

The background of the cover is an abstract, textured image that resembles ancient rock art or a weathered rock surface. It features various shades of brown, green, and black, with some circular and irregular shapes that could be interpreted as stylized figures or patterns. The overall effect is one of age and historical significance.

# Rock Art

## Heritage of Northeast India

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# INTRODUCTION

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In archaeological parlance, rock art is a very vague term that signifies any prehistoric or ancient human activity on the surface of natural or living rocks. It may include pictographs and petroglyphs. However, we must not ignore the fact that rock art is the mother of all art forms irrespective of their depictions and the canvas used. All art forms perhaps have their roots in this art form. India is fortunate enough to have continuity in its artistic traditions from prehistoric times to the present era. Hence, it is appropriate to study rock art of India in this framework and context.

Rock art is one of the greatest surviving art treasures which possess a large body of evidence of the artistic, cognitive and cultural beginnings of human beings. It is a vital archaeological source to study and analyse the evolution of human intellect across the world. Man's first awareness of the world around him came through his primeval senses of sight and hearing. Prehistoric rock art forms a crucial component of man's primeval vision. The intrinsic efficiency of rock art lies in the universality of its appeal and its ability to endure and sustain in a manner in which all can discern it. Rock art is pure and absolute and hence capable of dispensing great experiences beyond its original culture and time.

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) under the aegis of its Adi Drishya Department has taken up the rock art studies very seriously. Under its purview, a national project for multidisciplinary documentation of rock art sites in all the states of India with rock art concentrations has been initiated. So far, the documentation of rock art sites has been initiated in the states of Uttarakhand, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Assam, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Kerala. In Eastern India, work has been completed in Odisha and in South India it has been completed in Andhra Pradesh. The credit of bringing the Northeast India to the rock art map of India also goes to IGNCA.

In its series of national and international events, IGNCA organised a national seminar on the Prehistory and Ethno-archaeological context of Rock Art of Northeast India in November 2015 at Tripura Central University, Agartala. The proceedings of the seminar have been published. This was followed by a seminar on the Rock Art of Northeast India: Methodological and Technical Issues in October 2016 at North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) at Tura Campus, Meghalaya. As prehistoric and archaeological research has been a key issue of the north-eastern states which continue to face difficulties about methodologies and the misinterpretation of findings. Hence, an objective of these seminars was delving deep into these aspects and reviewing the prehistoric and historic investigations carried out by various eminent scholars in this region. In fact, it was an explanatory attempt to broadly trace the origin and antiquity of prehistory and rock art of Northeast India.

This present publication is an outcome of the seminar held at NEHU, Tura campus in 2016. The main focus of the publication is on recent developments in rock art research and documentation in Northeast India. IGNCA has, so far, produced 19 well received publications under its 'Rock Art Series' – *Rock Art in the Old World* (ed. Michel Lorblanchet), *Deer in Rock Art of India and Europe* (eds G. Camuri, A. Fossati, Y. 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* (eds B. L. Malla and V. H. Sonawane), *Rock Art of Andhra Pradesh: A New Synthesis* (N. Chandramouli, General Editor 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). *Rock Art of India: Suitable Dating Techniques* (ed. B. L. Malla), *Glimpses of India China Rock Art* (B. L. Malla) and *Silent Rock's An Eloquent Testimony: Rock Art Heritage of Odisha* (S. Pradhan, General Editor B. L. Malla), *Cultural Ecology: Prehistoric and Ethno-archaeological Context of Rock Art in North-Eastern and Other Indian States* (eds B. L. Malla and D. Bezbaruah), राजस्थान की शैलचित्रकला (Murarilal Sharma, General Editor B. L. Malla), *Glorious Bimbetka: A Catalogue Based on IGNCA's Dr. Yashodhar Mathpal Collection* (B. L. Malla) and *Rock Art of India and China, Vol. I & II* (ed. B. L. Malla). We have great pleasure in bringing out this 20<sup>th</sup> publication in this series titled *Rock Art Heritage of Northeast India*.

The present volume is quite significant as it addresses new ways of doing rock art research in Northeast India. The challenge is widening the scope of multidisciplinary involvement and to look beyond the context and decode the messages. The papers presented in this volume are a well-researched interdisciplinary effort. The data and the interpretations put forward are comprehensive and analytical. This volume intends to understand at least some of the findings holistically, in their proper context and cultural ecology. Archaeological research is generally based on the material remains of past human society. These material remains or archaeological records are carefully examined and studied to obtain a possible scenario of the past ways of life of human beings. If archaeological records are insufficient for the reconstruction of past human society, other sources such as ecological, geographical and ethnographical sources become very helpful for archaeological interpretations.

The first paper in this volume 'Rock Art of Northeast India: Some Observations' by V. H. Sonawane discusses the shortcomings of the investigations carried out rock art researchers in this one of the most potential but lesser known regions of India.

Bansi Lal Malla's paper 'An Approach to Rock Art Documentation' explores new methods of rock art research and interpretations along with various methods of field documentation.

Dwipen Bezbaruah in his paper 'Rock Engravings from Brahmaputra Valley, Assam: Context and Preservation' discusses recent investigations of rock art forms in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam.

The paper on the 'Engravings on Monoliths of Dimapur: A Review of Hutton's Work' by Garima Thakuria discusses decorated stone pillars/ monoliths. She refers to various theories of their origins, shapes and evolution.

Ditamulü Vasa and Tiatoshi Jamir in their paper 'Observations on Some Unique Rock Art Features of Nagaland' discuss the significance of these art form in the Naga community and also talk about various forms of monolithic/ memorial stones with the importance of each engraving.

Yilobemo Sangma's paper 'Tattoo Culture among the Nagas of Nagaland - With Special Reference to Ao Nagas' elaborates on the significance of tattoos among Ao Nagas, their origins and patterns. Incidentally, rock art is full of different symbols/ patterns and may have similar type of messages.







The paper titled 'Rock Art in Manipur: With Reference to Ruangmei Tribe' by P. Binodini Devi talks about rock art site Salangthel in Churachandpur district in Manipur. She adopts an ethnographical approach to study rock art of Manipur in this paper.

The paper 'Petroglyphs at Pallong, Tamenglong District, Manipur' by Huidrom Suraj Singh talks about the recent discovery of the Pallong petroglyphs.

Sukanya Sharma's paper 'Hominid Adaptations in Prehistoric Northeast India: With Special Emphasis on the Ganol and Rongram River Valley, Garo Hills, Meghalaya' explains the relationship between prehistoric human behaviour and observable archaeological records of the region, which consists of stone tools and pottery. The paper also makes an attempt to understand the adaptive strategies developed by the prehistoric inhabitants of the region, mainly focusing on the Garo Hills, an area with the highest concentration of prehistoric sites in Northeast India.

Benora Batemon Masharing paper 'Traditional Technology and Culture: With Reference to the Khasi of Ri-Bhoi Area' explains the traditional colour extracting technology, processing raw materials from different natural materials and their use in the Khasi area. It gives an idea of the making of traditional colours in this area which may encourage researchers to trace the nature of different colour pigments used in the making of rock paintings in India.

Another paper on the same subject 'Traditional Method of Producing Lac and Colorant among the Garos' by Tiana Areng and Monika Kalita also gives an account of the traditional processing methods for lac, extraction of other natural colours and dyeing techniques.

The paper 'Engravings on Megaliths in Mizoram' by Malsawmliana observes different aspects of Mizo tribal megaliths including depictions on the megaliths and indicates the use of different techniques for making these carvings.

'The Memorial Stones or Monoliths of Mizoram as Rock Art and its Stipulation' by Aten Jenla discusses the monolithic/ memorial stones erected for hero worship that contain many depictions such as various animal and human forms, decorative ornaments and other geometric decorations.

Shyam Singh's paper 'Cup-Marks and other Anthropic Holes in the Northeast India: A Prospect of its Research in this Region' describes the cup marks of Northeast India and also research done on cup marks in other parts of the country. It also attempts to find out the origins of these markings with the help of ethnographic studies in a universal context.

The papers included in this volume highlight the immense potential that rock art possesses in unravelling the mysteries of the past. The authors of some of the papers have tried to approach rock art with a view to reconstructing the lifestyle and environment of the people who created this art form. They not only give a detailed analysis of rock art and related data from the sites surveyed, but they also provide a detailed account of its archaeological and ethnographical context, geology and the flora and fauna of most of the areas of Northeast India with rock art concentrations. This beautifully illustrated volume will certainly contribute to enhancing our vision of rock art. It will also help in boosting and promoting the importance of rock art research particularly in Northeast India.

Lastly, it may be noted that the views expressed by the scholars in their papers are not necessarily those of IGNCA or of the editor of this volume.

