

## **Semester IV, SEC – B(2)**

### **PREHISTORIC ART**

#### **ROCK ART**

In India there is however little evidence of Palaeolithic art. It has been suggested that some of the paintings at sites such as Bhimbetka go back to the upper Palaeolithic period, but it is far from certain.

So the rock paintings that are discovered so far in India are from Mesolithic and Neolithic Age.

150 Mesolithic rock arts were found from various parts of India.

First rock paintings were discovered by A.C.L. Carlley in 1867-68 at Sohaghat in the Kaimur hills in the present Mirzapur district (UP).

Other Mesolithic rock painting sites :

- Bhimbetka, Kharwar, Jaora, Kathotia, Lakhajuar(MP)
- 55 rock shelters in the western districts of Orissa especially in the Sundargarh and Sambalpur districts. The richest area for the rock paintings are the 12 rock shelters of the Lekhamoda group in the reserve forests of Chhengahapahad and Garjanpahad.
- Ezhuthu Guha in Kerala

V.S. Wakankar discovered Bhimbetka in 1957.

The Bhimbetka paintings have been studied by V.S. Wakankar, Yashodhar Mathpal and Erwin Neumayer.

Mathpal identified three main phases of the rock paintings, with further sub-phases within these. The first five sub-phases are Mesolithic, the sixth is transitional, and the last three belong to the historic period.

**Colours :** Sixteen colours of shades can be identified, with white and light red used most often. The colours were made from minerals which were ground and then mixed with water or some other substance like animal fat, marrow or egg white. The red was made out of iron oxide (*geru*), white from limestone, and green may have been made from green chalcedony. Some paintings are monochrome, while others are polychrome.

**Tools:** The brushes must have been made of squirrel tail, animal fur or *sema* (silk cotton) and their handles were perhaps made of twigs.

**Subjects of Paintings:** As at most Mesolithic rock sites, animals dominate the scenes at Bhimbetka. 29 species of animals are depicted, including chital, leopard, tiger, panther, elephant, rhinoceros, antelope, deer, squirrel, different types of birds, fish, lizards, frogs, crabs, scorpions, small centipedes. Animals were represented on their own or as part of hunting scenes. While some of the animal figures are abstract, many of them are realistic. Animals are sometimes shown in outline, in other instances their bodies were decorated with designs. A few paintings were in x-ray style.

The Bhimbetka paintings reflect a division of labour on the basis of gender. Men hunt and women are shown gathering and preparing food. Male figures often look like matchsticks, women are sometimes given fuller forms. Some men wear loincloths, probably made of leaves, animal skin or pieces of tree bark. Men wear their hair loose, women braided. Some figures are broad and decorated with geometric designs, and from their attitude seem to represent men of authority. Masked dancers may represent ritual specialists.

**Neolithic painting** : Burzahom in Kashmir

It covers an area of 48 x 27cm of a stone slab and depicts a hunting scene. A stag with large antlers is being pierced from behind by a (female?) hunter with a long spear, while another hunter shoots an arrow at it from the front.

**Reasons behind making paintings** : Probably for many reasons -

1. To express their creative urges
2. To decorate their homes
3. To tell a story in pictures

Some scenes have been picture stories of memorable events in their lives. Others may have been connected with rituals connected with hunting and fertility. It is impossible to say whether the paintings were made by men or women, or both.

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