

Rock impressions

Rock art represents thousands of years of history and human creativity, and Indian rocks too form a rich archive of this art. The challenge now is to understand and interpret their meaning, writes

ANANDHAR KHASNIS

He was the world's first visual artist. The rock artist faced unimaginable hardships and daily struggles for survival in a largely hostile environment.

Yet he found time, strength and motivation to create 'works of art' by scratching hard surfaces and colouring them with available pigments — thousands of years ago!

As one looks at the images of rock paintings made in different time points and different countries, one wonders about the tools employed by the rock artist. What were his impulses, concerns and circumstances? What did he want to represent and why? How did he manage to surmount the many challenges in creating his images? Fascinating questions that have mystified and triggered the imagination of archeologists, scientists, scholars, researchers, art historians, and philosophers alike.

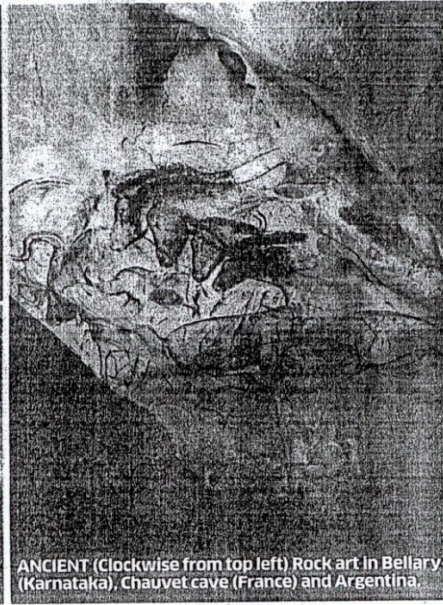
"Rock art represents the most important archive that humanity has on its past," says Italian scholar and archeologist Emmanuel Anati. "The study of rock art has started long ago, but with every generation, there are some new issues. Now the main issue is not just about describing and dating but of understanding."

Anati emphasises that rock art is part of our culture; it adds a new dimension and deeper understanding of a culture acquired by awareness of thousands of years of human creativity. "Rock art is going to provide thousands of years of history that was never written before. It gives awareness, it gives pride, it gives the knowledge of identity of different ethnic groups. And it provides a kind of mosaic of the human kind. Study of rock art provides clues about researching mind and the spirit of man in his artistic production."

According to Anati rock art was not done by men merely to embellish rocks. "It was done to convey messages to other people, to Gods, to the spirits that are inside the rock. What we want to do is to understand, read and to decipher the meaning of rock art. This process is opening up a new age for human history. Until now, we were talking of history from the beginning of writing, but rock art is writing before writing. So, if until now human history was covering the last 5000 years, by studying rock art we may have a human history covering the last 50,000 years."

Painting life

The rock artist principally portrayed the life around him. Through his paintings, he wrote his own stories, expressed his



ANCIENT (Clockwise from top left) Rock art in Bellary (Karnataka), Chauvet cave (France) and Argentina.

beliefs and gave vent to his feelings. He included divinities and ancestors who were worshipped. He incorporated spiritual symbols and religious/mythological texts. He enthusiastically showed human figures, wild animals, vegetation and nature. Presenting himself as a hunter using spears, sticks, bows and arrows, he brought bulls, bison, elephants, wild boar, fish, lizards, scorpions, snakes and a range of birds into his creative landscape. Frequently, he applied to his paintings pigments derived from naturally occurring material. In doing so, he brought an exceptional grace and elegance to his paintings.

One can also see a rare sophistication and liveliness along with a sparkling sense of movement and flowing naturalism in rock paintings art.

Experts believe that rock art served different purposes. "We are very lucky that it is rock art and not paper art, or art made on some perishable material (like cloth, bark of a tree or even on human bodies), which did not last long," says an anthropologist. "It is a tremendous heritage, but it is only a small part of human creativity of the past."

Threat to rock art

The importance of studying rock art has been acknowledged by various countries world over. There is also a growing concern about rock art archives that are fading and facing damage by natural causes and vandalism. The biggest threat for rock art, unfortunately but predictably, comes from the modern human. The need for multidisciplinary research, management and decision-making has been emphasised by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other international agencies. Many prehistoric rock art venues have been declared as World Heritage sites by UNESCO.

New and newer rock art sites are being discovered across the world. Archeologist and long-time rock art researcher Dr Lawrence L. Loendorf feels that a newly discovered rock art site should receive careful attention and in fact, be treated like a crime scene. "It has been recommended that access to the site be prohibited until archaeologists have had the opportunity to meticulously examine the site

WHAT WERE A ROCK ARTIST'S IMPULSES, CONCERNS AND CIRCUMSTANCES? WHAT DID HE WANT TO REPRESENT?

surface for clues that might be relevant to an understanding of the rock art."

Another aspect of rock art is that it is notoriously difficult to date, unlike bones and tools dug up from the ground. It was commonly held that Chauvet cave paintings in France with images of bears, lions and horses were the world's oldest paintings; they were believed to be at least 37,000 years old. But in June 2012, National Geographic News and other agencies reported that a study team had considered eleven subterranean sites along northern Spain's Cantabrian Sea coast, and concluded that the cave called El Castillo had the oldest paintings, which were more than 40,800 years old!

There is a fair amount of controversy about these assertions, but no one disputes that the rock artist did leave his ineradicable marks of creativity many thousands of years ago.

Indian rock art

India, with its variety of elements, is among the richest countries of rock art. It is estimated that the country has the third largest concentration of rock art in the world, after Australia and Africa. The recognition of Indian rock art as an archaeo-historical source is said to date back to 1868, but it was the discovery of Bhimbetka, the spectacularly rich rock art site in Madhya Pradesh, in 1958 that generated wide interest. Today there are many rock art sites in remotest places of the country hidden beneath dense woods or inaccessible mountainous terrain. According to cultural anthropologists, the whole India is carrying 'the heritage of rock arts that are a rare book of knowledge of the days of antiquity.'

An interesting exhibition currently on at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Bangalore, provides a glimpse of rock art of India and abroad. Organised by Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) and Archaeological Survey of India, 'The World of Rock Art' exhibition unfolds images of a representative collection of important traditions of rock art. The five-city travelling exhibition (Varanasi, Guwahati, Bhubaneswar, Pondicherry and Bangalore) is part of the IGNCA's efforts to create awareness about the first creative art of mankind. The show concludes on January 3, 2014.

A chip from the past

The rock art exhibition that concludes today in the city generated a lot of interest

Rock art is one of the richest cultural resources in the world, which depicts the earliest expressions of humankind. Fortunately, India has one of the world's six major pre-historic rock art concentrations. Rock art is artistic expressions on rocks in form of pictographs and petroglyphs. Rock paintings and are found on rock shelters whereas Petroglyphs are engravings, carvings, brushings and cup marks and are usually confined to open rocks and boulders.

Rock art forms a crucial component of the Adi Drishya programme under which Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) records all rock art motifs by all possible means of documentation in a uniform format developed by IGNCA for this purpose. IGNCA's conceptual plan aims to open the doors to the realisation that rock art is pure and absolute and hence

CONNECTING CULTURES B.L. Malla

capable of dispensing experiences beyond its original culture and time. Dr. B. L. Malla, Project Director, IGNCA, was in Bangalore for the rock art exhibition at NGMA, which concludes today. Excerpts from an interview.

When and how was the rock art exhibition planned?

The rock art project at IGNCA was initiated in the year 1989-90 with the aim of documenting rock art sites, its environment and communities living around these sites. Keeping in view the aims and objectives of this project, IGNCA has taken up an interdisciplinary project on rock art survey and documentation along with ethno-archaeological study of rock art. Although the rock art project was initiated in 1990, the multi-disciplinary field research and documentation at large scale has been going on after 2005 only. Field documentation is initiated in about a dozen states in India in collaboration with local experts and institutions in the areas/zones concerned.

What are the other programmes to promote rock art exhibition?

So far, a huge database of photographs, audio and video slides, line drawings and GPS data has been compiled.

Under the rock art publication series, 12 well-received volumes have been published so far. Four CD/DVDs have also been brought out. Two international conference (1993 & 2012) and three national seminars (1991, 1996 and 2004) have been conducted on the subject.

Two international exhibitions one on 'Deer in Rock Art of India and Europe' and another 'The World of Rock Art' were conducted in 1993 and 2012, respectively.

IGNCA is also holding orientation workshops on the subject throughout India.

How is the response to this exhibition?
The exhibition started in New Delhi and moved to Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Srimantha San-kardeva Kalakshetra, Gouthathi, Odisha State Museum, Bhubaneswar and Department of History University of Pondicherry.

We are concluding at Bangalore. There is a tremendous response from people from all walks of life.

RAVIKUMAR

CM K

ಹೃದಯದ ಅಭಿವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಗಾಗಿ ಆದಿಮ ಕಲೆ ರಚನೆ: ಷ.ಷಟ್ಕರ್

ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು: ಆದಿಮರು ಹಣಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಕಲಾಕೃತಿಗಳನ್ನು ಬಿಡಿಸದೆ ತಮ್ಮ ಹೃದಯದ ಅಭಿವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಗಾಗಿ ರಚಿಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದರು ಎಂದು ರಾಷ್ಟ್ರೀಯ ಆಧುನಿಕ ಕಲಾ ಸಂಗ್ರಹಾಲಯದ ಗೌರವ ನಿರ್ದೇಶಕ ಷ. ಷಟ್ಕರ್ ಅಭಿಪ್ರಾಯಪಟ್ಟರು.

ಸಂಗ್ರಹಾಲಯದಲ್ಲಿ ಹಮ್ಮಿಕೊಳ್ಳಲಾಗಿದ್ದ 'ಶಿಲಾ ಕಲಾ ಜಗತ್ತು' ಪ್ರದರ್ಶನದ ಸಮಾರಂಭದ ಸಮಾರಂಭದ ಆಧ್ಯಕ್ಷತೆ ವಹಿಸಿ ಮಾತನಾಡಿದರು. ಆದಿಮ ಕಲೆಗಳ ಉದ್ದೇಶ ಮರಾಟ, ಪ್ರದರ್ಶನಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಇರುತ್ತಿರಲಿಲ್ಲ. ಅವುಗಳೂ ಆಪ್ತ ಹೃದಯದ ಅಭಿವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಯ ಮಾರ್ಗವಾಗಿದ್ದವು. ಇವತ್ತಿನ ಆಧುನಿಕ ಕಲೆ ಪ್ರಕಾಶನವಾದ ಆದಿಮ ಕಲೆಯನ್ನು ಸಹೃದಯತೆಯಿಂದ ಒಪ್ಪಿಕೊಂಡು ಕೈಬಿಡಬೇಕು. ಆದಿಮರೂ ಕಲೆಯ ಜತೆಗೆ ಸ್ವಲ್ಪ ಬೆಳಕಿನೊಳಗೆ ಬಂದು ಅವರನ್ನು ಅರಿವು ಮತ್ತು ಎಂಬ ವಿಶ್ವವಿವರಿಸಿದರು.

ಹಿರಿಯ ಕಲಾವಿದ ಎಂ.ಬಿ. ಪಾಟೀಲ್ ಮಾತನಾಡಿ, ಕಲಾವಿದನಿಗೆ ಸಮಾಜದ ಎಲ್ಲ ಪಾತ್ರದ ಸಂಗತಿಗಳು ಗೊತ್ತಿರಬೇಕು. ಆ ಕಲೆಯ ಮೂಲಕ ಸಮಾಜವನ್ನು ಅಭಿವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಸಬೇಕು, ಯಾವ ಆಧುನಿಕ ಸೌಲಭ್ಯಗಳೂ ಇಲ್ಲದ ಸಂದರ್ಭದಲ್ಲಿ ರಚಿಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದರು ಆದಿಮ ಕಲಾಕೃತಿಗಳನ್ನು ನೋಡಿದಾಗ ಇವತ್ತಿನ ಆಧುನಿಕ ಕಲಾಕೃತಿಗಳು ಎಷ್ಟು ಹಿಂದುಳಿದಿವೆ ಎನ್ನುವುದು ಗೊತ್ತಾಗುತ್ತದೆ.



ಆದಿಮ ಕಲಾವಿದರೊಂದಿಗೆ ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿನಿಗಿ ಬಿ.ಎಂ ಪಾಟೀಲ್ ಮತ್ತು ಕೆ.ಬಿ. ಕುಮಾರ್ ವೆಚ್ಚ ವಿತರಿಸಿದರು.

ಹೀಗಾಗಿ ಆದಿಮ ಕಲೆ ಆಧುನಿಕ ಕಲೆಗಳಿಗೆ ಮಾದರಿಯಾಗಿವೆ. ಆದಿಮದಿಂದ ಆಧುನಿಕ ಕಲೆಯು ಬೇರಾಗಿದೆ ಎಂದು ವಿವರಿಸಿದರು.

ಕಲಾ ಸಂಗ್ರಹಾಲಯದ ನಿರ್ದೇಶಕರಾದ ಕೆ.ಜಿ. ಕುಮಾರ್ ಮಾತನಾಡಿ, ಕಲೆಗಳು ನಮ್ಮಲ್ಲಿ ಪ್ರತಿವಂದನೆ, ಸಂವಾದ, ಚರ್ಚೆ ಹಾಗೂ ಅಭಿರುಚಿಯನ್ನು ಹುಟ್ಟಿಸುತ್ತದೆ. ಕಾವ್ಯ ಸೃಷ್ಟಿಗೂ ಕೊಡ ಆದಿಮ ಕಲೆ ಕಾರಣವಾಗಿದೆ. ಇಲ್ಲಿ ನಡೆದ ಆದಿಮ ಶಿಲಾ ಕಲಾ ಪ್ರದರ್ಶನ ಹೆಚ್ಚಿನವರನ್ನು ಆಕರ್ಷಿಸಿದ್ದು ವಿಮುಖ ಅದಕ್ಕೆ ಮೆಚ್ಚುಗೆ ಸೂಚಿಸಿದರು.

ಈ ಸಂದರ್ಭದಲ್ಲಿ ಕೆಲ ಸುಟ್ಟು ಹೊಲೆಯಾರ್ ಆದಿಮ ಕಲೆಯ ಜೀವ ಸಂಸ್ಕೃತಿಯನ್ನು ಹೇಳುವ ಕವನ ವಾಚಿಸಿದರು. ಕವಯಿತ್ರಿ ಪಿ. ಚಂದ್ರಿಕಾ ಮತ್ತು ಮಗಣಿ ರಾಮಚಂದ್ರಯ್ಯ ಅವರು ಕೂಡ ಅರ್ಥಪೂರ್ಣವಾದ ಕವನ ವಾಚಿಸಿದರು. ಆದಿಮ ಕಲಾ ಸ್ಪರ್ಧೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಪ್ರಶಸ್ತಿ ಪಡೆದ ಅರ್ಜುನ್ ಕಾರ್ತಿಕ ರಾಜ್ ಅವರ ಕಲಾ ಕಾರ್ಯವು ವಿವಿಧ ರೀತಿ ಪ್ರಶಂಸೆ ಪಡೆದಿದೆ. ಇದೇ ಕಾರಣವೇ ರಾಜಕೀಯ ಪಾಟೀಲ್ ದ್ವಿತೀಯ ಬಹುಮಾನವನ್ನು ಹಾಗೂ ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು ಬೋರ್ಡ್ ಕಲಾ ಕಾಲೆಯ ಸಿ.ಪಿ.ಚಂದ್ರಮೋಹನ್ ಕೃಷಿಯ ಬಹುಮಾನ ಪಡೆದರು. ಲಕ್ಷ್ಮೀ ಪೂರ್ಣಿಮಾ ಮತ್ತು ಹೇಮಂತ ಸಿಂಗ್ ಅವರುಗಳ ಕಲಾಕೃತಿಗಳು ಮೆಚ್ಚುಗೆ ಬಹುಮಾನವನ್ನು ಗಳಿಸಿದ್ದು.

ಶಿಲ್ಪಾರಂಗ ಸಂಕೇತ - 4/01/2014

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