomorphic figures: Hunting scene of ibex, dancing scene, battle scene; Zoomorphic figures: Dog, ibex, wild goat; Others: Palm impression, foot prints, wheel, <i>stupas</i> .
Darchik	N34 37.973 E76 22.857	Anthropomorphic figures: Standing human figure holding an object; Zoomorphic figures: Ibex, yak; Geometric designs: Triangular and square pattern.
Mulbek	N34 22.718 E76 21.995	Anthropomorphic figures: A huge four handed Maitriya Buddha figure is carved on the face of the hill at Mulbek.
Shankhu	N34 16.169	Anthropomorphic figures: A huge size carved image of Maitriya Buddha in <i>Shambhanga</i> posture

	E75 59.956	with arms. The height of the statue is 9.40 mts, and it is in <i>Abhayamudra</i> with <i>Kamandalu</i> in the right hand.
Tilmarchey	N34 20.647 E75 57.884	Anthropomorphic figures: A six armed Buddha figure in <i>Vyakhyan mudra</i> in the central figure of the panel.

Interpretation of Rock Art

Conceptual Framework

Rock art study of the Ladakh region has been sporadically dealt with so far, although it attracted attention of scholars like Herman Francke (1902) and others since last more than hundred years. Basically, it requires a multi-disciplinary approach so that coherent and integral information is obtained on the subject, which had so far been treated as graffiti on rock rather than symbology of Cosmic representations as understood by the primordial beings. It symbolises the human consciousness from the earliest times to the present day and provides a holistic viewpoint on physical and metaphysical phenomena. In Indian thought and art, both vernacular and classical traditions, one finds variously images of an apparently metaphysical world. Indian art is struck by an extraordinary feat of traditional thought - currents which are both simple and complex. At one level, simple words are used so that everybody can understand the nature of art and art of nature. But at higher level it becomes 'cosmology' instead of simple explanation.¹ Interestingly, many traditional societies have no formal term for art, no separate word for artist.²

The classification of arts in Indian tradition is based on different aesthetic senses. Amongst the senses that lead to aesthetic experience are vision (*Drshya*) and hearing (*Shravya*). Architecture, sculpture and painting originate from vision, and music and poetry originate from hearing and theatre from the two together. Hence, Indian aesthetics is a well-experimented psychoanalytical process of judgment. Most probably man's first awareness of the world around came through his primeval sense of sight and ability to hear. The rock art forms a crucial component of the *Adi Drshya* (primal vision).

The prehistoric rock art has been interpreted with different theoretical orientations - generally based on vague and misguided notions of "primitive mentality". Primitive man is denied of having "deeper aesthetic feelings" and "highest moral and intellectual speculations". Following the evolutionary approach - addressing the propositions about human cognitive development and the process of evolutioning emergence of language - "scientific" claims are made for the "origin of art". But we should not ignore the fact that in the old world the cosmocentric view dominated the lifestyle. Even the authors of rock art and sages of the *Upanisadic* philosophy reveal the same experience of the cosmos and man's place in it. Both look at the universes sacred artifacts. Interestingly, the text of the classical Indian theory of art is consistent with the context of what is known today as aboriginal art.³ the fundamental intuition, motifs and styles of rock art persist in their art.

The 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

the world-view of the ancient people, and tells us about the soul of a community, its thoughts, beliefs and emotions. It is associated with the cultural values, particularly in countries like India and Australia, where this art is a part of the living cultural heritage of its native population. The rock art images could be treated as a source for cultural communication with the past, present and the future. The past was to celebrate remembrance, memory and legacy. The present is to confirm and legitimise the culture and the future as an expression for the cultural and human fear of death. Fortunately, India has one of the world's six major Prehistoric rock art concentrations of stone age era, and is the first country in the world to discover the same (in 1867 A.D. at Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh). The other places of the globe are South-Western Europe, Russia, South-East Asia, Central Asia, North Africa, South Africa and Australia. The term 'Rock Art' is generally used for all types of artistic activities found on rocks and is classified into two main forms; 'pictographs' and 'petroglyphs'. The pictographs refer to painted figures and are also termed as rock paintings and petroglyphs include engravings, carvings, brushing, dotting and cup marking. The pictographs are found on rock shelters, while petroglyphs are usually confined to open rocks and boulders.

Rock art authors of the Ladakh region mainly depicted the anthropomorphic figures, social scenes, zoomorphic figures, wild and domesticated animals, symbolic figures, religious scenes and inscriptions. In the anthropomorphic form, the figures like giants and human figures are mainly depicted. The hunting, dancing and riding scenes have also been depicted. Among the signs and symbols depicted are the *swastika*, *yoni*, sun-like circles, dots, spirals, palm, foot prints and masks. In zoomorphic form, the wild animals like the ibex, stag, leopard, canines, fox, big horn sheep, wild birds, etc. have been depicted. Among the domestic animals, the figures of the camel, yak, horse, dog and sheep are mainly found. The religious figures of later periods like *Stupa* (Archaic Chortens), Buddha, Buddhist monks, and Christian Cross have been depicted. The inscriptions in Chinese, Sogdian, Kharoshti, Brahmi, Arabic and Tibetan are also found in the rock art of the Ladakh region.

Rock art of the Ladakh region perhaps has been either made by the local inhabitants or by some foreign travelers, traders and invaders. Rock art made around the villages and the high pasture lands is made by the local people. In some such cases, the local script alongwith the engravings are found and human figures are in traditional costumes, etc. Rock art of different areas of the Ladakh region show a significant difference in character and subject. Some of them are stylistically very different from the local type. Such types of figures are usually found scattered along ancient foot trails or trade routes or along river banks.

In most parts of the world there is universality in subject matter and pattern of rock art depictions. The style and subject of some art from Kargil area to the one from Burzahom in Kashmir connects the two places as long as the Neolithic period. The depiction of hand and foot prints, hunting scenes, masked dances, astronomical symbols like sun and moon, etc. in the rock art of Ladakh shows a primitive character, usually shared by most of the prehistoric people.⁴ The hunting scenes by the mounted men chasing yak or dong are believed to be pre-Buddhist. The figures of archaic *stupa* perhaps belong to the period of introduction of Buddhism in Ladakh. This type of *stupa* shows some similarities with the *stupa* built by Rinchen Zangpo. The rock art of Domkhar site (Domkhar Sanctuary) depicting figures of horse, ibex, birds, carnivores, deer (with antlers), human figures and inscriptions appears to be earliest, between second or third millennium B.C. or earlier. The deer (stylistically like Domkhar) figure in its tip-toe pattern has been reported from Siberia also, which has been assigned the date of early Iron age. Some of

the deer figures on the tips are shown in the rock art of Zanskar (assigned to Iron age). The 'S' pattern drawings on the animal figures reported from Domkhar, Khalsi and Chilling areas are believed to be comparatively of earlier period. In one of the rock surfaces at Sasoma a composition of six or seven mask-like figures has been reported. Some of them have resemblance either to the mask figures reported from Mugur-Sargol (Siberia) or those found in the Indus area at Ziarat I and Chilas or Okunevo culture of Mongolia and Altai region of southern Russia, dated from 3rd to 2nd century B. C.

At some places, the superimposition of figures is noticed. At Alchi, a group of wild sheep and dogs are superimposed by the *stupas*, obviously of the later period (Fig. 11). The patination pattern also indicates *stupas* of the later date. Earlier composition is most probably pre-Buddhist.

Rock art of the Ladakh region has a variety of different figures. Some are schematic, others realistic, and still others approach naturalism. In the initial phase the depiction of the animal figures are usually found. The other themes which followed were the anthropomorphic forms, symbols, and other religious themes. The religious inspiration for the rock art has been widely accepted and recognised. But no sufficient attempt has been made to go beyond this notion and explain their profound meaning or they existed. It may be noted that the authors of the rock art never depicted their animal and human figures in the natural surroundings. There is no sky, no sun, no moon, no water or vegetation, not even the ground. This could be an expression of some convention. A mere outline or some prominent feature of their anatomy depicts many of the animals. Perhaps the animal in such cases was nothing but a support for some form of symbolism?

Unfortunately, the rock art of the area is facing severe problems of conservation and preservation, due to both human and natural causes. The preservation of this art is very necessary owing to the rapid rate of destruction caused by an unaware society. The people make frequently crude attempts by scratching and writing their names on these rock art boulders. The sites facing human vandalism are mainly Kere, Sasoma, Dha, Bema, Diskit, and some other rock art sites of Leh and Kargil districts. The human vandalism not only indicates lack of sensitivity and knowledge but also an alienation from the human family. There is an urgent need for conservation and management of the rock art sites from the fundamental problems like floods, weathering, breaking down of the rocks for road and building constructions, etc. In the rock art areas/ sites like Sasoma, Kere, Dha, Bema, Diskit, Alchi, Nurla, Khalsi, Taru, Tangtse, Upshi and Darchik, the breaking down of rocks art boulders for the construction of roads, etc. has been going on.

Ethnographical Connections

The ethnographical approach for studying rock art has two main aspects. One is direct relationship between tribal/ native groups and the rock art in their habitat. And another is the interference, which can be extracted from the cognition of the natives about this art. It does not matter if they did not do it or if it belongs to another age and precedence. The first addresses/undertakes ethnic and ethnological studies of the techniques of conservation (facing tourism and the cultural changes). This is an urgent task. But the approximation to the problem must be synchronic and phenomenological. At the same time, an archaeology claiming to be cognitive, aiming at how a culture is understood need a tautegoric ethnography to plan its interfaces. The true understanding cannot come by imposing the pre-concerned, uni-dimensional models of the cognitive development of the human language or through artificial order or data.

We would have to understand the circular movement of our past and present, regional and global, part and the whole, self and the other, surface and the context in the rock art traditions of the world. It could help in making clear the meaning of the rock art depictions; why some and not others are ruled by the fixed laws, why is not possible to generalise when dealing with different people. The native of today, as that of yesterday, is a free being, who select the motives that his cosmology dictated or by imperative shamanism. The other factors, which could be investigated by ethnoarchaeology, include– abrogation, superimposed drawings, destruction, and changing of sites.

The people of Ladakh region have maintained their cultural links throughout the ages with the rock engravings. They associate it with some of their intrinsic myths, associated with their culture and religious practices. In the lower Ladakh area, the present day usage of assembly grounds with rock art boulders among the Brog-pa Dards (known as Changra) and the Kinnauris at Poo (Known as Dogra) are perhaps remnant of similar notions. The numerous repatinated engravings in these assembly grounds most probably reveal a reverence for the symbols carved by the early inhabitants. These depictions canonise the rocks and there by increase the power and sacredness of the place. Such a type of setting perhaps creates an appropriate atmosphere for the socio-religious gatherings. Interestingly, in other parts of India, the belief system is associated with the rock art shelters also.⁵

The figure of ibex which is frequently depicted in the rock art of Ladakh has relevance in contemporary culture of Ladakh too. It represents the local tradition of the area connected with the ceremony of ibex hunting, known as *thuma salimg*, a term perhaps in Balti language. A local story also refers to a ritual conception of a male ibex, which, if drawn on this rock. It leads to human regnancy. The male organ of the ibex is also drawn at a number of places. Even today, on the New Year day of Ladakhis, locally called “Losar”, people make ibex from barley dough, which is baked and worshipped in religious ceremonies. Some communities carve an image of ibex on rocks, with a belief that it will lead to conception and bring a child to the family. It may not be out of context to mention here that the fertility cult was very popular in early India and other parts of the world also.

The role of ibex hunting as a ritual of fertility was existing in a vast area including the North East and Central Asia for many millennia; it perhaps started during the Bronze Age or even earlier. It is worthwhile to mention here that the Moon Worship in ancient times was associated with life, fertility, propitiations of rain and children. Interestingly, the moon maintained its features in the different geographical areas even if it had different aspects. In Europe, it was a goddess identified with Great Mother (like *Zoon Mage*-Mother Moon in Kashmir) and then with Diana or Juno. In Mesopotamia, Babylonia and North West Iran it was represented as a horned man or a bull. In the other regions it was represented as an adult male ibex and among propitiatory rites there were touching horns and hunting the animal with bow and arrow.

The Buddhist rock reliefs and sculptures from Ladakh were influenced by the Indian Buddhist thought-currents. Infact, Buddhism entered Ladakh through Kashmir. Buddhist relief’s found at Mulbek, Dras, Suru valley in Kargil district, Changspa, Shey, Spituk, and around Leh, testify to Kashmir artistic influence into Ladakh in the 7th to 10th century. But, Ladakh came under the influence of Toling, the great

religious centre of Guge in western Tibet in the 11th century. Many of the rock engravings of Ladakh perhaps belong to this period or before. The anti-clockwise signs of *swastika*, which are found in many rock engravings, have perhaps the Bon origin, which pre-dates Tibetan-Buddhist period in Ladakh. In the Tibetan-Buddhist period engravings, sculptures, *stupas* and Buddhist *mantras* (inscriptions) were gradually introduced.

Conclusion

Rock art material along with ethnographical evidence suggests a close dynamic relationship between man and nature. The significance of prehistoric rock art forms, designs, colours and concepts perhaps reinforces and continues to emphasise the vitality of the traditional way. These elements, most probably, basic to all arts, allow the artists to visualise their concepts and traditions. Traditional philosophy expresses the vitality of the emerging contemporary art. Its study may involve three successive stages: First entering into the present day context of traditional art forms and then moving backward in time to rock art stages, and ultimately constructing a conceptual framework by juxtaposing visual text with the cultural context. While drawing analogy from the theme of native or tribal art, one can state that the people in the prehistoric period might have conceptualised nature into art form and worshipped the presiding deities and spirits for better living. The basic urge, which had compelled and prompted the people to manifest art, was utilitarian purpose, invoking sympathetic magic to ensure a constant food supply. The principal food of the prehistoric people was the games hunted so regularly. By portraying animals they perhaps believed, it would give them success in hunting, and there would be a plentiful supply of wild animals who made them fell prey to their weapons, when they went on hunting. Thus the prehistoric rock art acquires status of magico-religious nature. The beliefs and rituals occupy an important place in the socio-religious life of all the primitive communities. The themes such as community dance and the hunting indicate perhaps some sort of magico-religious significance. Rock paintings and engravings of animals like antelope and ibex pierced with spears or arrows may also have served as magic invocations of success, because several tribal/native groups still make images personifying evil and ceremonially decapitate them. In most of the cases the dancers are seen wearing the masks. The prehistoric and tribal/native people had deep metaphoric functions in their traditional masks. Perhaps by putting on the mask, they become spirits and acquire the power, the nature and the magic skills of spirits. The different ways in which present day tribal/native people express the magic of their beliefs, rituals and taboos are really noteworthy. The symbols were most probably adorned for their own value or represented deities. There is a sacred spiritual reality that the symbols represent, an understanding that it is proper and just that we all being in this space at this time and place. Rock art seems to be influenced by the socio-cultural conventions. The comparative studies may perhaps add to the thesis of continuity of tradition(s), but definitely with some modifications along with the time.

Notes

1. Indian theory of aesthetics is deeply rooted in the triple - principle of *satyam* (Truth), *shivam* (Goodness/auspiciousness) and *sundaram* (Beauty). *Satyam* (Truth) is paired with *rtam* (Cosmic Order) in the famous passage of *Rgveda* (X.90.1), which says that both of these were born of kindled *tapas*. *Tapas* is the basic effort and form of the manifestation of existence, creation and bliss from the basic cause. This relates to primary analysis of creation where Reality is seen in two forms viz. *rtam*, the kinetic aspect of

order and *satyam*, the potential aspect of Truth. *Rtam* for Hindus in the blue print for Cosmic harmony (*Dharma*); for the Buddhists the law of righteousness (*Dhamma*); for the Muslims the inflexible yet all the merciful decrees of divine (*Haqq*). And for the Chinese *rtam* is the mystical path (*Tao*). Thus *rtam* is the framework in which the process of creation, sustenance and dissolution operates. Its most important meanings include Cosmic Order, Truth, Nature (*Dharma*), Beauty and Continuous Flow. It regulates the cosmos into a systematic whole.

2. The majority of the people from the traditional societies can paint and carve. It is an integral part of their lifestyle. The priest may have the privilege for producing paintings and songs in ceremonies. Or members of a clan may hold such a status. The Saora icon is the drawing on the walls and is locally called *ITTALAN* (*ID* = to write; *KITALAN* = a wall). The term varies from one area to the other. The Saoras living around Chandragiri refer to it as *ANITAL* (*KINTAL* = wall, the drawings on the walls are called *ANITAL*). Similarly, the Pithora painters of western India call painting, "writing" *LIKHANA* and painter, "writer" *LAKHERA*. In Indian classical (textual) tradition also the aesthetics or the science of art appreciation uses the word 'art' in a wide and all-inclusive sense. The essential hallmark of art is to make, create or fashion a form or *rupa*, sensible or intelligible.
3. In the different regions of the world where traditions have best been preserved and where rock art has persisted until recent times, their interpretation has often been sought in current popular beliefs. It is a general belief that traditions never die but change alongwith time. The forbearers of the present day tribal/native people have a variety of ways to express the magic of their beliefs, rituals and taboos. Current myths and traditions can offer us tools for analysis; elements for thought, but not, of course, ready-made answers. They can provide approach to rock art, which is complementary with that of Archaeology, even though it often holds certain dangers.
4. Usually the subject matter of the Indian rock paintings include human and animal figures, hunting and battle scenes, handprints, inscriptions and symbols. A few illustrations connected with other activities of the contemporary tribal life as fruit gathering, rowing, mother with child etc. are also found. It is attempted by some scholars to co-relate these paintings with the local folklores. A reference from Mirzapur (U.P.) rock paintings is worth mention here, in which a warrior with raised hands, an elephant in each of them and both his feet trampling an elephant under them. The illustration in question, may be linked with the 'Lorikayan' folk-lore, mentioning that Lorik, the hero of the love-tale, single handedly threw elephants in the war. While describing X-ray paintings of cow and neelgai (antelope) an elephant embryo in their womb, Wakankar remarks that such stories are still told in the same way by the Korku tribe in Pachmarhi hills. This may perhaps have some sort of connection with the theory of reincarnation of Hindus.
5. Some of the rock shelters from the very earlier days are regarded sacred, magical and enchanted places. During my exhaustive field study in Central India I was able to locate and document many such rock shelters which are/were under worship. Regarding this, mention may be made of such shelters at Jhiri, Bhimbetka, Kota Kerar , Gufa Maser and in Pachmarhi area of Madhya Pradesh state.

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