

# Report



## The Rock Art Sites of Brahmaputra Valley in Western Assam, Assam

(IInd Phase of Field Documentation)

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INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE ARTS  
NEW DELHI



The rock art sites visited during the second phase of the project fall along the bank of the Brahmaputra river on both sides. The rock art sites are also located on the Hills made up of Precambrian rocks. The most dominated rock types used for engraving the art were fine grained granite.

## Sopaidong

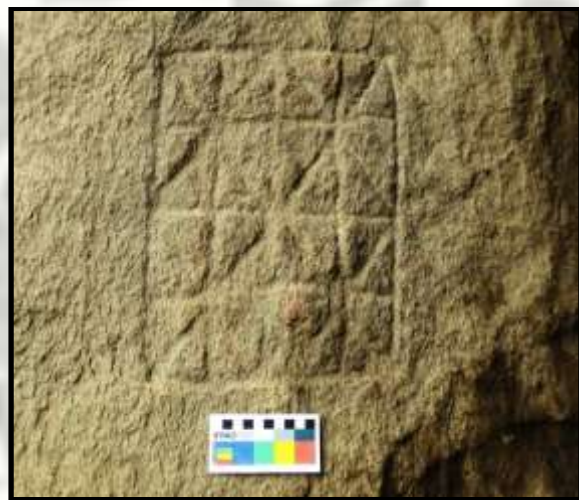
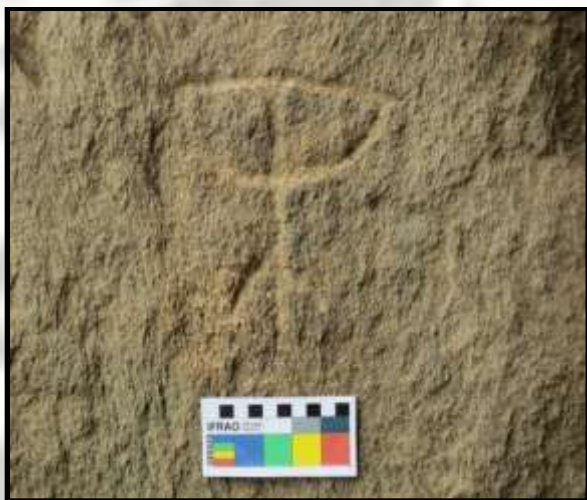
Sopaidang is situated in the eastern part of Guwahati near Narengi. It is around thirty kilometres from the Gauhati University campus in the district of Kamrup and about four kilometres north from Guwahati-Chandrapur main road near the river Brahmaputra.

The rock art site is situated in a Precambrian Hill (Inselberg) amidst a low lying alluvial plain on the south bank of the Brahmaputra. The hill is very steep and composed of fine grained granites.

A *Ganesha* temple has been constructed nearby the site. It is motorable upto a distance of about two kilometers from the temple and one has to walk rest of the distance. Located on the foothills of Sunchali hills merging into the bed of the river Brahmaputra the area spreads over an area of around 600 sq Km marked by numerous blocks of rocks of varying sizes and shapes scattered over the hillocks. There is a rock-cut image of *Ganesha* at the site. Above the engraved *Ganesha* there is a square shaped engraved motif of chess board used by the local people to play with cowrie shells. On the same block of rock surface there is also a line engraving of a small bow with a arrow. The other blocks of rock have dot marks, brusings and other forms of incompleated engraved markings weathered by repeated ravages of fluctuating climate. About fifteen metres away from this block of rock on the foothills of the hills a rockshelter has been recorded with clear signs of human activity but no traces of any art form. The vegetation at the site consist of decideous forest but it is destroyed due to due to anthropogenic activity.

Further down a small lake has been formed by the intruding water of the river Brahmaputra where several blocks of stoned of rectangular shapes and sizes are scattered some with design engravings.

Sopaidong site is in the bad state and steps need to be initiated to protect the archaeological remains before the area is totally shorn off its historic relics.



## Hatisila

Hatisila is situated on the Chandrapur-Narengi road on the bank of the Brahmaputra river. The Ganesh temple where the rock arts were found is situated on the foot of a hillock made up of Precambrian rocks amidst an alluvial plain. It is another site explored lying at a distance of around eight kilometers west of Sopaidong on the Guwahati-Chandrapur road and is motorable and being developed into a temple complex by the local population. The site is located on the foothill of a hill called Hatisila locally merging into the river Brahmaputra.

The site rocks that are exposed in the hillock are made up of grey coloured quartzo-feldspathic gneisses. The gneisses are composed of alternating light and dark bands. The light bands are granoblastic and composed mainly of plagioclase and quartz, while the darker bands are mainly composed of biotites which show strong preferred orientation. These rocks were used for engraving rock arts and sculptures.

An ancient inscription on an extensively weathered rock surface and a human face is depicted there which seems to be worshipped by application of vermilion. Other engravings like the eyes of a person, dot marks and other markings have been observed over the rock surface.

Rampant human interference is clear on the site being full of visitors for worshipping and touring purpose. Although no human habitation has been observed nearby but there are few villages of Assamese caste population and Kabri tribes lying at a distance who are associated with the management of temple complex.



## Kanai Barasi

It is another site located on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra lying by the side of a motorable road at a distance of about twenty five kilometres from the campus of Gauhati University. The site lies on a low hillock on the bank of the river Brahmaputra with scattered pieces of boulders and a large block of rock surrounded by other smaller blocks.

This area appears to be of significant strategic importance as is revealed by three important rock inscriptions – all relating to military victories of regional powers over foreign invaders that attacked Assam from the west. While Rock Inscription No.1 belongs to 1206 CE, Rock Inscriptions Nos. 2 and 3 were issued in 1665 CE.

The total number of rock blocks with petroglyphic engravings recorded at the site are six. The largest of the block has a girth of 37.8 feet and the smallest one measures 4.5 feet in length and 1.3 metres in breadth. The petroglyphic engravings consist of labyrinth, chessboard, circle, animal like figure, man, man riding animal, circle in a square, linear markings, circle, demon, lady, indeterminate objects etc.

Fine grained granites are found to be protruded out of the alluvial soil cover in the area. These fine grained granites had been used for engraving rock arts and inscriptions. In the vicinity on the bed of the river Brahmaputra, many similar granite bodies are found to be exposed. Ancient ruins of a temple of Pre Ahom period are found on scattered around on the river bed.

The site is protected by the Assam state department of Archaeology and basically known for the four plates of medieval stone inscriptions. The inscriptions, drawings and other rock arts indicate a multilayered and discontinuous history.

A temple has been constructed very recently over a rock cut engraving of *Ganesh* and worshiped mainly by the local Assamese caste groups inhabiting the area nearby. Another rock cut engraving of female has been considered by the

local population as a female goddess and beginning to be worshipped. Application of vermilion on a large scale has caused early damage of the rock cut images. Further down the site on the bank of the river Brahmaputra few blocks of stone are scattered over an area which shows some ancient activity of a riverine population.

Precipitation and seismic activities coupled with poor conservation and human interference have caused considerable damage to the remains. It also represents a case of very poor conservation.



## Dirgheswari

Dirgheswari is another site located on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra at a distance of about thirty five kilometers from the Gauhati University campus and about ten kilometers from Kanai Borosi. The site is situated on the slopes of a large hill gradually merging into the valley over a wide area. The site bordered by reserved forest on western and northern boundaries and situated on the left side of the motorable road with staircases leading to the site. The site is protected by the state Archaeological department.

The Dirgheswari temple was constructed by the Ahom king during sixteenth century on a steep hillock in this area. The petroglyphic art form consists of elephant motifs, human figure, temple motifs and indeterminate objects. The human figure of 2.6ft high and 2.3ft width is in a dancing posture while the two elephant engravings on the first block of rock show one following the other. The next engraving of the elephant shows it in a chasing posture. The other rock cut sculpture and inscription has raised the anthropological significance of the area.

Among the rock cut sculptures of Dirgheswari site, six *Ganesha* were recorded of which two were found side by side at the back of the main temple, one by the side of the sculpture of a sage on the left hand side, one huge *Ganesha* was found again on the left hand side from the entrance. The other two are located on the right side from the entrance. Just above the hill where two medium sized *Ganesha* was perceived, one shrine resembling a yonipitha (genital organ of Mother Goddess) was noticed with the remains of a ratha type sanctum sanctorum surrounding the shrine. On the left hand of the big *Ganesha*, one sculpture of Yama sitting on an animal, probably a buffalo was noticed. On climbing upwards one sculpture of hanuman was seen on the left hand side from the entrance. Just below the sculpture of the sage which is believed to be of sage Markandeya, one shrine resembling *Shiva linga* (phallic pillar of *Shiva*) was seen. Two unidentified deity were found on the same piece of rock on the right hand side from the entrance. Three series of steps were found, two outside the temple



boundary having fourteen and twelve steps and the other series inside the temple boundary with approximately eight steps.

The Dirgheswari Devalaya is located at Phulung village which reveals a distinct tribal settlement in contemporary times. The remains are of a *Shiva* temple while Dirgheswari Devalaya is popular as a *Shakti peeth*. The prolific remains indicates the existence of a complex with built-up rock structures many of which have fallen victim to the seismic activities and degenerative climatic forces.

The *Shakti peeth* might be attributed to a tribal deity or even to some deity like Tara of the Buddhist pantheon largely conforming to archetypes popular in tribal myths.

The history of the area would definitely be multi-layered spanning from the ancient, tribal to contemporary times.



## Mayong (Mahesh Dham)

Mayong is another site located on the southern bank of the river Brahmaputra marked by scatters of rock over a sloping valley. The site is at a distance of one kilometer from an irrigation canal and at a distance of one kilometer from the motorable road lying at a distance of fifty kilometers from Gauhati University campus in the district of Morigaon.

All the rock art sites are found on top of hillocks (inselbergs) made up of quartzofeldspathic gneiss and fine grained granites on the bank of the Kopili river which is an important tributary of the Brahmaputra river.

The engravings found on the site are weathered considerably being situated in a dust storm ravaged area of high sedimentation near the sandy bank of the river Brahmaputra.

The archaeological remains of the area consist of carvings of *Ganesh* and *Shiva Parvati* at a distance of around hundred metres from the site where the engraved block lies.

The local population of the area mainly consists of Assamese caste population but now the area is settled by Muslim people of Bengali origin. Worshipping of *Ganesh* and *Shiva* is elaborately performed by the local people and as such they have named the site as Mahesh Dham. The temple is managed by local people.



## Surya Pahar

Surya Pahar is very important archaeological site of Assam which falls in the vicinity of the Brahmaputra river on the south bank near Goalpara town of western Assam and protected by the Archaeological Survey of India. Located at a distance of around hundred and thirty five kilometers west of Gauhati University and covered by a motorable road from Goalpara connects the site ending in another small town of Dudhnoi.

The site is over a wide hilly terrain where blocks of rocks are scattered. The hilly terrain gradually merges into the plains inhabited by the oldest settlements. The hills are covered with thick forest areas. The archaeological resources of the site consists of several rock cut sculptures. Rock cut shelters and dome shaped temple top, *Shiva lingas* and rectangular grooves and a huge *Shiva linga*. A stone inscription, engraved trident marks are some notable association.

Geomorphologically, the place is composed of denudational hills with a large and gently rolling pediment towards the south of the hills. Geologically the hills are composed Precambrian quartzo-feldspathic gneiss and coarse grained porphyritic granite intrusives. In the pediment that encircles the hills on their southern side, several similar rock bodies are found to be exposed out of the surface made up of red in situ soils.

The sculptures are made with coarse grained porphyritic granites. Finer details of the carvings are mostly lost because of coarse grained nature of the rocks. These kinds of rocks are not as suitable for carving figures as the fine grained granites. Moreover, these rocks are also more amenable to wear and tear by natural agencies.



## Dekdhowa

About five kilometres away from Surya Pahar lies the site of Dekdhowa which is scattered over a hilly terrain just on the bank of the river Brahmaputra. The site is under the reserve forest area of the government.

Over a rock surface several *Shiva lingas* are seen scattered with associated remains and engraved markings on the surface. As reported by the local people the rock cut shelters have the engraved picture of a couple which is not visible from below. Further up the sites several other rock sculpture has been reported but the footprints of a human considered to be that of the God is an important engravings of the site.

Geologically and geomorphologically the area is similar to Surya Pahar but the pediment is wider, rocks are more weathered and the hills are not as elevated and steep as those in Surya Pahar. The area is situated on the bank of the river Brahmaputra on its south bank.

The remains of Dekdhowa are located at the confluence of the river Jaljala and the Brahmaputra are very rich with *Shiva lingas*, statues, rock caves, rock arts and brick remains.

This place mostly is covered by salforestrprimary vegetation which indicate decedeous type of forest. The vegetation of the hillock completely destroyed by immigrant.

The present situation of the site is pathetic with no conservation efforts by any agnecy. As the area is inhabited by immigrants with little understanding of or reverence to the remains. There is an urgent necessity to immediately protect the area before further damage is caused.



The rock art in Assam is comparatively late and mostly historical in comparison to the rock art of other states of India. It is good example of continuity of rock art tradition in stone.

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