



A Report
On
The Field Documentation of Rock Art sites in Maharashtra
(Phase-I)

(12th – 19th November, 2016)



INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE ARTS
NEW DELHI



The state of Maharashtra occupies the western and central part of the country and is a fairly homogenous region both in terms of physical and cultural traits. One of the prominent physical features of Maharashtra is the Deccan plateau, which is separated from the Konkan coastline by 'Ghats'. The Ghats are a succession of steep hills, periodically bisected by narrow roads. The Western Ghats (or the Sahyadri Mountain range) provide a physical backbone to the state on the west, while the Satpura Hills along the north and Bhamragad-Chiroli-Gaikhuri ranges on the east serve as its natural borders. The state is surrounded by Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Karnataka and Goa. The entire region rests on a basaltic base with occasional escarpments of sandstone formation at different places. The main rivers of the state are Krishna, Bhima, Godavari, Tapi-Purna and Wardha-Wainganga.

Rock art of Maharashtra: A Brief Report

In continuation of an Orientation Workshop on the Rock Art and its allied subjects in the region conducted in the month of August, 2016, a field documentation of Rock art sites of Maharashtra (Phase-I) was initiated by IGNCA in collaboration with the Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University, Nagpur from 12th -19th November, 2016.

The multidisciplinary team members comprising; Dr. Prabash Sahu (Dept. of A.I.H.C & Archaeology, RTM Nagpur University and State Coordinator, IGNCA), Dr. Bhaskar Urade (Anthropologist, An.S.I), Sh. Vijay Kumar (Sociologist, Hislop College, Nagpur), Dr. Vijay Gedam (Archaeologist), Dr. Ekta Dharkar (Research Scholar), Shri. Jigmet Namgyal from IGNCA, New Delhi along with Sh. Namit Malgewar (Photographer/Videographer) started the field work and documentation of rock art sites in the Chimur tehsil of Chandrapur district from 12th-19th November, 2016 with their base camp at Naghbid in Chandrapur district.



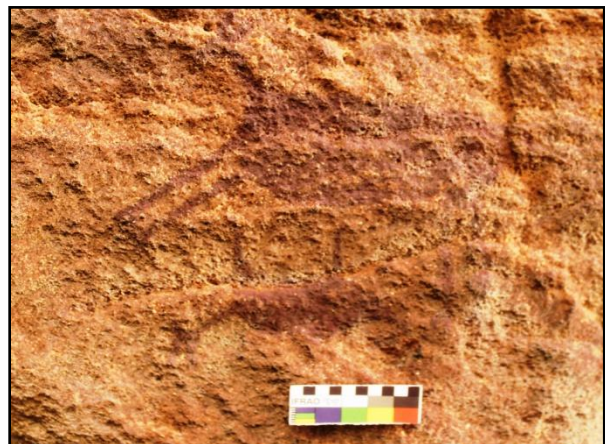
A view of the Waghai hills.

Exploration and documentation of Rock Art sites

A systematic documentation of rock shelters in the Waghai Pahari in the the Chimur tehsil of Chandrapur district was carried out. Chandrapur district is located in the eastern edge of Maharashtra in Nagpur division and forms the eastern part of 'Vidarbha' region. This hill is a part of Perjagarh-Naghbir range of hills and it is known locally as 'Sitamai Dongari'. The rock art sites here are located in the thick forest region. Nearly 15 rock shelters, most of them bearing rock art were documented during the course of 8 days field documentation in the region. Besides, some pre-historic sites and historical monuments were also documentaed. While looking into the importance of rock art in ethno-archaeological context, the team also documented some communities inhabiting the villages near these rock art sites.

Pandubara Rock Shelters (N 20°34'42, E 79°32'11)

A group of four rock shelters were found at Pandubara, two of the shelters here has paintings in red. These shelters are located at almost 400 meters. Most of the paintings in these shelters are painted in various shades of red. The first shelter in this group PNB I has paintings of animal figures. An animal figure is filled in red, depicting prominent ears in front and a raised tail. This figure measures 10x9 cm. Two beautiful deer figures are depicted aesthetically and few of the paintings in the shelter are superimposed. A large panel might have been used as a canvas for creating these figures as some traces of paintings can still be seen. Most of the paintings in this shelter are destroyed now due to human and natural agents/factors.



Animal figure (above) and two deer figures (right) at Pandubara shelter.

A small shelter located adjacent to this shelter has some paintings in red on its ceiling. A total of six figures are painted in outline on this shelter. Another shelter is located few meters below has been now converted into a shrine by the villagers and people from the nearby villages flock to this shelter for worship during festive occasions. The shelter has vermilion marks on its wall and a trident has been found at this shelter. This shelter is known as the Pandav shrine and the group of four shelters at this site has been named accordingly.



Animal figures (above) and the shrine at Pandubara group of shelters (right).

The fourth shelter at this site is known as the *Barasingha* shelter as two beautiful figures of *barasingha* has been painted on this shelter. These figures are depicted facing each other and are filled with red colour. The antlers are depicted prominently. The figures are now showing signs of deterioration due to gradual weathering of the rock surface.



Two Barasinghas and a general view of the shelter (right).

Sita chi Nahani (N 20°35'28, E 79°32'54)

A huge rock shelter is located on the hill facing west. This shelter is known as Sita Chi Nahani (*bathing place of Sita*). This place is covered by huge sandstone blocks and deep grooves can be easily seen above it. The rock paintings here are found on the exterior side and cliff sides of the rock shelter. A row of paintings has been found on the panel about 6 meters above the ground surface. On this panel a prominent boar figure along with few human figures are depicted. Some stick shaped human figures can also be seen most of which are now faded.



The boar figure in red and human figures in a row (right).



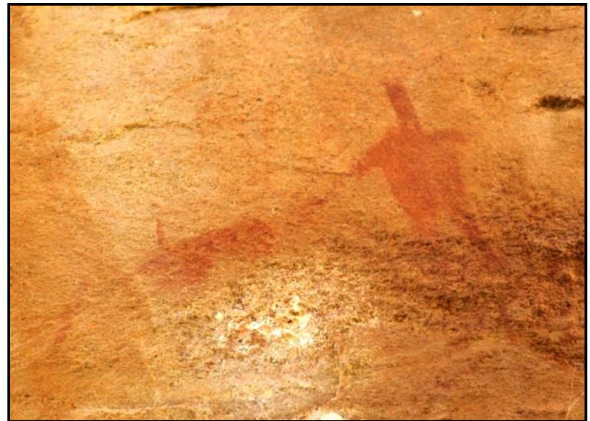
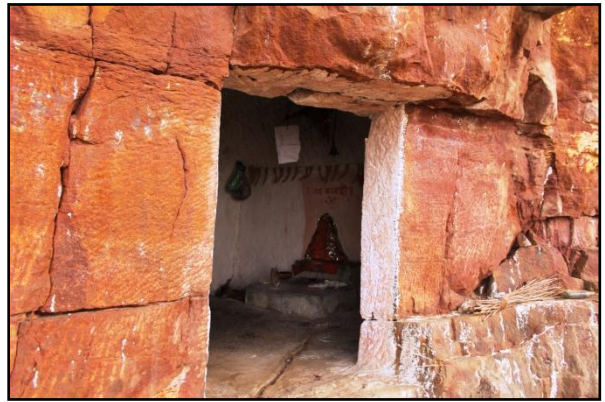
A view of the panel with paintings of boar and human figures on it.

A man made rock cut chamber has been found at this site which is constructed by the villagers. An idol believed to be that of *Sita Mai* has been placed inside this chamber and is worshipped by the villagers. People from nearby villages also visit this site for prayers and worship during Shivratri and other festivals. This shelter is also vandalised with grafittis in lime and paints of different colours.

A group of three shelters has been found below the Sita chi Nahani shelter. Most of these shelters are highly vandalised with modern grafitti like names of people and date of their visit in lime and other colours. A shelter at this site is known as Ganesh Mandir by the villagers and a modern Ganesh idol has been placed inside this shelter. The IGNCA team discovered a rock painting just above the ceiling of this shelter, these figures comprised of two animals and one human figure.



A man made rock cut chamber with an idol inside.



The Ganesh idol inside the shelter and the paintings above this shelter (right).

Beside the above mentioned rock shelters some other shelters bearing paintings were also documented in the Dongargaon group of rock shelters. In this group a shelter (DRG 1A) with a lone painting of a horse rider and a circle in red has been found and it is painted on a panel 3.10 meters above the ground level. This shelter is facing north-west. In this group, shelter no. DRG ID has the most number of paintings consisting of human and animal figures in red. At this shelter, the right side of the shelter towards west has the maximum number of paintings in filled and outline profiles. DRG 1F is a small shelter, here an engraved Chaurasa or a game pattern has been found on the floor of the shelter. Few rectangular dressed stone slabs has also been found here.



Horse rider and a circle at DRG 1A and an engraved chaurasa in DRG 1F.

Most of these paintings were painted in dark red and ochre. The animal figures depicted in these shelters are Barasingha, deer, canines, humped cattles etc.

These rock paintings in these shelters are deteriorating gradually due to human vandalism and natural causes. Natural causes such as weathering, rain water percolation, insects etc and vandalism of these shelters by humans by applying lime and paints for writings names, dates etc are the primary factors responsible for the defacement and gradual deterioration of the paintings.



A heavily vandalised rock shelter at Waghai hills.

Kalachakra (Hirva Jhari) (N 20°38'53, E 79°35'23)

The site is located towards the west of Jhari village at the foothills of Waghai hills. The site is so named as a circle with cupules in linear pattern is found. This engraved circle measures 1x1 meters in diameter and has been encircled by small stone blocks. This site seems to be a potential stone age site as microliths made on chert, chalcedony, agate has been found. Microlithic flakes and debitage are found abundantly on the surface.



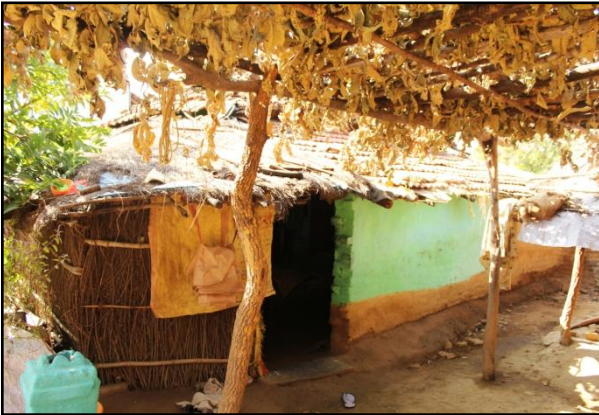
Kalachakra circle at the site.



Microlithic flakes on the surface and Microliths (right) found at the site.

A study of Dongargaon Bk Village

The village of Dongargaon Bk, the nearest village located to the rock shelters. This village is inhabited by the people belonging primarily to Gond and Mana tribal communities. The villagers are primarily farmers cultivating various crops. It is a medium sized village with almost 300 families residing. As found commonly in tribal population of some villages the practice of tattooing on arms and legs is a common practice among the women of the village. Primarily the symbols of wheat, a scorpion and half moon or three spots in a triangle is found tattooed commonly on the arms of women. Such artistic traditions might throw a light on the authors of the rock art in these shelters.



A traditional tribal house.



Tattooes on the arms of a woman.

In the course of its eight days field documentation of rock art sites in the region the team also documented few villages and historical places. The villages of Dongargaon Bk and Hirva Jhari and other historical places like Aambai-Neembai, Shiva Mandir, Baldev Mandir at Navtala etc.

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