

Rock Art Studies

Volume I



Concept, Methodology, Context,
Documentation and Conservation



Edited by Bansi Lal Malla

19

Inventory of Indian Rock Art: A Multidisciplinary Approach

Bansi Lal Malla





ABSTRACT

One of the major academic programmes of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) relates to exploring artistic manifestations emanating from man's primary sense perceptions. Rock art forms a crucial component of the Adi Drishya programme. The Sanskrit term 'Adi Drishya' is an indicator of multiple levels of interpretations of the adi world (primeval world). Rock art is one of the richest cultural resources in the world, which depicts the earliest expressions of humankind. We should not ignore the fact that rock art sites are very vulnerable both to natural and human factors, as they are in open and attract attention. Human vandalism not only indicates lack of sensitivity and knowledge but also an alienation from the human family. Keeping in view these dangers to rock art, IGNCA has taken up a project for the survey, documentation and study of Indian rock art sites in a holistic perspective. The field documentation is being done with scientific means in collaboration with local experts and institutions in the areas/zones concerned. At the national level, the data is being collected in a uniform format developed by IGNCA. The documented rock and its allied subjects are then analysed according to their geographical and cultural settings.

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 worldview of the ancient people, and tells us about the soul of a community, its thoughts, beliefs and emotions. It is also associated with cultural values, particularly in countries like India and Australia, where this art is a part of the living cultural heritage of their native populations. Rock art images can be treated as a source for cultural communication with 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. Other places in the world which have prehistoric rock art concentrations are—South-Western Europe, Russia, 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. Pictographs refer to painted figures and are also termed rock paintings. Petroglyphs include engravings, carvings, brushings, dotting and cup-markings. Pictographs are found on rock shelters, while petroglyphs are usually confined to open rocks and boulders.

One of the major academic programmes of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) relates to exploring artistic manifestations emanating from man's primary sense perceptions. The classification of art in Indian tradition is based on different aesthetic senses—vision (*drishya*) and hearing (*shraavya*). Architecture, sculpture 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. Man's first awareness of the world around him came through his primeval sense of sight and his ability to hear.

Rock art forms a crucial component of the *Adi Drishya* programme under which IGNCA records all rock art motifs by all possible means of documentation. These motifs are then analysed according to their geographical and cultural settings. It will not be an exaggeration to say that IGNCA is the only institution in the country where rock art is being studied as the earliest visual manifestation of mankind, a study which is necessary to understand human society holistically.

IGNCA's fundamental approach to all its works is multidisciplinary, multidimensional, multidirectional, multilayered and multi-meaning within the systematic cultural whole. Its conceptual plan aims to open the doors to the realisation that rock art is pure and absolute and hence capable of dispensing experiences beyond its original culture and time. IGNCA's concern with prehistoric rock art is not restricted to archaeologists' and prehistorians' concerns with establishing a linear chronological order of prehistoric rock art, nor is it restricted to the identification of 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.

The Sanskrit term *Adi Drishya* is an indicator of the multiple levels of interpretations of the *adi* (primeval) world. IGNCA has envisaged *Adi Drishya* display (s) which will create a degree of experiential contact with prehistoric art that is otherwise restricted to



rock art shelters/caves. It will provide the basis for entering into the changing aspects of man's living art. It is believed that man's awareness of the world around him came through his primeval senses of sight and sound. These two stimulated artists' expressions, visual and aural, in the prehistoric past as also in contemporary cultures. Exploring, through the faculty of sight, we can construct the kind of worldviews that have nearly ceased to exist, and try to infer from them an articulation of the lifestyles that continue to the present in radically altered ways. Besides, emphasis is also given to creating both a perception of time as well as the unchanging material and non-material needs in the physical and environmental settings common to all humankind without linking the past and the present in an evolutionary framework.

While considering the diversity of form and manifold concepts of time, there is no good reason to restrict the understanding of rock art in terms of linear time, making it outfixed points of time in history. On the conceptual side, the display (s) that IGNCA proposes will attempt to bring out the universals among world cultures that existed in prehistoric times. It is intended that by placing cross-cultural products side by side, it can be demonstrated that they are universal in this system of visualisation holding great relevance today. In fact, the endeavour will be to create a greater appreciation of the global past among Indians. With a view to preparing for eventual display (s) of rock art, a lot of research and the gradual building up of permanent collections are very necessary.

CONSERVATION HAZARDS

We should not ignore the fact that rock art sites are very vulnerable to natural and human factors, as they are in open and attract attention. Ecological disturbances and problems of bio- deterioration are creating havoc in the preservation of rock art. With increasing population and relatively improved access to formerly remote areas, threats to these sites have increased immensely. Human vandalism not only indicates a lack of sensitivity and knowledge about rock art and its importance, but also an alienation from the human family. Increasing pressure from tourism as well as fundamental problems of weathering and of the impact of vegetation and stock, indicate that there is an urgent need for conservation and management of Indian rock art sites.

Here arises a question: Who will be entrusted with the direct protection and management of these rock art sites? This needs to be worked out urgently. Ideally, it should be—and it is—the responsibility of the central/state governments, but the involvement of local people should not be ignored. Government agencies still do not know the extent and locations of all rock art sites in the country and, therefore, are also not aware of the problems that confront each one of them. So far the prehistoric era has not been a priority area for art conservation in the country. Since most of the rock art sites are located in forestlands, the Ministry of Environment and Forests could play a vital role not only in conserving this precious art form, but also in facilitating the study of the hinterland where forest-based communities may yield useful clues for deciphering rock art. An attempt is being made to explore, document and conserve the intangible aspect of rock art among these communities. An appreciation of prehistoric rock art in India will



improve greatly when these sites are made widely known, can be seen by the people and are protected for posterity as national treasures.

AIMS OF THE ROCK ART PROJECT

- Documenting rock art sites, their environment and communities living around the sites.
- Discussing extant theories of rock art and the intrinsic value of palaeo-art as a cultural heritage and not merely as the cultural property of a particular nation where it is found.
- Examining concrete cases for the conservation, preservation and management of rock art sites.
- Identifying common conservation hazards and practices.
- Evolving strategies for managing, conserving and computerised documentation of rock art sites.
- Suggesting national policies for management of rock art sites.
- Enriching children, common people and serious scholars.

AGENDA OF THE ROCK ART PROJECT

- To make inventory of rock art sites;
- To make contextual video and photo documentation;
- To 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;
- To make documentaries on the basis of the video documentations in the field;
- To develop a digital archive of videos, photo and other electronic data;
- To make suggestions for structural, ecological, and, in rare cases, direct conservation, preferably using local materials and techniques;
- To prepare a Conservation Manual for rock art sites;
- To bring out publications, both in print and electronic media;
- To organise exhibitions (permanent, mobile, temporary).

MAIN COMPONENTS OF THE ROCK ART PROJECT

- National Rock Art Project: Documentation and study of rock art sites in India.
- International collaborative projects: to study/research, training of scholars and publications of international volumes and books.
- Organisation of conferences, seminars, lectures to promote and share researches of rock art at national and international level.
- Acquisition of objects and data related to rock art of India and establishment of archives (reprographic, photographic materials and tools, etc.)
- Cataloguing.
- Outreach/public awareness programmes.



SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES

- Identification of rock art sites under various threats and to ensure their protection and conservation.
- To document the endangered rock art sites of India on priority basis under the national project.
- Evolving site management strategies and conservation strategies to the site specific.
- To finalise work plans and intents for international collaborations.
- Documentation of living traditions of the communities living in proximity of these rock art sites.
- Organising exhibitions and work shops on rock art for dissemination and awareness.
- Training of young researchers.
- To bring out methodological and basic text on rock art.

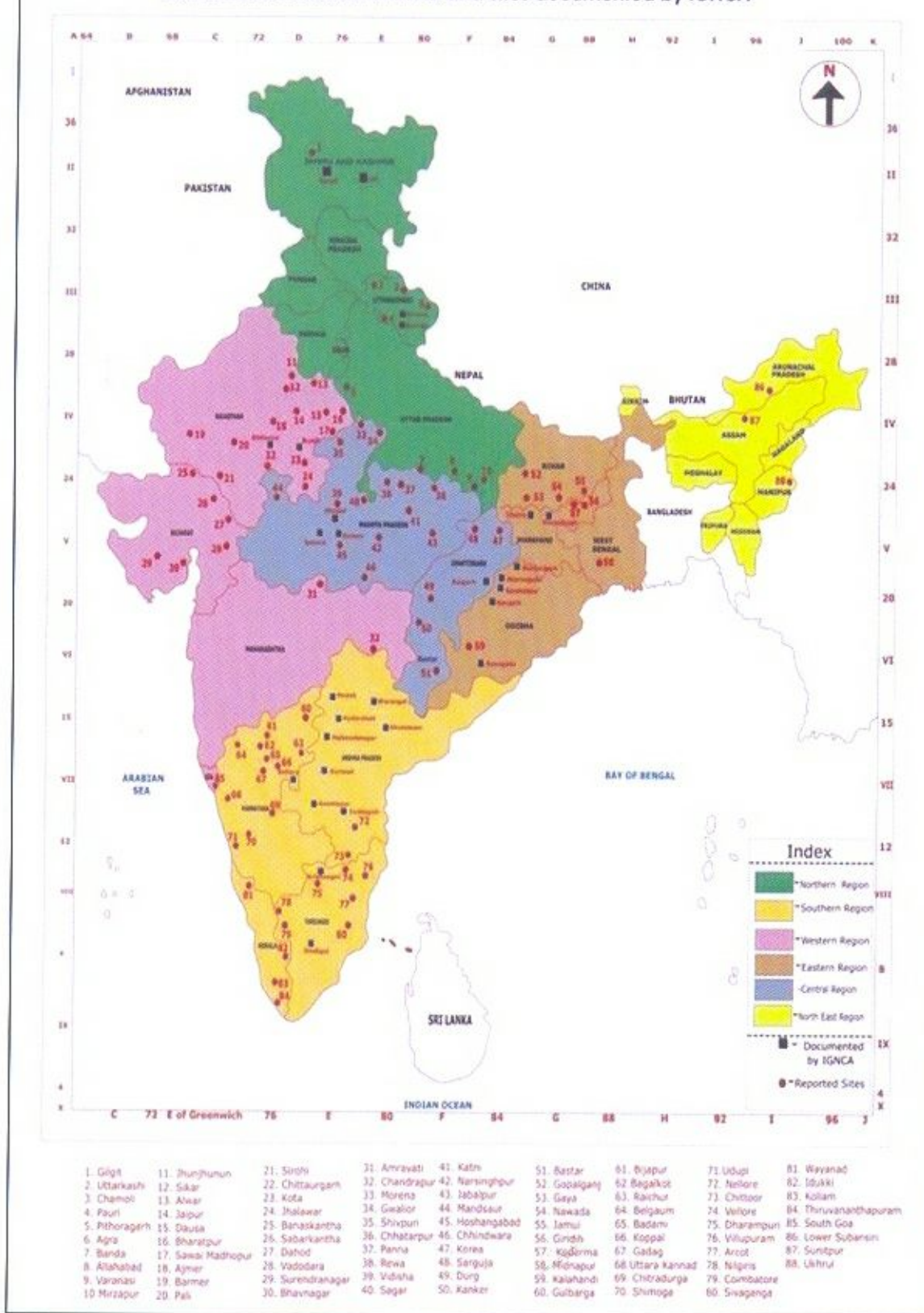
Keeping in view these aims and objectives, IGNCA has taken up this ambitious project on rock art survey and documentation, and also an ethno-archaeological study of rock art. This rock art project was initiated in 1989-90. Major fieldwork/projects undertaken before 2005 were: a project on the rock art of Kumaon Hills in northern India, Kerala in south India and Jhiri in Central India. Multidisciplinary field-based studies and documentation started on a large scale in 2005-06. Field documentation is being done in collaboration with local experts and institutions in the areas/zones concerned. Data is being collected at the national level in a uniform format developed by IGNCA. A huge database has been compiled in this process. Thousands of images have already been digitised. Under the rock art publication series, nine volumes have been published so far. Four CD/DVDs have also been brought out. An international conference (1993) and three national seminars (1991, 1996 and 2004) have been conducted on the subject. An exhibition on 'Deer in Rock Art of India and Europe' was held in 1993. So far, documentation work has been initiated in the following regions/states:

In north India, documentation was initiated in the states of Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir. In Central India, the work was initiated in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. In eastern India, work has been completed in Odisha. In western India, work was initiated in Rajasthan and in southern India, work was initiated in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

In Uttarakhand, documentation work was conducted in Almora and Nainital districts. Fifteen rock art sites and three villages were documented. In Jammu and Kashmir, documentation work was done in the two districts of Leh and Kargil in the Ladakh region. Thirty-three rock art sites and a village were documented. In Madhya Pradesh, documentation work was completed in the three districts of Bhopal, Raisen and Sehore. Eight rock art sites and three villages were documented. In Chhattisgarh, documentation work was done in Raigarh district. Ten rock art sites and three villages were documented. In Jharkhand, documentation work was done in Hazaribagh and Chatra districts. Eight rock art sites and two villages were documented. In Odisha, documentation work has been completed in the four districts of Bargarh, Jharsuguda, Sundargarh and Sambalpur.



Distribution of Rock Art in India and Sites documented by IGNC



Map 19.1 Distribution of rock art sites in India and sites documented by IGNC.

Seven rock art sites and five villages were documented in these four districts. In the Raigada district of Odisha, 15 villages were also documented for the study of tribal art. In Karnataka, documentation work has been completed in Bellary district. Thirteen rock art sites and five villages were documented. In Rajasthan, documentation work was completed in the Bundi district. Thirteen rock art sites and three villages were documented. In Andhra Pradesh, documentation work was initiated in the districts of Hyderabad, Medak, Mahaboobnagar, Warangal and Khammam. Seven rock art sites and four villages were documented. Documentation work in Tamil Nadu was conducted in Krishnagiri and Dharampuri districts. Thirteen rock art sites and five villages were documented. Since the documentation and research of rock art is an ongoing programme at IGNCA, we may take up documentation work in the remaining sites/states from next year. In India, about 1,100 rock art sites are known/reported so far (Table 19.1).

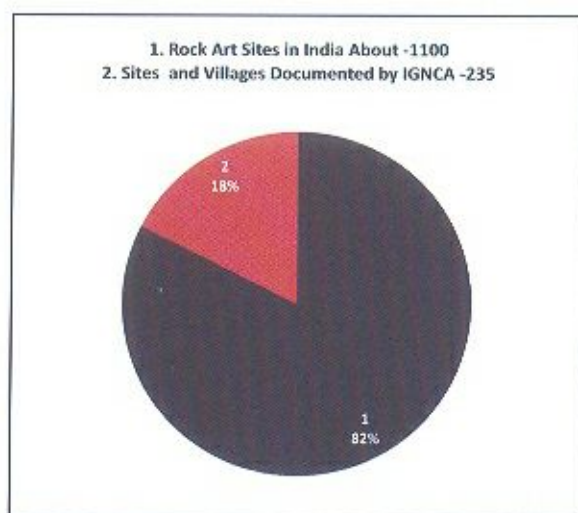


Fig. 19.2 Rock art sites documented by IGNCA.

Table 19.1 Concentration of Indian Rock Art (district/areawise).

North/ North-East	South	East	West	Central
JAMMU & KASHMIR: Leh, Zanshakar, Kargil, Gilgit (area), Burzahama, Bomai (52 sites)	ANDHRA PRADESH Anantapur, Chittoor, Cuddapah, Karimnagar, Kurnool, Mahaboobnagar, Nellore, Ranga Reddy, Medak, Hyderabad, Warangal, Khammam (32 sites)	BIHAR Nawada, Jamui and Giridih (86 sites)	GUJARAT Bhavnagar, Sabarkantha (4 sites) RAJASTHAN Bhilwara, Chittorgarh, Jaipur, Kota, Bundi, Jhalawar, Sikar, Sirohi (52 sites)	CHHATTISGARH Bastar, Raigarh, Raigarh, and Kanker (42 sites)
UTTARAKHAND Almora and Srinagar (42 sites)		JHARKHAND Hazaribag, Chattra, Singhbhum (41 sites)		MADHYA PRADESH Bhopal, Chhatarpur, Chhindwara, Damoh, Datia, Durga, Gwalior, Hoshangabad, Jabalpur, Mandsaur, Morena, Narsinghpur, Nimar, Panna,
UTTAR PRADESH Agra, Allahabad, Almora, Banda, Chamoli, Mirzapur, Uttarakashi and	KARNATAKA Bangalore, Bellary, Bijapur, Gulbarga,	WEST BENGAL Midnapur		
		ODISHA Keonjhar, Sambalpur,		



North/ North-East	South	East	West	Central
Varanasi (155 sites)	Raichur, Sorapur (55 sites)	Sundargar, Bargarh, Jharsugud, Kalahandi, Mayurbhan, Nupara and Suvarnapur (106 sites)		Raisen, Rajgarh, Rewa, Sagar, Sehore , Shivpuri and Vidisha (310 sites) Note: Sites in
ASSAM Sonitpur (3 sites)	KERALA Idukki, Kollam, Trivandrum, Wyand (10 sites)			
MANIPUR Ukhrul	TAMIL NADU Dharmapuri, Dindigal, Krishnagiri, Madurai, Nilgiri, South Arcot (42 sites)			
ARUNACHAL PRADESH Lower Subansiri (Parsi Parlo)				

Briefly, the goal is not merely to develop a huge database or multimedia displays but also to establish *Adi Drishya* as a school of thought and research on alternate means of understanding prehistoric art. At the moment, there is not much available in India by way of an interpretive treatment of prehistoric art. For achieving all these goals, inventrisation and interpretive research of rock art is going hand in hand.

II

(A) IGNCA INVENTORY FORMAT FOR ROCK ART SITE DOCUMENTATION

Site: Mander (Jharkhand)

Present name: Mander (Satpahar).

Village: Mander (Shiruha Mander).

Block: Tandwa.

District: Chatra.

State: Jharkhand.

Physical setting: The site is located on the top of the easternmost end of the Satpahar range and the western-north Karanpura Valley in Chatra district of Jharkhand. The nearest villages are Mander and Khander.

Approach: Mander is located 58 km south of Hazaribagh town and 33 km from Badka gaon (on the road to Hazaribagh via Badka gaon).

Geo-coordinates: The site is located at a height of 575 m MSL on 23° 47' 11.8" North and 84° 59' 45.2" East.

Geo-cultural set-up:

a) Shelter: With painting.

b) Materials: Sandstone.



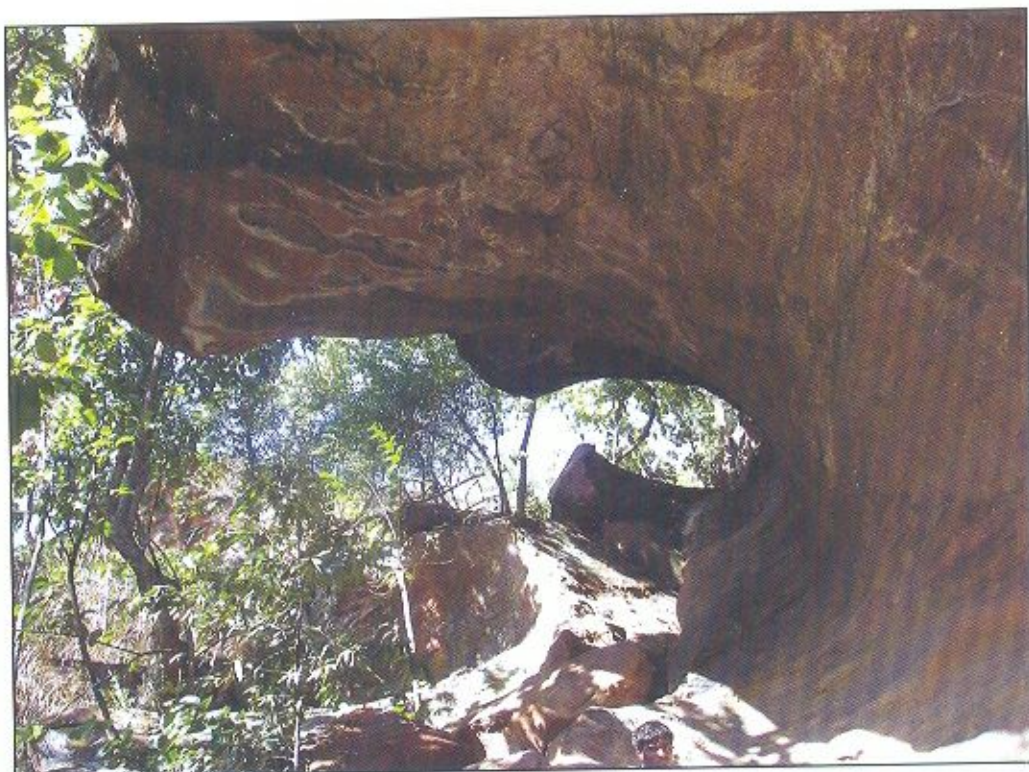


Fig. 19.3 General view of rock shelter.

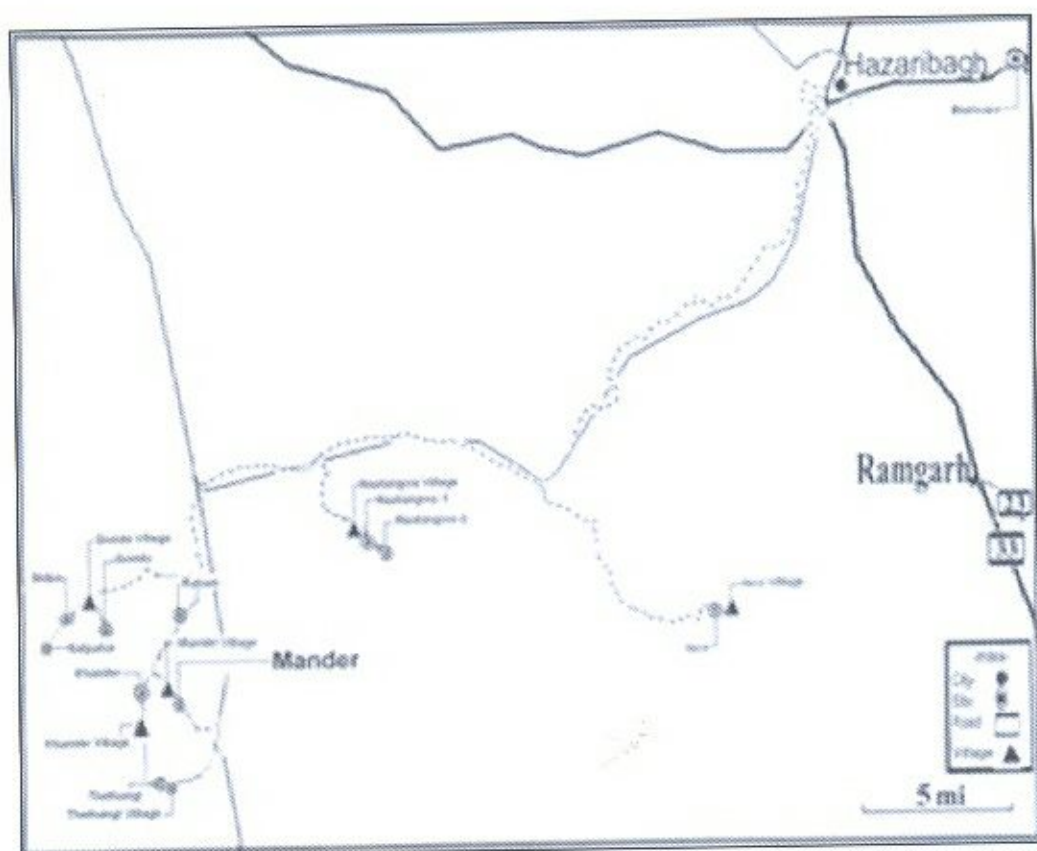


Fig. 19.4 Geo-coordinates of the site.

c) Ownership: State Department of Forests.

d) Use description:

Past: A habitation site?

Present: Not in use.

Type of rock art:

a) Pictograph and Petroglyph (cup-marks).

Colour: Painting in red ochre and white colour.

b) Superimposition: Some figures are superimposed.

Rock art motif:

a) Anthropomorphic.

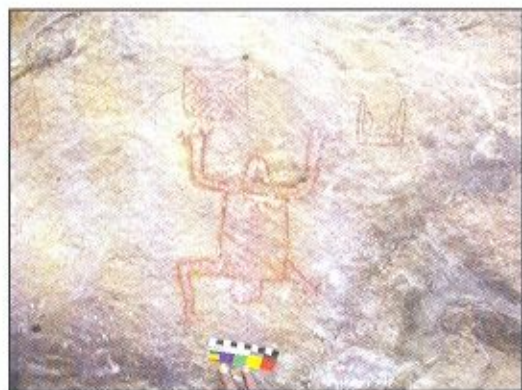


Fig. 19.5 (a-b) Depiction of anthropomorphic figures.

b) Zoomorphic.

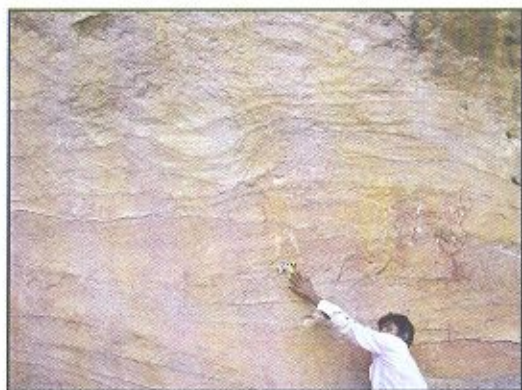
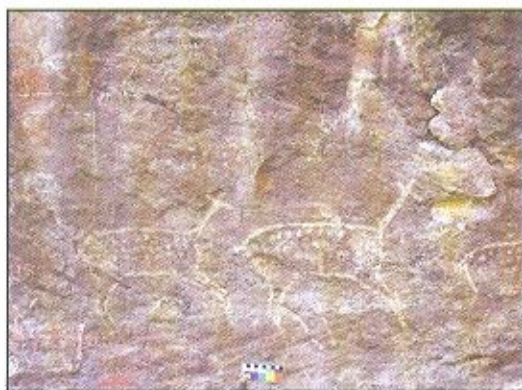


Fig. 19.6 (a-b) Depiction of animal figures.



c) Geometric.

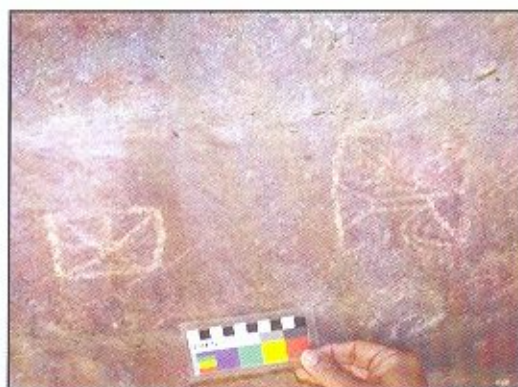


Fig. 19.7 (a-b) Depiction of geometric patterns.

d) Others



Fig. 19.8 Depiction of hunting.

There are four painted rock shelters in the Mander site in Chatra district:

Shelter I: Geometric patterns, rectangular motifs, running animal figures and trees are the central subjects of this shelter.

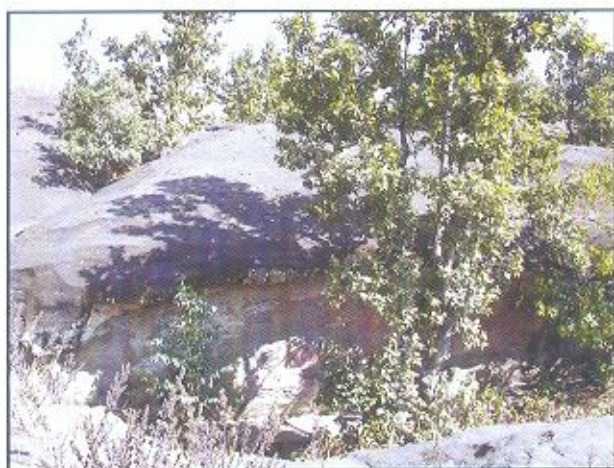
Shelter II: It is the biggest shelter at this site. It has a number of animal figures like deer, bison, wild boar, tiger, tigress, cow and monkey. The scene of a monkey and tiger hunting a boar are the most attractive figures at this shelter. Besides this, there are also various geometric patterns; some grinding holes are also seen on the platform of the rock shelter.

Shelter III: The shelter has painted figures of spotted deer, wild boar, palm impression, etc.

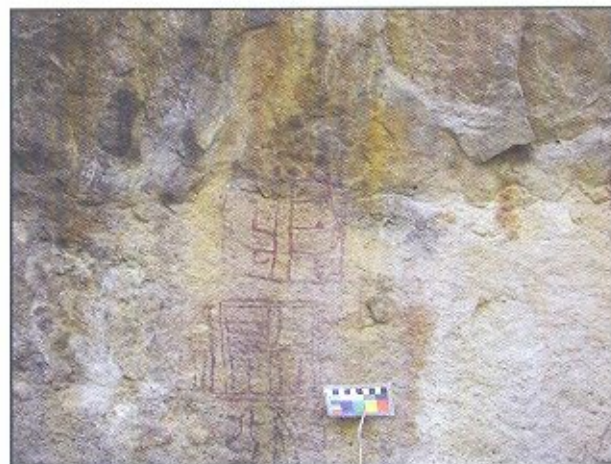
Shelter IV: Presently, a majority of the paintings at this shelter have been washed away due to water seepage.

Age description: Prehistoric and Historical.





Left: **Fig. 19.9** General view of site.



Right: **Fig. 19.10** Showing signs of deterioration.

Area quantification:

a) Area/Site/Block L x B.

The length of Shelter I is 14.20 m.

The height of Shelter I at the highest point is 7.10 m.

The length of the painted panel at Shelter I is 5.80 m.

The depth of the painted panel at Shelter I is 1.75 m.

The length of Shelter II is 17.20 m.

The height of Shelter II at the highest point is 11.70 m.

The length of the painted panel at Shelter II is 6.30 m.

The depth of the painted panel at shelter II is 1.10 m.

The length of Shelter III is 9.80 m.

The height of Shelter III at the highest point is approximately 20 ft.

The length of the painted panel at Shelter III is 3.80 m.

The depth of the painted panel at Shelter III is 15 ft.

The length of Shelter IV is 10.80 m.

The height of Shelter IV at the highest point is 15 ft.

The length of the painted panel at Shelter IV is 1.80 m.

The depth of the painted panel at Shelter IV is 70 cm.

- b) Orientation: Shelter I has north-south orientation and north-west face opening. Shelter II has two blocks; one has a west face and the other has a south face opening. The shelter has east-west orientation. Shelter III has an east-west orientation with south face opening. Shelter IV has north-south orientation with south-west face opening.
- c) No. of blocks: Shelter II has two blocks.

Geology: The rock shelters of Mander belong to the Damuda series of the lower Gondwana group. The rock is sandstone in light red, red, white and yellow colours and the lithology of the stone contains red sandstone, iron stone shale, limestone, clay material and pebbles of different colours.

Status of conservation: Showing signs of deterioration (SSD).



Perceived threats: Both natural and human.

- A) Natural: Exposure to direct sunlight, water seepage from the top of the rock and microbiological growth (algae and lichens) are the main threats.
- B) Human: Increased mining activities for extracting minerals like coal and iron ore by the government department, deforestation and influx of local people are serious threats to this art.

General description, inter-alia:

Flora and fauna: The forest has trees like *Sal*, *Sakbbi*, *Mubul*, *Karada*, *Harda*, *Ainal*, *Babada* and *Domkurdu* and fauna like bear, leopard (*tendua*), boar, wild fox and leaf monkey (*langur*).

(B) INVENTORY OF ETHNO-ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY, BHELWARA VILLAGE (JHARKHAND)

(I) Village Location and Extent

- Village Name: Bhelwara.
- Other Name:
- Physical Setting:
 - Geography, Geology and Environment:
 - Village Type: Revenue village.

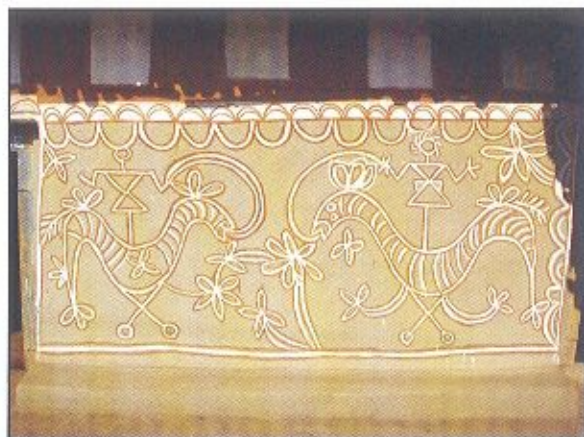
House types: Mud houses, bamboo-thatched and tile roofs with mud flooring and mud walls. There is a courtyard in the middle of the house. Various vegetables are grown in kitchen gardens. The houses mainly have one door for entry and exit, usually in the front of the house. Now, brick and RCC structures are replacing these traditional houses in this village.

Social set-up: Basically, a tribal village dominated by the Kurmis. Male dominated society. The people of this village perform marriages in their own community and all the activities of the marriage are arranged locally. They have their own priest and own harber to carry out all the activities during the function.

Economic system/status: The people of the village cultivate paddy and some vegetables; they are mainly dependent on agricultural products and on the coal mine. Most of the people are engaged in

Fig. 19.11 (a-b) Traditional paintings on the walls of the village houses.





Left & Right: Fig. 19.12 (a-b)
Depiction of different motifs on
the walls of the village houses.

daily labour. The village has one middle school. There is no medical facility like hospital or dispensary. A handpump and wells are the main source of water for drinking and other day-to-day activities.

Belief system: Shrines, deities and festivals—Hindu gods and goddesses.

Modes of transmission of knowledge: Both oral and written.

Approach: The village is located in the Hazaribagh district of Jharkhand and is about 37 km north of Hazaribagh town. It is located on NH 100 from Hazaribagh to Kolkata.

- District: Hazaribagh.
- State: Jharkhand.

(II) Forms of village creativity

- Paintings: The villagers make excellent paintings on their walls. Usually, the paintings are of trees, flowers, creepers, wildlife, birds, decorative horses, horses eating flowers, horse-riders, human figures, snakes, peacocks, fish, creepers, animals and various decorative motifs. Comb paintings are exclusive to the village and are drawn on the interior and exterior parts of the house.
- Embossing
- Carving
- Performing arts
- Any other form: (including pottery, basketry, weaving, carpentry, smithy, etc.—*tradition and innovation*): Village women make tattoos on their hands and legs.

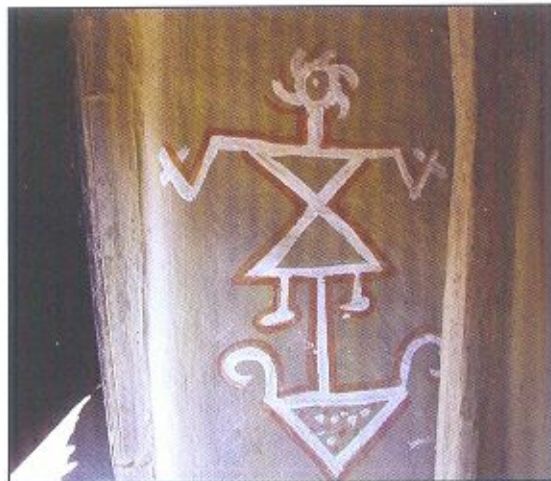
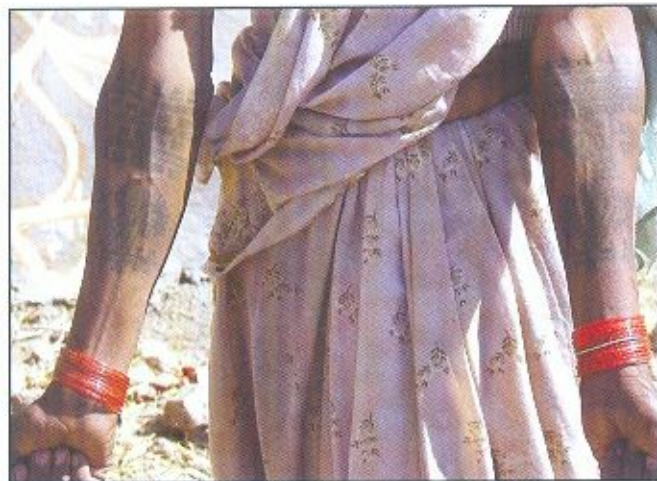
(III) Classification of village art

- Theme
 - *Cosmic/human/symbolic*
- Artist/painter
 - *Social group, gender, specialists.*
- Associated myths and rituals:

They paint the walls during Dipawali for their betterment and prosperity.

- Associated dreams/trances.





- Materials: Rice dust and natural mud and other natural colours.
- Colours: Pigment composition in case of paintings.
- Location: Mainly on the interior and exterior parts of the wall.

Left: Fig. 19.13 Tattoos on the hands of a woman.

Right: Fig. 19.14 Symbols of village art.

- (IV) Geo-cultural set-up of the village:
- Name of rock art site nearby: Isco/Kohabar/Ambakargha.
- Site history: Ritual purpose/habitat (?)
- Use description:
 - Past:* Ritualistic (?)
 - Present:* Tourist attraction.
- Archaeological deposition in and around the site: The site has not been excavated as yet.
- Forms of rock art:
 - *Pictographs:* Painting.
 - *Petroglyphs:* Cup-marks (?)
- Superimposition: Many of the paintings are superimposed.
- Materials used: Haematite and kaolin.
- Age description: Prehistoric to historical.
- Preservation status: Showing signs of deterioration.
- Perceived threats: Both natural and man-made.

- A) Natural: Exposed to direct sunlight, flaked off, cracked, blasting by winds, accretion of dust, dirt and soot, water seepage, flowing water, leaching by rainwater, growth of large plants and shrubs, microbiological growth (algae, fungi and lichens), mineral deposition and salt formation on the painted surface, mineral deposits and mineral accretion.
- B) Man-made: Deforestation, influx of local people. Mining and blasting of stones and extractions of minerals (coal and iron ore) are the major threats to this site. Human vandalism in the form of improper development, creating a 35 cm deep concrete flooring on the floor of the rock shelter and building an RCC structure in



front of the rock shelter as a rest house by the Department of Tourism. The Rautpara opencast project (opencast coal mine) will also be a big threat to this site.

- Ownership details:

Under the State Department of Forest.

(V) Tracing similarities/variations in form and content of both rock and village art.

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