

Prologue

Rock art is one of our greatest surviving art treasures. It is a vital archaeological source to study and analyse the cognitive evolution of the human intellect across the world. As the written word had not yet been conceived, the urge to articulate, document and preserve ideas and events found expression through pictorial representations. The vast corpus of rock art that occurs in almost all parts of the world provides the most comprehensive database for understanding the universal forms of expression and communication of human societies, right from the Pleistocene epoch. The intrinsic value of rock art lies in its universal appeal and in its ability to endure and survive in a manner in which all can experience it. The study of rock art has great relevance in the context of re-definitions for the study of all forms of arts. Until the recent past, the content of rock art was archaeologically studied as an indicator of the evolution of the cognitive capabilities of the authors of rock art. Of late, attempts are being made by many scholars to explore the possibility of the proximity of rock art with the art of the indigenous societies of the world, such as aborigines, tribals, agro-pastoral communities as well as nomads. With rock art being an intricate and complex domain covering material and cognitive aspects of culture, a multidisciplinary approach has been recommended by many contributors to decode and understand it in all its dimensions.

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. While looking into the importance of this earliest artistic activity of human beings, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) has taken up its multidisciplinary documentation, study and dissemination very seriously. 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 (*Drishya*) and hearing (*Shravya*). Rock art forms a crucial component of the *Adi Drishya* programme. Its conceptual plan aims to open the doors to the realization that rock art is pure and absolute and hence capable of dispensing great experience beyond its original culture and time. IGNCA's interest

with prehistoric rock art is not restricted to the concern of archaeologists or pre-historians in establishing a linear chronological order of prehistoric rock art, nor is it limited to the identification of style and school as a criterion for establishing chronology. Instead, it is a concern for man's creative ability across time and space and civilizations and cultures through the perception of sight. To decipher rock art in its proper context, three main methods, archaeological, ethnographical and psycho-analytical approaches are being followed by researchers across the globe. The primary objective in the current research strategies is to explore new methods and means for documentation, classification and analysis of rock art through collaborative research designs between archaeology, anthropology, art history, philosophy, semiotics, psychology, psychiatry, religion etc. Briefly, the objective of IGNCA is not merely the development of a database and multimedia gallery/displays but also to establish *Adi Drishya* into a school of thought and research on alternate means of understanding prehistoric art. For achieving all the goals, inventorisation and interpretive research of rock art is also carried out simultaneously.

A multidisciplinary approach is being adopted by the IGNCA for this project. The field documentations are being done in collaboration with local experts and institutions in the areas/zones concerned. In North and Central India, the documentation work has been initiated in the States of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. In the North East, the documentation work has been initiated in Assam. In Eastern India, the work has been completed in the State of Odisha. In Western and Southern India, the work has been initiated in the States of Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. A huge database of photographs, audiovisuals, slides, line drawings and GPS data has been compiled in the documentation process. This data is being collected in a uniform format at the national level. Two international conferences (1993 and 2012) and four national seminars/workshops (1991, 1996, 2004 and 2014) have been conducted on the subject. Two international exhibitions titled: 'Deer in Rock Art of India and Europe (1993)' and '*Adi Drishya: A Primeval Vision (2012-13)*' were also held in India. An international exhibition on 'Rock art of India (2014-15)' was held in Yinchuan, China. As a part of its outreach programme, IGNCA is also organising mobile exhibitions, orientation workshops, children workshops, painting competitions and special lectures in different parts across India.

IGNCA has, so far, produced twelve well-received publications in the print media under the IGNCA Rock Art Series - *Rock Art in the Old World* (ed. Michael Lorblanchet), *Deer in Rock Art of India and Europe* (ed. Giacomo Camuri, Angelo Fossati and Yashodhar Mathpal), *Rock Art in Kumaon Himalaya* (Yashodhar Mathpal), *Rock Art in Kerala* (Yashodhar Mathpal), *Conservation of Rock Art* (ed. B. L. Malla); *Global Rock Art* (ed. B. L. Malla and V. H. Sonawane), *Rock Art of Andhra Pradesh: A New Synthesis* (N. Chandramouli; ed. B. L. Malla), *The World of Rock Art: An Overview of Five Continents* (ed. B. L. Malla), *Rock Art: A Catalogue* (ed. S. S. Biswas), *Rock Art Studies: Concept, Methodology, Context, Documentation and Conservation, Volume I* (ed. B. L. Malla), *Rock Art Studies: Interpretation through Multidisciplinary Approaches, Volume II* (ed. B. L. Malla) and *Suitable Dating Techniques for Indian Rock Art* (ed. B. L. Malla). On electronic media, a CD on *Rock Art of India*, three

DVDs on *Rock Art of PAN India*, *Rock Art of Ladakh (J&K)* and *Rock Art of Jharkhand*, and a comprehensive cross-cultural, bibliographic database have been brought out.

We have great pleasure in bringing out the thirteenth publication of the Rock Art Series (print media) on the *Silent Rock's An Eloquent Testimony: Rock Art Heritage of Odisha*. The present volume is mainly based on the decades of personal research of the author and the multidisciplinary documentation conducted by the IGNCA under his able guidance in the area. The documentation of rock art in Odisha, like in other parts of the country, was well planned in a phased manner as the area to be covered was vast and the access to rock art sites was very difficult. All the other team members such as Prof. S. P. Adhikari, Prof. Jagannath Dash, Dr. Debananda Beuria and Prof. K. K. Basa have also contributed in their respective fields to give final shape to this monograph.

This volume is quite significant as it addresses new modes for rock art research and deciphering rock art. This opens a new chapter in the history of research in prehistoric and tribal art, with a wide scope for the collaboration of archaeology with its allied and interdisciplinary subjects. Rock art research has coupled archaeology and anthropology with aesthetics and art history. By this approach, a common research ground has been established between prehistoric art and the history of religion. In this direction, investigations have been conducted on the signs of myths and shamanism, logical and cognitive functions revealed by art and paradigms of semiotics and graphic art etc. But, at present, the challenge is to widen the scope of multidisciplinary involvement and to look beyond the context and decode the messages. Because prehistoric art narrates a piece of life, a thought or an emotion which has been a part of our tradition, it reveals changes in the way of thinking, feelings and sentiments of people.

The present volume is a well-researched interdisciplinary effort. It gives an insight into exploring artistic manifestations emanating from man's primary sense perceptions. It not only gives a detailed analysis of rock art and related data from the sites surveyed, but also provides a detailed account of its archaeological and ethnographical context, geology, flora and fauna of the rock art sites in Odisha. Briefly, it gives a general survey of the state of rock art research in India with special focus on Odisha and eastern India.

This beautifully illustrated volume will certainly contribute in enhancing our vision of rock art. The data and the interpretations put forward in the volume are comprehensive and analytical. The author tries to approach rock art with a view to reconstruct the lifestyle and environment of the people who created this art. The volume will not only interest scholars but also the public at large.

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