

A PILOT FIELD STUDY
OF
ROCK ART OF ROBERTSGANJ & SONBHADRA DISTRICTS
(UTTAR PRADESH)
(March 12- 15, 2015)



**INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE ARTS
NEW DELHI**

ROBERTSGANJ & SONBHADRA DISTRICTS

The districts Sonbhadra and Robertsganj were created by dividing the southern parts of the earlier Mirzapur district on 4th march 1989. The area is drained by several rivers like Son, Karmasha, ChandraPrabha, Rihand, Kanhar, Renu, Ghagar and Belan. Located between the Vindhyan range and the Kaimur range, this area has been the centre of activities for Pre-historic man as is evident from the numerous rock paintings found in this region. Religious and Cultural evidences also correlate this area with the ancient Epics: Ramayana and Mahabharata. From 3rd C. to 9th C. AD, the area was ruled by Kantit (Kantipur), Nag Vanshi's Vakatak Dynasty. Kol king and Abho dynasty also ruled over this region.

Son circuit starts from Shivdwar and ends at Salkhan. It offers adventure trail, natural, historical, geological heritage, shrines and wildlife sanctuaries (Kaimur). This region still shows some shades of tribal cultures like tribal dances, Loric and Kanjali singings are the main folk cultural activities. Overall, 16 tribes are found in the region viz; Gond, Dhuria, nayak,Ojha, Pathari, Kanwar etc.

A team comprising of three members visited the following Rock Art sites during the Pilot Field Study. They collected the first hand information about the sites in the area from Dr. Jitendra Singh and a local resident Mr. Deepak Kesarwani.

Mukhadri

A site Mukhadri was learnt to be within 5-10 km. There was another known site Mahuwaria via Ghorawa/ and Shahganj in the reserved forest Lekhania. It was learnt that near Robertsganj, there are 2 other sites: Panchmukhi about 5 km from Robertsganj on Robertsganj- Churk road and Chinainman. The later is on either side of village Chhappa and termed Chinainman East and West.

After that the team proceeded towards Mukhadri, crossed Ghorawal (about 30 km) and then turned to Deogarh after about 15 km.

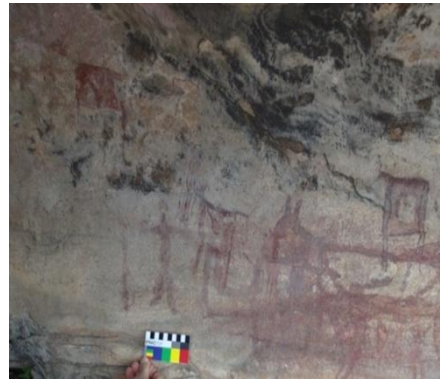
The Pilot Survey Team comprising Dr. B L Malla, Project Director, Dr. C M Nautiyal (State Coordinator, Uttar Pradesh) and Dr. Arvind Mishra reached Mukhadri Fall with the help of a local guide and explored the rock art site. The site was a little away from the pond and at some height from the ground. The fall is towards the road side i.e. east. The pond is about 10 m down.

After surveying the site, the team photographed the pictures on the west side of the sand stone shelter. There were no caves/shelters seen near the site. On the west side, about 50 m from the pond on the left (West) side, art work is seen at about 5-10 m heights. On the left are figures in red colour. In the middle but at a higher level and on the extreme right fading paintings are seen.



Lekhania

Contacted a rock art enthusiast Mr. R B Singh at Mahuwaria by phone for information on Mahuwaria rock art site (Lekhania). The team proceeded for Deogarh (via Ghorawal) and interacted with some people from the local community.



Panchmukhi

Panchmukhi site is located atop a hillock off Robertsganj- Churk road. The place is known as Panchmukhi as the temple has a bust of Lord Shiva (white marble) with 5 heads, said to be very rare. There is a temple along the route. The temple priest informed that several of the sites have lost parts of walls due to vandalism. The place is known as Sarjania Khurd and also as Kantaiyya locally.

The team visited three rock art shelters/ sites PR-2, 6, 7 and photographed/ video graphed for record and further guidance.



Chanain

Another site, known as Chanain was also visited which is about 1 km from Panchmukhi. This is also located atop a hillock of sandstone and is visible as a shelter from the road. The figures at this site are somewhat different and include more of non-animal designs though animal figures are also depicted. These paintings include geometrical figures/ designs, some 'script' etc. The paintings are also on the ceiling. At present, the shelter is also used by the local shepherds as a resting place. The drawings have been overwritten/ drawn by contemporary people, in the process damaging them. These sites have been labelled and numbered.



Lodhi

Another site was located atop a hillock in Lodhi village near the DM office. The site was also visited by the team and photographed/ video graphed. It has also been vandalised in the sense that people have painted their names (including some earlier explorers/ workers of the site).



(II)

'Vindhya ki Aadi Sabhyata': A Discussion

A discussion was organised on 'Vindhya ki Aadi Sabhyata.' The following scholars participated in the discussion Dr. B L Malla, Dr. C M Nautiyal, Mr. Indranath Singh, Dr. A Mishra, Dr. Sarjit Singh Dang, Prof. P N Mishra, Prof. Umeshchandra Chattopadhaya, Pt. Ajay Shekhar and others from nearby areas. The idea was not only to educate people about the academic significance of the rock art but also to learn from them the knowledge and information about the sites.

Dr. C M Nautiyal, State coordinator (Rock Art Project) for Uttar Pradesh set the ball rolling and enlightened about the Salkhan stromatolites at Chopan which evidenced existence of life over a billion year ago at the site. He informed that presence of the green authigenic mineral glaucony indicated shallow marine conditions in the past in the region. The mineral-availability in the region may have been responsible for the practice of smelting techniques in Vindhyan region as evinced by findings of iron and copper artefacts. He mentioned the efforts of Banaras Hindu University in collaboration with Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany to date such sites. Dr. Nautiyal said that by dating charcoal associated with cave art; charcoal and vegetal materials used for artwork and uranium- containing calcite on rocks or engraving, one may set limits on rock art age. The isotope-based K-Ar and uranium-lead series- based dating methods have clearly established that Vindhyan series like Semri, Rohtash and Kaimur formed over a billion year ago. He stated that Ganga plain and Vindhyan regions are likely to be early homes of civilization as indicated by evidences of paddy farming in Ganga plain and iron smelting evidences discovered by Banaras Hindu University researchers in the area, such as Raipura but we need more numbers for any firm conclusions. The studies can help in understanding the spread of civilization in the region.

Dr. B L Malla, Project Director, IGNC, New Delhi emphasised on the need of Rock Art studies and said that for correct reading, the subject of rock art should be studied in an integrated manner and not as an isolated approach. History, Art, Archaeology, Dating, Geology, Zoology etc. helps in developing a fuller understanding. He mentioned this as the reason why multi-disciplinary team was constituted. Dr. Malla said, the idea was to arrive at truth and not to score points over antiquity of cultures. He briefed on the efforts by IGNC to realize the goal by forming such teams in various states and informed about the documentation status of Indian rock art and the initiative taken by IGNC in this field and also about the importance of this first artistic /creative act of the human being.

Mr. Indra Nath Singh from Raipur, former conservator forest, stated that the drawings were dominated by animal figures with deer family featuring in as much as 40%. Elephants and wild boars were other major objects. Hunting was one of the major activities covered. He mentioned his observation that in many other places hunting was depicted in groups but in Sonbhadra, single hunters were depicted. He described some unusual drawings seen in the local rock art such as half bird- half animal depictions. He said that having a centre at Sonbhadra for such studies would be desirable.

Dr. Arvind Mishra, a zoologist and rock art enthusiast said that despite the improved understanding of the evolution, the gap in understanding of evolution from chimpanzee to man remained a riddle. Rock art may not answer all the questions but being records of human evolution and community culture, may shed light on some aspects.

Dr. Sarjit Singh Dang, a well known doctor and former minister, highlighted the importance of involving the local community. He, however, cautioned that to believe that the drawings were pure reflection of reality and had no element of imagination could be erroneous. He also suggested the importance of making use of community wisdom and hence consulting even folklorists. He said that these sites should be developed as culture- and eco-tourism sites which could lead to employment even without major investment.

Prof. P N Misra, formerly of DAB Indore University, said that the region could be one of the early cradles of life. Further studies were very much wanted.

Several members in the audience clarified doubts by asking questions. The local representatives stated that the work should be started at the earliest. The discussion was significant for bridging the gap between the researchers and the local community.

They were informed by Dr. B L Malla that the IGNCA plans to take up the documentation work in Uttar Pradesh in the last week of March 2015. An interdisciplinary team of scholars from UP has already been formed for the same purpose. The first phase field documentation work will start in Sonbhadra and Robertsganj area itself.



(III)

Felicitation by UP Governor

At the Devgarh Festival, Dr. B L Malla Project Director, IGNC, New Delhi was honoured with 'Prabhashri Samman' by Shri Ram Naik, the Hon'ble Governor, Uttar Pradesh for his illustrious contribution in the field of art and culture. Our state coordinator and a leading scientist Dr. C M Nautiyal of Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeontology, Lucknow was also honoured on this occasion for his research contribution. The event was widely covered by the media.

