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## HISTORIC PHASE OF ROCK ART IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

Vishnu Wakankar, who is generally revered for his memory, is considered the "father" of the field of rock art studies in India. When he discovered the Bhimbetka shelters in 1957, he immediately began working there, both on the art and on excavations. He dated some of the images to the Mesolithic and even to the late Palaeolithic, which surely sparked studies on Indian rock art. As a result of his tireless efforts, he was able to locate and document a diverse collection of rock art sites. Rock art in India can be found over the length and breadth of the entire country, typically in settings that are quite similar to one another but with some regional differences. In addition to India, other regions that are particularly abundant with the existence of rock art include South Africa, Australia, North and South America, and Europe. Rock art is a word that is used to describe human-made markings on natural rock surfaces that are not intended to serve any practical use.

**KEYWORDS:** - *Rock, art, India*

### INTRODUCTION

Vishnu Wakankar, who is generally revered for his memory, is considered the "father" of the field of rock art studies in India. When he discovered the Bhimbetka shelters in 1957, he immediately began working there, both on the art and on excavations. He dated some of the images to the Mesolithic and even to the late Palaeolithic, which surely sparked studies on Indian rock art. As a result of his tireless efforts, he was able to locate and document a diverse collection of rock art sites. Rock art in India can be found over the length and breadth of the entire country, typically in settings that are quite similar to one another but with some regional differences. In addition to India, other regions that are particularly abundant with the existence of rock art include South Africa, Australia, North and South America, and Europe.

According to Yashodar Mathpal, the history of rock art research in India can be broken up into three major periods. The first one, which would span the years 1867 to 1931, would be that of adventurers and enthusiasts. During the second era, which lasted from 1952 through 1972, "greater attention was paid to faithful recording," whereas "during the third period, which still predominates, the study of rock art has become a science and a subject of inquiry" (Mathpal 1992). Last but not least, it is important to remember the contributions that the Rock Art Society of India (RASI) has made since it was established in 1990.

Archibald Carlley, who was working as the Earliest Assistant of the Archaeological Survey of India at the time, made what is believed to be the first discovery of rock art in 1867. This find was made in the sandstone hills of the Vindhya Mirzapur District (what is now Uttar Pradesh). This was a full twelve years prior to the uncovering of the Altamira treasure. His findings were not made public until 1906, a significant

amount of time after they were initially made. There have been reports of rock art sites in India. These sites are typically found in rocky terrain that are composed of sandstone or sedimentary rocks. This is largely referring to the Vindhya, Cuddapah, Kaladgi, and Bhima basins, as well as the Satpura and Aravalli ranges, which may be found strewn across the states of Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. The Vindhyan ranges in Madhya Pradesh and its Kaimurean expansions in Uttar Pradesh contain the greatest number of archaeological sites per square kilometre. In addition, a sizeable number of sites can be found in the granite hills that are found on the peninsula of India. Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Rajasthan, as well as the Datia district of Madhya Pradesh, are included among these regions.

### SOME OF THE IMPORTANT ROCK ART SITES

In south of India, some major rock art sites are Kupgal (Sanaganakallu), Badami, Maski, Piklihal, Tekkalakota in Karnataka, Budagavi, Chintakunta, Kethavaram, Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh, Alambadi, Padiyandal in Tamil Nadu and Edakkal and Ezuthupara rock shelters in Kerala.



Fig.1 The white and red rock art paintings of human beings and animals. (Right) A view of the rock art painting site at Chintakunta. [Source: [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com)]

The locations of Dras, Kargil, Mulbekh, Nurla, and Leh in the region of Ladakh are among the most significant rock art sites in North India. It should go without saying that this region's extreme altitude, geology, and environment have kept rock art to a minimum. Along the higher reaches of the Indus River and her tributaries in the Karakoram Hills and especially in Ladakh, a significant number of rock engravings have been discovered. These are most likely from a later time period. In addition to that, there have been reports of rock engravings in the Zaskar Valley and the neighbourhood of Chilas, which is located on the banks of the Indus River. Even in the foothills of the Himalayas, close to the ancient city of Almora in Chamoli in Garhwal, there have been reports of many rock paintings. Paintings have also been discovered at sites at Varanasi, Allahabad, and Agra, all of which are located in the Ganga Yamuna valley in the state of Uttar Pradesh. In the 1860s, Archibald Carlyle first became aware of rock shelters in the Mirzapur district that included artwork when he was in this area. In this region, a single district that is 11,310 square kilometres in size contains 115 rock art locations. The names Bhaldharia, Bijayagarh, Likhunia, Kauva-Khoh, Hathvani, Lakhma, and Mukhadari are given to some of the most significant shelters in the Mirzapur region.



Fig.2 Rock Art Site of Bhimbetka [Source:www.bradshawfoundation.com]

There have been several discoveries of rock shelters, the most of which have been made in the Vindhyan region, with some coming from the Satpura ranges. The most significant examples of rock art in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh may be found in and around Bhopal, the state capital. The renowned Bhimbetka complex of rock shelters, which was recognised as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2003, may be found in the Raisen area forty kilometres to the south of Bhopal. It is believed that Acheulian people created the petroglyphs that can be found in Auditorium Cave (Bhimbetka III F-24). They consist of ten cupules, also known as cup markings, and a long line that meanders. The petroglyphs that date back to the Acheulian period are the oldest examples of rock art that have been discovered to date.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To studies chronology of indian rock art
2. To studies Historic phase of rock art in India

## METHODOLOGY

In essence, this study investigates the many different methods that researchers have used to interpret rock art.

A comprehensive understanding of the neuropsychological model as well as shamanism, both of which are recent interpretive approaches adopted towards rock art interpretation in countries such as South Africa and the United States, has been completed following general discussions on the history of rock art research in India, along with its nature, distribution, chronology, and distinguishing features. This was accomplished following completion of research on the history of rock art research in India, along with its nature, distribution, chronology, and defining characteristics. The neuropsychological model was developed using ethnographic data collected from communities that have only recently begun engaging in the practise of rock art. During the process of deciphering the rock art of India, all of these were considered and consulted.

However, because this system of representation was not inspired everywhere by the same perceived needs and cultural bodies of ideas, an attempt has been made to understand the art tradition of various ethnic groups in India. This attempt has been made because this system of representation was not inspired everywhere by the same perceived needs.

Next, ethnoarchaeological data has been consulted in order to search for the practise of 'shamanism' (which almost served as a religion in the prehistoric times) amongst tribal groups in India in addition to their ritual practises. This search has been conducted in conjunction with the previous step.

After that, because there are such a large number of paintings and engravings available from India, a select few of them have been categorised under a variety of different subject headings. Each picture has been provided with a succinct description, which is then followed by an interpretation of that picture. For example a picture depicts an elephant. In this particular instance, it will be filed under the category of "animal figures," followed by a description. Next, all of the information that is pertinent to explaining the elephant-like motif that is currently available has been gathered together. This includes material not only from India but also from other parts of the world. Along with ethnography, sources from mythology have been referred to wherever they have been applicable. Taking this approach therefore broadens the perspective that can be applied to the interpretation of rock art. Regardless of how one chooses to interpret them, descriptive forms can almost always function as an informative database.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

### **CHRONOLOGY OF INDIAN ROCK ART**

Even if there are ongoing debates about the reliability of chronology, any investigation into the rock art of India will be lacking if it does not address the topic of chronology. In the following part, we will make an effort to explore the many approaches that researchers have taken in an effort to determine the chronological order of India's rock art.

Recent efforts to investigate the timeline with the assistance of objects that have been unearthed have, to some extent, assisted in putting a date on some of the paintings. In addition, chronological order is also sought to be studied, based on the style that was used when the painting or engraving was made (Wakankar & Brooks 1976). The chronology of Indian rock paintings has not been established by an absolute method of dating, in contrast to some of the rock paintings of Europe and Australia, which can currently be safely dated by utilising AMS (Accelerator Mass Spectrometer) dating by pigment analysis. Even though there are efforts being made, we are still very early on in the experimental stage. In light of this, researchers and academics are still continuing the study of the thematic substance, superimpositions, and style of rock art in order to ascertain a preliminary date. The one and only exception to this rule is found in a few of the later pictures. These photos are linked to dated inscriptions, which makes it feasible to date them with a degree of certainty. As a result, the aforementioned criteria can only function as an overarching working hypothesis when it comes to determining the relative chronology of Indian rock art.

Before getting into the specifics of the chronological location of rock art, it is necessary to have a general concept about the absolute chronological periods that occurred inside India. It was during the prehistoric period, sometimes known as the stone age, that human colonisation of the earth first got its start. Research on the Stone Age can be broken down into three distinct time periods: the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic periods. During the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods, the predominant form of social organisation was hunting and gathering. Stone was the primary component of technology during these time periods. During the Neolithic period, the first beginnings of a settled community that produced food can be found. The next phase was called the Chalcolithic, and it was during this time that copper was first used. When people relocated from mountainous, rocky, and forested regions to fertile alluvial plains, it was the

beginning of agriculture, which led to significant changes in the economy, technology, and demographics. It is interesting to note that between the years 3500 and 1500 B.C., as the rest of India remained with the Neolithic and Chalcolithic farmers, the northwestern section of the nation witnessed the first light of urbanisation on the banks of the rivers Indus and Saraswati.

To return to the topic of relative chronology of Indian rock art, the concept of superimpositions is an important factor in determining the chronology of the artwork. The phrase "superimposition" refers to a group of rock paintings that are executed on the same canvas in a manner that layers one painting above the other. Archaeologists almost always operate under the assumption that the artwork that is lowest on the wall is the oldest, while subsequent paintings are younger. Therefore, on the basis of this information, the rock paintings have been categorised by scholars into groups such as (i) the group of paintings that are under patina (a patina is a process in which a thin deposit is formed by the percolation of water through the rock over a long period of time), (ii) the group of paintings that appear to belong to the Historic period, and (iii) the group of paintings that underlay the Historic paintings (Pandey 1993). Recent scientific research on superimpositions has resulted in statistical studies supported with systematic photographic survey, which in turn has helped scholars to build up a relevant chronology. In point of fact, by observing the stylistic features and use of colour of the overlapping paintings, it becomes easy to build up a relative chronology (Sonawane 2002a). Scholars have also arrived at a clearly defined periodization by correlating the technological, stylistic, and social characteristics of the paintings with archaeological finds. On the basis of this, they have subdivided early Indian rock art into distinct groups, such as pictures belonging to hunting and gathering societies and pictures of agriculturists. The age of the rock pictures can be efficiently determined by connecting the relative chronology with chronologically relevant elements. This makes it feasible to determine the age of the rock pictures (Sonawane 2002a). For instance, archaeologists have arrived at a fairly well demarcated time frame between 2500 B.C. and 200 B.C. for the rock pictures by drawing stylistic and formal analogies of rock pictures of hunter's gatherers and agriculturists with the designs of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic pottery. This is how archaeologists determined the age of the rock pictures. Also, according to the research done by V.S. Wakankar, S.K. Pandey, Erwin Neumayer, V.H. Sonawane, and Giriraj Kumar, the stylized paintings of humped oxen in Indian shelters can be dated to the Chalcolithic period because they are identical to figures on vases from the Malwa civilization. On the other hand, the engraved ostrich eggshells or the ornamental nucleus of Chandravati

Following the process of superimposition, the colours that were employed in Indian rock paintings have assisted researchers in establishing a relative chronology to some extent. In most cases, the colour red is used in practically all of the early paintings, which were created centuries ago. On the other hand, at Bhimbetka, a green pigment that dated back to the Upper Palaeolithic period was discovered, which was the basis for V.S. Wakankar's conclusion that the "S-shaped green dynamic pictures" were among the earliest and that they belonged to the Upper Palaeolithic period. Wakankar was of the opinion that the later Mesolithic assemblages featured a higher percentage of geometric microlith-types when compared to the earlier Upper Palaeolithic assemblages. He was of the opinion that green paintings belonged to the upper Palaeolithic period because he discovered faceted green colour nodules in microlith-bearing strata, which he said also had a low percentage of geometric forms (Neumayer 1993). There is evidence of the use of the colour white during the Mesolithic period, but its introduction is not clearly distinguished at this point. In later stages of the timeline, a variety of colours, including pink, deep yellow, green, and black, were utilised.

The manner in which rock art was created is also an essential component in determining the timing of the event. A great number of archaeologists have classified the rock paintings into several groups according to the techniques and artistic styles they employed (Wakankar 1962, Gupta 1967, Varma 1964, Gordon 1960 and Pandey 1992). For instance, Gordon had already organised the paintings into five distinct groups as early as the 1960s, and the first four of those groups were then further subdivided (Pandey 1993). The paintings were categorised by V.S. Wakankar (1962) into ten major groups, some of which were referred to as 'silhouette drawing in red,' 'outline drawings of human figures,' 'silhouette drawing of human figures,' and 'drawings of horses and elephants with riders,' all of which were further subdivided. The paintings were categorised as "silhouette style," "half-filled drawings," "outline drawings," and so on by Radhakant Varma (Varma 1964), while Jagdish Gupta (Gupta 1967) categorised them as belonging to a total of five distinct categories. Radhakant Varma's classifications can be found in Varma 1964.

The term "naturalistic" is used to describe the artistic style of paintings that date back to the Upper Palaeolithic. This wide classification is based on the characteristics of the paintings (Pandey 1992). The oldest paintings on rocks represented, for the most part, a culture that engaged in hunting, as evidenced by the realistic presentation of animal forms. In addition, the photographs depict the employment of microlith-barbed weaponry such as spears and arrows. Both human and animal figures have decoration on their bodies that resembles a ladder or zigzags. This design may be found on both human and animal models. Archeological evidence suggests that the practise of using microliths dates back to the Upper Paleolithic period. This assertion is supported by the findings of certain excavations. According to what has been mentioned previously, artefacts unearthed from various archaeological strata can help in comparative studies of the designs found on the artefact that has a more or less confirmed date, with similar designs on the rock pictures. This can be done by comparing the designs on the artefact with the designs on the rock pictures. Unfortunately for Indian archaeologists, there are extremely few artefacts with designs that can be dated and fall into this category. An intriguing artefact belonging to the upper Paleolithic stages and dating back to 25000 B.P. was discovered in Patne, which is located in the Indian state of Maharashtra (Sali S.A 1984). This artefact has two lines that are simple and parallel to one another. This kind of pattern may be seen throughout all stages of rock art, and as a result, there is very little room for determining any kind of chronology using it. However, the chert blade core that was discovered at Chandravati in the Sirohi area of Rajasthan (Sonawane 1984) makes it possible to make a stylistic comparison with rock pictures of the Upper Palaeolithic that contain similar design patterns. The character of the assemblage is quite obviously Upper Palaeolithic, despite the fact that its precise chronological era cannot be determined because this core was discovered on the surface. On the side of the core that was unscarred, a design of a rhombus-type spiral was cut in exceedingly fine and delicate lines. This design was quite comparable to the rhomboid design patterns and honeycomb designs found in the early rock art of hunter-gatherers in India.

After the naturalist style, the second series of rock art in India has been categorised as "stylized" art, on a wide basis; this occurs chronologically after the naturalist style (Pandey 1992). The stylization was only applied to human figures, which were either presented in linear forms known as stick shape or in 'S' twist forms known as dynamic figures. Stick shapes and dynamic figures were the only two forms that were used. It's interesting to note that the feminine characters were shown as having square bodies and were painted in a rigid style. The straightforward appearance of the animal representations was preserved, and they were now adorned with complex patterns and linear motifs. The large number of paintings that belong to this series is indicative of a lengthy period of time. These paintings have been further categorised as "schematic" and "conventionalized" based on the aesthetics of their respective compositions (Pandey

1992). In the Vindhyan region, there is a tenuous distinction in fashion between the people who belong to the hunting society and those who belong to the agriculturist's society. The style of rock art that belonged to hunting societies was dynamic, rich in narrative aspects, and extremely stylish, whereas the style of rock art that belonged to agriculturist societies was static and stereotypical. Despite the fact that animal bodies are portrayed in a natural way, one can still see the elaborate and detailed designs done within (Some resembles the design of Upper Paleolithic find of Chandravati core). During this phase, there are multiple geometric designs that can be seen. The representation of X-ray renderings of animal models, which were sometimes used for decoration and sometimes to give anatomical details, was another significant artistic trend of this time period. According to Erwin Neumayer, the stylistic and formal analogies between the rock pictures of the agriculturists and the cattle keepers and the pottery designs of the Neolithic and chalcolithic cultures give a fairly well demarcated time frame between 2500 B.C. and 200 B.C. for the rock pictures. This time frame encompasses the period of time between the Neolithic and Chalcolithic cultures (Neumayer 1993).

The rock paintings that were done during the Historic period are just slightly distinct from the chalcolithic paintings that were done previously (Neumayer 1993, 36). The emergence of an urban society is reflected in the current fashion trends. S.K. Pandey has given this collection the label of being an eclectic series (Pandey 1992). Inscriptions in Brahmi and Shanka characters, both painted and engraved, that were discovered with the drawings provide a precise chronological bracket for many of the paintings, which range from the final quarter of the first millennium B.C. onwards. On some of the paintings was an engraved Ashokan-Brahmi inscription that had a depiction of a cow superimposed on top of it. Therefore, the chronological location of this style can be easily matched to Gupta Brahmi inscriptions, and as a result, it is abundantly obvious that this specific rock art style belongs to some point in time between the 1st century B.C. and the 4th century A.D.

Both the quality and the style of the rock art found in the Vindhya region experienced a significant decline during the second half of the first millennium A.D. (Neumayer1993). Shell writing was present in these paintings, which had a rough appearance and were created with both a thick brush and fingertips. It is necessary to speculate in order to understand the reasons for this decline in style, and this endeavour will take place later in the thesis. The absence of proportion and embellishments can be seen in the animal representations, while human figures are represented by the usage of double triangles. The figures have either been drawn using the flat wash technique or using only outlines. Pictures in this style can be seen at locations such as Sagar, Putalikarar, Bhimbetka, and Kharwai, amongst others. These pictures are somewhat reminiscent of the paintings that are done on the walls of houses in rural and central India. The shanka, also known as shell characters, were frequently used in inscriptions. The Mahadeo hills are home to a number of historical paintings that are considered to be masterpieces. These paintings share a stylistic affinity with Kushana art (Neumayer 1993)

With the exception of Chintakunta, which is located in the Cuddapah region of Andhra Pradesh, the rock art forms portrayed in southern India are not numerous nor are they rich enough to verify succession of the types. The Early Mesolithic style group and the Later Mesolithic stylistic group are both represented in the artwork found in southern India that dates back to the Mesolithic period. Early Mesolithic sites in south Arcot district and Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu, Cuddapah districts of Andhra Pradesh, and Bijapur district of Karnataka conform perfectly to the stylistic criteria of the Mesolithic art found at Vindhyas. These districts are located in the southern Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka. The

paintings of the later Mesolithic group, on the other hand, display a considerable deal of artistic variety. In these paintings, animals are depicted as being huge, rigid, and round. Representations of humans are extremely uncommon and don't show any signs of technological advancements like wheeled transportation or the domestication of animals, both of which are necessary for hunting (Neumayer 2019). There is not a single Mesolithic artwork that can be compared to any of the paintings found in southern India. When agriculture and animal domestication were already well established, it would appear that all of the paintings have already been done. During this time period, depictions of cattle predominated in both paintings and drawings. The primary distinction between paintings created during the late Mesolithic and those created by early agriculturists in south India is fairly striking. This pattern may also be observed in the rock art of the central region of India; however, in the southern region, the rigid and static art of later Mesolithic hunters has been replaced by the elegant art of agriculturists and cow caretakers.

The preceding explanation sheds light on how the chronology of Indian rock art can be discovered by conducting an investigation into the superimpositions of styles and images. To further strengthen the chronology, the periodization that was thus obtained is based on a thematic analysis of the pictures. These pictures show various subsistence patterns, tool technology, and technological innovations such as the use of microlithic tools, the introduction of metal weapons, and the use of chariots.

Following this, research into the subject matter of Indian rock art contributes further to the establishment of its chronology. The earliest rock paintings represented a society that engaged solely in hunting and made use of microlithic barbed weapons such as spears and arrows. This was a characteristic of the Upper Palaeolithic time period. The paintings that belonged to hunters and gatherers from all throughout the Vindhya region conform to the general theme features that are expected from paintings of foraging people. These features include hunting and fishing. The application of microliths on spears and arrows, as well as the use of metal arrowheads and metal axes, can be seen in photographs of agriculturists and animal breeders, as can be seen in photographs of the domestication of animals. These photographs provide clear evidence of a rapidly evolving technological capability. There have been depictions of both warriors and charioteers operating chariots. It is possible to infer a more advanced state of social stratification from pictures that depict procession scenes with heroes, gods, or other individuals who are held in great favour in the culture. Certain themes, such as the depiction of horse riders and human figures, which were still conventional but they have been fashioning various types of costumes, were more pronounced now in rock pictures of the Historic period compared to the earlier Chalcolithic period. This is one of the few ways in which rock pictures of the Historic period differ from those of the Chalcolithic period. At this time, the use of weapons such as swords and shields first becomes common (Pandey 2019). The microlithic barbed weapons have been phased out and replaced by weapons that have metal points. During this time period, chariots were scarce to nonexistent.

An unusual type of painting that belonged to the Historic period includes engraved Ashokan Brahmi inscriptions, as was mentioned earlier in this discussion. The later types of this script, which date from the last part of the first millennium B.C. onwards, provide a definite historical period for many of the drawings. People who lived throughout the Historic period had a culture that was significantly more advanced than that of the people who came before them. It is quite intriguing to see that some of the drawings included depictions of deities from the Buddhist credo and the Bhakta religions (Neumayer 2013), both of which are still venerated by Hindus today. The discovery of six Indo-Greek coins in Afghanistan that were issued by Agathocles, an Indo-Greek king who ruled from 180 to 170 B.C., allows



for an accurate dating of images of Krishna and Balarama found at sites in north Pakistan and Madhya Pradesh. These coins were issued by Agathocles, who ruled from 180 to 170 B.C. These coins have an image of Balaram holding a plough and a club in each hand and Krishna holding a spoke-wheel with projecting arrows.

The script on the coins is Ashokan Brahmi. Both figures covered their heads with what appeared to be umbrellas, much like the depictions of Krishna and Balaram that were discovered in cave paintings not far from the hamlet of Tiluka in Madhya Pradesh. The Brahmi scripts that date to the Kushana and Gupta periods can be found in the second part of the Historic period. As a result, it is possible to establish a chronological date that runs from the beginning of the Christian era up until the Gupta period. During this ancient period, a large number of human and animal images have been drawn. These figures, which generally reflect the domestic life of cave dwellers, are located primarily in the Pachmarhi and Bhopal area. Rock paintings of the Mahadeo hills are quite rich in topic substance. As a result, archaeologists and researchers have come to the conclusion that these paintings belong to the Historic period only by analysing the technological elements of the paintings themselves. The lifestyle that is shown in the paintings found in the Mahadeo hills, representations of warriors dressed in heavy armour, and the technology that was used all point to the first millennium after Christ. In later works from this time period, there is a strong preference for the colour white in a lot of instances (Sonawane 2002a).

In light of this, the formulation of a provisional stylistic criterion, in conjunction with a study of the rock paintings based on their thematic content, superimposition, style, and context, can serve as a broad-based hypothesis for the chronocultural classification of the vast and diverse Indian rock art.

## CONCLUSION

Research on rock art in India can be broken down into three distinct time periods depending on the focus of the investigation. During the first time period (1867–1931), rock art sites were originally brought to light by individual efforts undertaken by explorers, the majority of whom were amateur enthusiasts. During the second period, which lasted from 1932 through 1972, more care was taken to produce accurate recordings. The subject of rock art received only a marginal amount of attention from professional archaeologists. The significant antiquity of Indian Rock Art was discredited by academics such as D. H. Gordon, who had an art and cultural perspective that was centred on Europe. The third time frame begins in 1973 and continues until the present day.

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