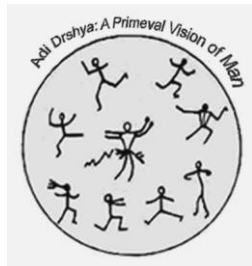


(Concept Paper)
International Event on Rock Art (2012)



(I)
International Conference on Rock Art 2012
(06th -13th December, 2012)

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) is India's premier institution conceptualised and visualised by Dr. (Mrs.) Kapila Vatsyayan, Founder Member Secretary and IGNCA Trustee, as a Centre encompassing the study and experience of all the arts – each form with its own integrity, yet within the dimension of mutual interrelatedness with nature, social structure and cosmology. The Centre has conceived a major academic programme, which relates to exploring 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 realisation that rock art is pure and absolute and hence capable of dispensing great experience beyond its original culture and time. The IGNCA's concern with prehistoric rock art is not restricted to the Archaeologists, and the pre-historians' concern with establishing a linear chronological order of prehistoric rock art, nor is it restricted to the identification of style and school as criterion for establishing chronology. Instead, it is a concern for man's creativity across time and space and civilisations and cultures through the perception of the sight. Briefly, the goal to be set is not merely the development of a database and a multimedia gallery but also to establish *Adi Drshya* into a school of thought and research on alternate means of understanding prehistoric art. So far, we have mechanistic, analytical approaches which assume that the underlying significance of this kind of creativity cannot be inferred by statistical counts of frequency of figures etc. Nothing could undermine the complexity and richness of this tradition more. At the moment, there is not much available in India by way of interpretive treatment of prehistoric art.

Rock art is one of our greatest surviving art treasures. It possesses a largest body of evidence of human artistic, cognitive and cultural beginnings. The intrinsic efficacy of the rock art lies in the universality of appeal and to endure and sustain in a manner in which all can discern it. Until recent past the content of rock art has been much commented on as an indicator of the stage of development of the authors of the rock art. But for a quite some time the attempts are being made by many scholars to explore the possibility of the proximity of rock art with the art of many living communities of the world – such as the indigenous people, the aboriginals, the tribal and the nomads. India is fortunate in possessing one of the three largest concentrations of this world heritage, the other two being Australia and South Africa, where rock art is still a living pursuit. Therefore, it will be a proud privilege for the IGNCA to host such an international conference of academic merit with an urge to analyse where we stand in the global context. 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.

To decipher rock art, mainly three methods i.e. archaeological, psycho-analytical and ethnographical are being followed. In the countries where there is no continuity of traditions due to industrialisation, etc. the psycho-analytical and archaeological approaches are being mainly adopted. Under psycho-analytical method the psychiatrists are exploring the minds of the prehistoric artists. But in the countries like India, Australia and South Africa where there is continuity of traditions, the ethnographical and archaeological approaches are being mainly followed. In ethnographical study two main aspects emerge. 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. 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 other factors, which could be investigated by ethno-archaeology includes – abrogation, superimposed drawings, destruction, and changing of sites. The concern for exploring new ways and means for rock art research and for deciphering rock art has opened a new chapter in the history of research in prehistoric and tribal art.

In the different parts of the world many international conferences have been held earlier on the general subject of the rock art but hardly a few on a specific theme in the global context. In India, the IGNCA organised a Global Rock Art Conference in 1993. In this conference the main stream of discussion followed the seminal issues like 'Universality' and 'Chronology'. Other problems highlighted were those of conservation and preservation of rock art sites, the safeguard of the natural environment and protection of the right of the indigenous people inhabiting in the proximity of rock art sites. On this issue an "Expert Meeting on the Conservation, Preservation and Management of Rock Art" was organised by the IGNCA in 1996. Another International Rock Art Conference on the general subject was organised by RASI at Agra in 2004. The present conference would mainly focus on the "Recent Developments in Rock Art Research and Documentation". The renowned international multidisciplinary scholars from all the five continents working on rock art will be invited to participate in the conference. These scholars would mainly address to the new documentation and research methodologies adopted for the interpretation of the rock art. They would also re-assess the acceptance of chronology as the sole criterion of rock art studies. In the conference the importance of the rock art, both for Archaeology and also ethnology and lifestyle studies would be discussed. The deliberations in the conference would follow mainly on seminal issues like the 'Adoption of both scientific and humanistic methodologies', 'Form, content and interpretation', 'Consideration of context', 'Rock art site(s) as a cultural landscape', 'Cognitive mapping', 'Ethnographical approach to examine the phenomenon of continuity', 'Psychology and semiotics of art', 'Ethnic and regional characters', 'Universal framework', 'Rock art and modern society', 'Chronology', etc.

Keeping in mind the rich concentration of rock art in India along with a vibrant living art tradition practiced by several communities across the country, the conference is focused to initiate a dialogue between academia and practicing artists both from the rural and urban areas. The conference has been conceived with a difference giving special attention to a new kind of inter-disciplinary research involving allied disciplines like Anthropology, Geology, Art History etc., which can open new horizons to the study of rock art. The deliberations in the conference sessions is proposed to be taken up under the following themes: (i) Concept and

Methodology (ii) Themes - (a) Forms (b) Content(c) Context (iii) Techniques (iv) Interpreting Rock Art - (a) Archaeological Approach (b) Ethnographic Approach (c) Psycho- analytical Approach (v) Interdisciplinary Approach (vi) Chronological Issues (vii) Cultural Ecology (viii) Documentation and Conservation.

(II) ***Special Lectures***

Renowned scholars representing five continents would present review and overall status of rock art studies in their respective continents.

(III) ***Workshops***

The artists from Saura (Odisha), Warli (Maharashtra) and Rathwa (Gujarat) would be invited to give demonstration on replication of rock art in order to create general awareness among the public and school children.

(IV) ***An Exhibition*** On ***Adi Drshya: A Primeval Vision of Man***

The Sanskrit term *Adi Drshya* is an indicator of multiple levels of interpretations of the world *Adi* (Primeval). The IGNCA has envisaged an *Adi Drshya* exhibition which will create for the viewer, a degree of experiential contact with prehistoric art. It would provide the basis for entering into the changing aspects of the living arts of man. It is believed that man's awareness of the world around came through his primeval sense of sight and sound. These two scenes have stimulated artists' expressions, visual and aural, in the prehistoric past as also in the contemporary cultures. Exploring through the faculty of sight, we can construct the kinds of world view that have nearly ceased to exist, and try to infer from that the articulation of lifestyle that continue to the present only in radically altered ways. Besides, the emphasis will be given to create in the viewer both a perception of time as well as the unchanging material and non-material needs in the physical and environmental setting common to all of humankind without linking the past and the present in an evolutionary framework. While considering the diversity of form and manifold concept of time there is no good reason to restrict the understanding of rock art in terms of linear time, making it out fixed points of time in history. On the conceptual side the exhibition will attempt to bring out the universals amongst different cultures that existed in the pre-historic times. It is intended that by placing side by side cross-cultural products, it can be demonstrated that there are universals in this system of visualisation, holding great relevance today. In fact, it will be endeavour to create among Indian's a greater appreciation of the past heritage and its continuum.

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 evolving 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. The fundamental intuition, motifs and styles of rock art persist in their art.

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. Drawing analogy from the theme of tribal art, we can safely state that people in the prehistoric period might have conceptualised the 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 shelter dwellers was games hunted so regularly. By portraying animals the shelter - dwellers perhaps believed, it would give them success in hunting, and there would be a plentiful supply of wild animals that made them fell prey to their weapons, when they went on hunting. Thus, the prehistoric rock art acquires status of magico - religious nature. Some scholars suggest that rock shelter paintings of antelopes pierced with spears may also have served as magic invocations of success, because several tribal groups still make images personifying evil and ceremonially decapitate them.

The proposed exhibition based on the documentation and acquisitions already done by the IGNCA would not address to periodisation of rock art, which is sunk in a maze of controversies. Besides, a comprehensive viewing of rock art is not always an easy task because superimpositions, composite associations and cognitive accumulation have come about in the course of time. Therefore, the main focus of the exhibition would be on the social patterns and lifestyle of the Early Man and on the regional variations of the rock art depictions. Display of indigenous living art traditions would also form the part of the exhibition.

(V) ***Film Shows***

Films on the rock art heritage of India and other parts of the World would be screened during the conference/ event.

(VI) ***Demonstrations of Traditional Ritual Art Forms***

The ritual art forms of cultural troupes like: (i) Saura (Odisha), (ii) Warli (Maharashtra), (iii) Rathwa (Gujarat), etc would be demonstrated in the conference/ workshop.

(VII) ***Publications***

Special publications like Brochures, Exhibition Catalogue special Lecture volume and other publication related to the rock art project to be brought out and released.

(VIII)

A Field Trip to a Rock Art Site



Concept paper by Dr. B.L. Malla