

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ROCK ART FROM VIDARBHA REGION OF MAHARASHTRA

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Introduction

Vidarbha (19° 21" N and long. 76° 80" E), presently part Maharashtra state and earlier part of Central Provinces & Berar has received major attention for its geological and archaeological wealth right from British times. This region has numerous archaeological sites ranging right from prehistoric times to the colonial period. The Waingang^o, one of the major rivers of Vidarbha has several such archaeological sites on its banks and tributaries. However until 2004 no rock art had been reported either from Vidarbha or any other part of Maharashtra.

The present paper deals with the discoveries of different rock art sites made in the last decade in the Perjagarh-Nagbhir Hill ranges of Chandrapur district in Maharashtra. The occurrence of the few pictographic and few petroglyph sites are in detail in an archaeological perspective which fills the gap on the rock art map after a century.

India is one of the three countries with the richest treasures of rock art reported from different geological, geographical and climatic zones, particularly in the areas of sedimentary, metamorphic and igneous rocks (Kumar 2014). More than 5,000 painted shelters have been reported from various parts of the Indian subcontinent (Fig.1). These spectacular discoveries

brought a new momentum to rock art studies. Wakankar, who recognized its archaeological potential, was the driving force behind these recent large scale discoveries. He discovered several hundred painted rock shelters mainly in central India and attempted a broad survey of rock art sites in the country (Wakankar 1975a; 1987; 1992; Wakankar and Brooks 1976). Wakankar had suggested the possibility of rock shelters in some parts of Maharashtra due the presence of different geological formations, especially in the Vidarbha region but he did not report rock paintings. Vidarbha, which forms the eastern part of Maharashtra, is surrounded by painted caves and rock-shelter sites in Nimar and Chindwara districts of Madhya Pradesh to the north, and Gupansar area in Chattisgarh to the east. Further south, we find rock shelters in Betamcherla and Adoni in Andhra; Balchaker and Hassan Patri, Hirebenekal in Karnataka; and Kilvalay, Settavarai, etc in Tamil Nadu (Pawar 2006).

In the last decade the Middle Waingang^o basin has been visited and surveyed by the various scholars which resulted few rock art sites which includes rock paintings, engravings and cupules being discovered (Mane 2003; Pawar 2006, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). This paper deals with the rock art discoveries made in

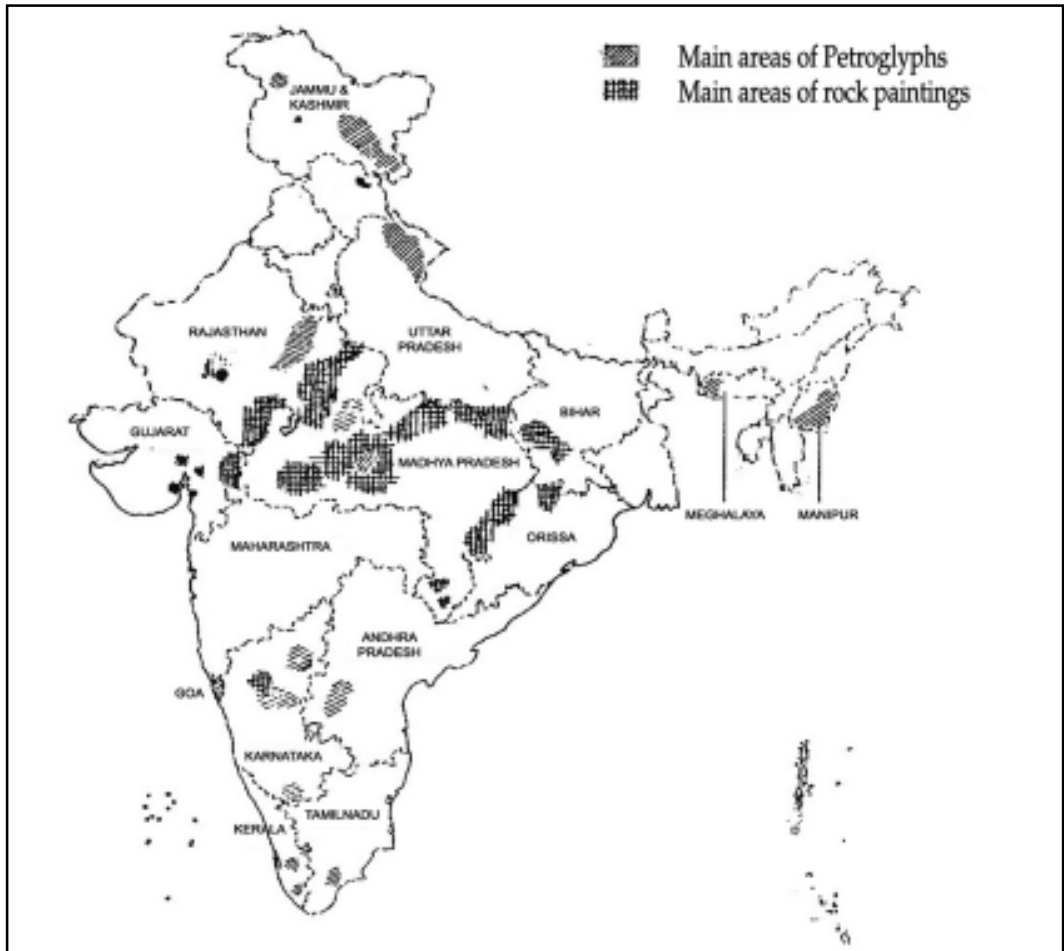


Fig.. 1 : Rock Art Map of India

the Parasgarh-Nagbhir hill range which falls in the Middle Waingang^o basin of Chandrapur district of Maharashtra. All these discoveries divided in three section i.e. pictograph sites, engraving sites and petroglyphic sites, with their archaeological associations.

Site and Environment

Parasgarh-Nagbhir hills, running with a north-north-east to a south-south-west strike

for a distance of about 20 km., have an average width of about 10 to 12 km. This is almost a single ridge of a cuesta type, with an excellent cliff section facing west and in part, south with the dip slope facing eastwards and the ridge is flat-topped. This ridge is made up of almost horizontally bedded Vindhyan Sandstone which is underlain by lime-stone of the same age (Wadia 1994). At the lower end of this hill, there is a large natural depression. The

complete hill range is surrounded by various big and small lakes. Parasgarh-Nagbhir hills are composed mainly of hillocks of rudaceous and ferruginous sandstones. Mineralogically, these sandstones are composed mainly of quartz and some mica flakes, but the sandstone here is weak. Coarse grained mineral structure is the main reason for its weakness (Singh 1971). Stratigraphically, this sandstone belongs to the 'Kampti' formation of the Mahadeo group of the upper Permian to the lower Triassic i.e. 280-180 million yrs B.P. (Deshpande 1998)

This hill range is further divided into different elevated portions, known locally as Pendhari peak (474 MSL), Sat Bahini (459 MSL), Siwap Hurki (383 MSL) and the Mugdhabai Pahar (411 MSL).

It is important to understand the present floral and faunal wealth of the region, while studying rock art since most of the panels inside rock shelters show animals. A number of varieties of plants were found in the dense forests of the Chandrapur and Gadchiroli districts. They are Babul (*Acacia nilotica*), Bel, Salar (*Boswellia serrata*), Bans (*Dendroca-*

lamus strictus), Bahera (*Terminalia bellerica*), Jamun (*Syzgium cumini*), Mohwa (*Bassica latifolia*), Teak (*Tectona grandis*), Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*), Imli (*Tamarindus indica*), Charul (*Holopteica integrifolia*), Ber (*Zizybus jujube*), Palas, Khair, Karanji, Umber, Ajan, etc. They are mainly found in the hill sides and plain plateau.

Parasgarh-Nagbhir hill ranges are extremely rich in wildlife. Tiger (*Panthera tigris*), panther (*Panthera pardus*), wild boar (*Sus crofa*), Indian black bear (*Ursus labiatus*), Black Buck (*Antelope bezoartica*), Indian gazelle or chinkara (*Antelope Arabica*), sambhar (*Rusa unicolor*), cheetal (*Cervus axis*), wild dog (*Cyon alpinus*), nilgai or blue bull (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) squirrel (Gunarubulus pennanoti), monkey (Mecaca muiatta),



Fig. 2: Discovered Sites in Parasgarh-Nagbhir hills



langur (*Seinnopithecus entellus*), barasinga, hare, hyaena, wolf, jackel, etc. are found in their wild varieties.

Rock Art Sites in Parasgarh-Nagbhir Hills

Rock art is found generally on the plateaus and hill slopes and tops, in valleys and gorges having rock shelters, and caves

and open rocks (Kumar 2014). Exploration over the last decade by the author in this hilly region has led to the discovery of various sites bearing evidence of paintings, petroglyphs/cupules/cup-marks and engravings along with associated archaeological material culture (Fig.2).

Sites with Pictographs

As earlier mentioned Parasgarh-Nagbhir hill range is the only known sandstone formation in the region which has been raised the possibility of presence of painted rock shelters in the vicinity of this hill ranges. During the survey two different sites having clusters of painted rock shelters has been noticed with variety of depiction of animal and human world. The details of these sites have been given here with other findings.

Dongargaon

Dongargaon or Vaghai hill (20 35”N & 79 33” E) painted rock shelters are perhaps the only known rock shelters in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. This hill is locally known as “Sitamai dongar”. Two different clusters of rock shelters have been identified within the periphery of this hillock i. e. *Nagargota* and *Pandubara* (Pawar 2011a).

The rock shelters at *Vaghai* hills are also located in the thick forest region, which covered the 60% land of Chandrapur district. Nagargota rock shelters are situated on top the of *Vaghai* hill, 1.2 km East of the village Dongargaon and Pandubara rock shelter is 3 km towards south of the same village. Even both shelters situated on the same hill, but they are found opposite to each

other. The walking distance between both these is nearly 1.5 km. An ancient natural lake is available at the foot of the *Vaghai* hill, which is one of the major water sources in this area even today for domestic and wild animals. The rich and varied topography of this district is almost unparalleled anywhere else in the state.

Nagargota Rock Paintings

This cluster is nearly 135 m above the ground level, where the four rock shelters running from South-West to North-East are situated (Fig 3). This place is covered by huge sandstone blocks and deep grooves can be easily identified above it. The rock paintings at Nagargota are found on the ceiling, exterior side and cliff sides of the rock shelters. The total numbers of paintings are near about 35 of which animal figures are 22 in number whereas human figures

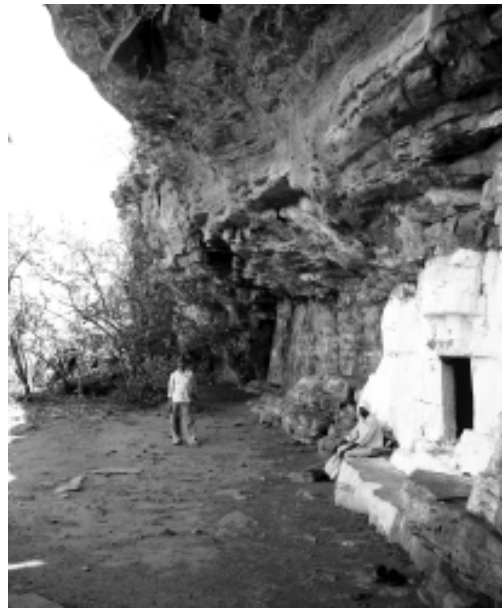


Fig. 3 : Rock Shelter at Nagargota

are 13. The majority of these paintings are painted in dark red and purple red ochre whereas a few are painted in dull red colour (Fig. 4). Presently due to weathering factors



Fig. 4 : Paintings Drawn on the Surface of Shelter

like rain, heat and insects, most paintings are not clearly visible. The animal figures depicted in these rock paintings are mainly barasingha, deer and humped cattle. Many animal figures were shown grazing whereas hunting scenes are completely absent. Both wild as well as domesticated animal figures were depicted in the rock shelter. Human figures are shown in stick shaped and small in size, shown without weapons, but a few figures are big in size like possible horse rider.

Rock paintings of Nagargota can be categorized into a -stage sequence. A few of the rock paintings in dark red colour and relatively large and crude seem to be the earliest rock paintings, whereas the other rock paintings in bright red colour are small in size and very well executed. Regarding the size of the paintings, animal figures have a maximum height of 30 cm and length of 40 cm whereas the other rock paintings are



Fig. 5 : Depiction of Horse Rider

7 cm in height and length is 4 cm. Out of thirteen human figures seven human figures depicted on ceiling portion of the rock shelter no. 1 and their size is about 4 to 5 cm. Four other human figures show average height of 18 cm. One human figure is shown as carrying arrows on the back. These human figures are painted in dark red colour. Most of the paintings are in flat wash, whereas

Table-1: Description of Nagargota Paintings

Sr. No	Subject matter of art	Colour
1)	Seven human figures	Dark red
2)	Four grazing deers	Dark red
3)	Running deer	Dark red
4)	Two big Barasingha	Dark red
5)	Humped cattle	Bright red
6)	Human with arrows	Dark red
7)	Horse rider (?)	Faint red
8)	Antelope	Dark red
9)	Tree	Dark red
10)	Unidentified animal	Dark red

the depiction of the possible horse rider was drawn in outline (Fig 5). The details of paintings are given below (Table-1). Since the remaining rock paintings are in fragmented condition and cannot be identified properly, it is difficult to understand the subject matter of those rock paintings.

Pandubara Rock Paintings

Four rock shelters are located at Pandubara cluster like Nagargota but out of these four rock shelters only rock shelter no. I & IV are painted. Rock shelters no. II & III are covered with semi dressed stone slabs (Fig 6). On the top of these rock shelters a few structures covered with huge

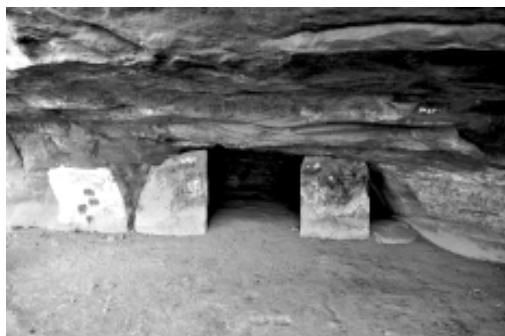


Fig. 6 : Rock Shelter at Pandubara

boulders similar to the Megalithic cairn circles were noticed. Probably these shelters were used by the Megalithic/Early historical communities.

The total number of rock paintings is about 17, out of which 12 are clearly visible and remaining paintings are in distorted condition and could not be identified. Most of the paintings are painted in different shades of red ochre colour (dark red and reddish brown). A



Fig. 7 : Paintings Drawn with Dark Brown and Yellow colour

few rock paintings are in dark brown colour (Fig 7). Two paintings are in red colour with the outlines in yellow colour. Paintings were drawn in various sizes. Smallest paintings are 6 cm in height and 9 cm in length white large paintings are 21 cm height and 18 cm in length. Here the paintings are fine as compared with those of Nagargota. In animal paintings deer, barasingha, elephant, rhinoceros (?), wild boar and a bovid are depicted. Other paintings are human figures with outlines in yellow colour, Swastika and two segmented figures, which is unique at this site (Fig 8).

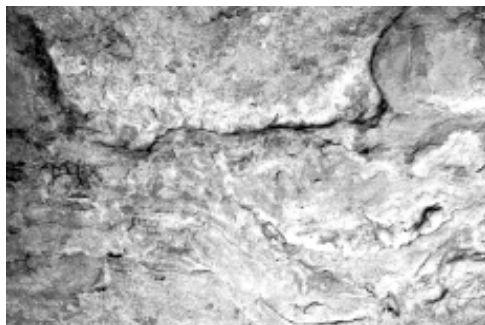


Fig. 8 : Depiction of Segmented figures, Swastika & Deer

Two segmented figures show some creatures drawn with 3-4 segmented lines. Two geometrical patterns inside the figure, a vertical rectangle and two vertical strokes are clearly visible. Human figures were drawn in dancing posture. Some trace of a swastika figure is visible on the ceiling of the rock shelter IV. Depiction of a deer figure is shown elegantly and the body portion was filled in with rectangular and semicircular designs. Most of the paintings were drawn on bare uneven rough surface of cliff side wall while only a few rock paintings had drawn on the ceiling portion of the rock shelter. The details of paintings are given in Table-2.

Table-2 : Description of Pandubara Paintings

Sr. No.	Subject matter of art	Colour
1)	Wild Boar	Dark red
2)	Rhinoceros (?)	Dark red
3)	Elephant	Dark red
4)	Human figure	Yellow ochre
5)	Reflection of Deer	Dark red
6)	Deer (Inside body rectangle & semicircle drawn)	Dark purple red
7)	Two segmented animals	Dark purple red
8)	Swastika figure	Bright red
9)	Barasingha	Dark red
10)	Geometric figure	Dark purple red

Style

The study of style, patina, superimposition and theme of the rock paintings are considered the parameters used to study the rock paintings and their chronology. The study of the style of the rock paintings is an essential factor which can give information to assign a date to the rock paintings. Rock paintings at *Vaghai* hill are classified according to their art form. They should be divided into different types as given below :

- a) Silhouette
- b) Half filled
- c) Decorative
- d) Outline
- e) Bichrome drawings
- f) X-ray
- g) Segmented
- h) Geometric

Lithic Industry

During the exploration inside the rock shelter it has been noticed that hundreds of microlithic tools of different varieties are scattered all around the shelter (Fig.9). It is quite interesting that all microliths collected from the surface are non- geometric in character. Not a single triangle or trapeze shaped tool was been observed among all the collected artifacts. Statistically debitage is more common than the microliths. The basic raw material employed for the manufacturing tools is fine grained stone material like chert, chalcedony, agate, jasper and especially quartz which easily available at the top of the hill in wider range. Collected tools include scrapers, parallel sided blades,

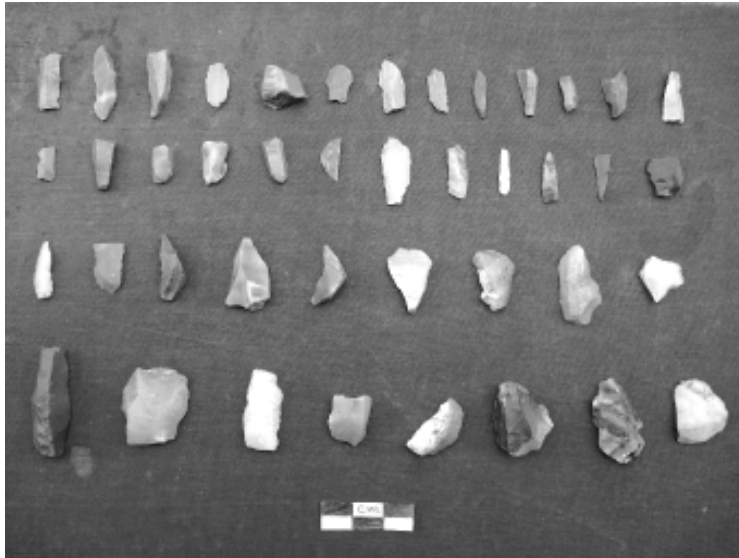


Fig. 9 : Collected Microlithic Assemblage from Nagargota

lunates, points and crescent etc. lithic industry of *Vaghai* hill is non-geometric in character whereas the other sites of the eastern Vidarbha, only geometric tools were found with a few exceptions which are an open air sites.

The recovery of a unique tool found with the microlithic assemblage made on quartzite is important here. The above tool is broken on one side and other side has a retouched like working edge. Two notches for finger grip are clearly visible on the tool. Probably there were four notches for gripping this tool. Measurement of this tool is 2.8 cm × 1.9 cm × 0.7 cm.

Habitation Deposit

On the ground surface of the Nagargota shelter thick habitation deposit has been noticed. Soil of the ground surface is mostly brownish but in some part it

looks brownish grey. This deposit has contains a variety of the non geometric microlithic tools. Smoothness of the soil and the lime kankars indicate the evidence of the habitation. Only surface collection and documentation has been done by the author so the further picture clears after systematic and scientific excavation.

Authors of the Rock Art

The authors of rock paintings can be found on the basis of paintings. Though the associated archaeological material, i.e., the microlithic assemblage at Nagargota suggests that these rock shelters were probably occupied by the Mesolithic communities. A few burial structures similar to those of Megalithic cairn circles were noticed on the top of the Pandubara and depiction of a possible Horse rider

suggests that it was drawn during the Megalithic or Early Historical period. The authors of rock paintings might have been culturally different from the Megalithic and Early Historical period people. The continuous process of human development as well as art development can be observed here.

Chronology of Nagargota & Pandubara Paintings

The most vital issue of rock paintings is chronology (Pandey 1992.). Even then, after various kinds of scientific research work related to the rock art has been undertaken by different scholars controversies about the antiquity of rock paintings continue. Wakankar and Neumayer attempted to describe these paintings on the basis of their style, pigment and superimposition. Painted designs on pottery, drawings and engravings of Chalcolithic-Neolithic periods have been taken into consideration for dating rock-paintings of these cultures. Significant evidence in the form of the microlithic core having engraved design on its patinated cortex, helpful for dating the Mesolithic paintings was discovered by Sonawane (Sonawane 1984).

The depictions of animal figures painted in dark red colour and life size and drawn in naturalistic outlines can be dated to the Mesolithic period on the basis of their style. A few paintings of stick-shaped human figures small in size and less stylized are shown without weapons, while the rock paintings of later phases are small in size and they were painted in various shades of red ochre colour.

Comparatively speaking, the first group of rock paintings at Nagargota shelters appears to be of Mesolithic period (10000–6000 B.P). The most significant evidence in the present context is, however, that of the findings of microliths during the exploration, but in the case of Pandubara rock shelters not a single microlithic was found. Though there are few Megalithic Cairns present on the top of Pandubara shelters and paintings of Pandubara are comparatively similar to those of Nagargota. In style, technique and colour depiction many similarities can be noticed with those of Central Indian rock paintings. Pandubara paintings probably belong to Iron Age/ Megalithic period. Depiction of the possible horse rider at Nagargota was probably drawn during the Megalithic or Early Historical period. In Vidarbha region the Megalithic culture can be dated to circa. 1000-200 B.C. Excavations of megaliths in Takalghat-Khapa, Mahurzari and Naikund have revealed horse bones and horse bits which suggest that Megalithic builders had a close association with horses. The depiction of a possible horse rider suggests that this painting belongs to Megalithic culture. Therefore on the basis of style and material evidences, chronology of *Vaghai* hill paintings can be put in the time-frame from Mesolithic to Historical period.

Navtala

Navtala (20° 41.2' N, 79° 30 63.3' E), is a small village situated on the foothills of the Parasgarh-Nagbhir hills, which itself is covered by dense forest. This village is approximately 14 km from

Dongargaon, in the south-east direction, close to Chimur tahsil. The explorations at Navtala revealed significant evidence of rock-shelters with few paintings on its surface (Pawar 2011a).

The rock shelters at Navtala are found 3 km south-east of the present village on the top of the hill which is a part of the Parasgarh- Nagbhir hills. Sandstone formations of these hills have revealed nearly twenty eight rock shelters, divided in two rows, opposite to each other, divided by a long stream or Nullah (Fig 10). The present rock shelters are 14 km away from the previously documented painted rock shelters at *Vaghai* hill. A huge natural lake, called *Madnagarh*, is present at the foot of the hill, which is one of the major water sources in this area even today. Many domestic as well as wild animals drink water from this lake.

Most of the rock shelters at this site are closed by fallen boulders, perhaps because of a landslide. Two rows of rock shelters run parallel to both sides of the stream. Paintings have been found only in two rock



Fig. 10 : Rows of Rock Shelters at Navtala

shelters, on its surface. The paintings are drawn by using red ochre colour. Identification of these paintings is very difficult due to its weathered nature (Fig. 11). The total numbers of paintings are four which is drawn into the surface of rock shelters, out of only one is identified as a



Fig. 11 : View of Observatory/Time Watch

fish motif. The others seem to be geometrical figures, but their exact shape could not be traced (Pawar 2012a).

Petroglyph Sites

Petroglyphs/Engravings/Cupules/ Cup-marks are one of the major component of rock art which can be found all over the cultural period covering long time span, right from lower Paleolithic period to the medieval time. Megalithic culture is also marked with this type of art in different forms which earlier discussed by various authors in connection to their relation with family group, work of art as a ritual and celestial relationship with astronomical approaches.

Early man has been involved in works of art in many parts of the world from much earlier times than is generally accepted

(Kumar 2001; Bednarik 2001, 2002). Presently most of the rock art scholars consider that cupules or Petroglyphs are oldest non-iconic form of rock art throughout the world. Dar-ki-chattan in Madhya Pradesh is one of the best examples of Lower Paleolithic non-iconic art found in all over the world, which was later on excavated and meticulously studied by Giriraj Kumar and his team.

Irave-Jhari Observatory & Cupules

Irave-Jhari (20° 38'52.56' N, 79° 34' 63.3' E) is the village situated in the same hill range and it is approximately 5 km away towards north of the *Vaghai* hill rock shelters and 4 km from the Hirapur Megalithic site excavated by the author. During exploration at the site Irave-jhari a very interesting petroglyph has been found which is carved on the flat surface of the lower portion of the hillock. This is a circular design with number of cupules/cup marks 1 m in diameter. A total of 79 cupules have been carved to make this circle. The circle is crossed by two axes dividing the circle

into four quadrants. Each axes has 24 (12 on each side) cupules except the centre one which is dividing point of this two axes (Fig.12). It is possible that there is some astronomical significance to this design as discussed below.

The figure has a '+' sign circled with cup-marks. These cup-marks are roughly of the same size but exact measurements were not made. The North is to the top of the figure indicated by an arrow. The quadrant around the north has 20 cup marks (not including the cup-mark that make the '+' sign). The Eastern quadrant has 16 cup-marks. The Southern quadrant has 21 cup-marks and the Western quadrant has 18 cup-marks. The 4 lines that make up the '+' sign have 12 cup-marks each, excluding the central point. In spite of near symmetry, it is clear that the centre of the '+' sign is offset towards North East with the South Western arm slightly longer than the North Eastern arm. In spite of this, the number of circles in the '+' sign in all arms is equal. This is achieved by slightly increasing the spacing between the cup-marks in the South Western arm.



Fig. 12: Depiction of Fish & Geometrical Paintings



Fig. 13 : Hillock Bearing an Observatory and Clusters of Cupules

Another interesting finding at the same place, within the 500 m radius, is evidence of large sized cupules in four different clusters. All these five clusters are within the few meters on the open air hillock (Fig.13).

In the first cluster 9 cupules have been carved out in almost triangular pattern. These cupules are varies in size from 3 cm to 1.5 cm. In the second cluster 8 cupules have been found divided group wise

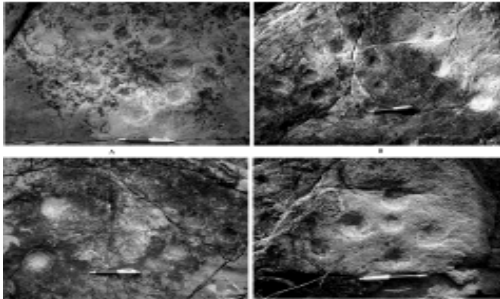


Fig. 14 : Clusters of Cupules on Hillock

(3+3+2). Here also all the cupules are not similar to each other in size and depth. In the third cluster 7 cupules have been noticed

without any pattern. While executing these cupules the author has taken the precaution for keeping the distance between all these cupules. In the last and fourth cluster 6 cupules have been noticed executed very close to each other (Fig. 14).

Hirapur Cup-marks/Cupules

Petroglyphs are continuous tradition of art found in variety of forms in different archaeological time period. Megalithic culture which is mainly marked by its burial traditions with numerous types also is associated with petroglyphs. Many of megaliths in Central India and South India have several examples of this kind of workmanship. The majority of these petroglyphs are associated with only one type of megalith, i.e. stone circle or cairn with peripheral boulders. During the excavation of Hirapur in remote zone of Vidarbha in central India it was noticed that the majority of cupules on the covering capstone of one dolmenoid cist which is another rare type



Fig. 15 : View of Excavated Megalithic Burials near Rock art Site

of megaliths found in Vidarbha region (Pawar 2012a).

The site Hirapur (20° 35''N & 79° 33'' E) in Chimur tahsil of Chandrapur district is excavated by author for last three seasons which has been yielded interesting burial architectural evidence (Fig. 15). During the survey, on some of these megalithic structures, many cup-marks have been noticed. These are the most conspicuous factor associated with megalithic burials in the region. Many megalithic burials of the Vidarbha region have cup-marks identified on the surface of the peripheral boulders, Viz., Junapani, Naikund, Mahurjhari, etc. but the presence of cup-marks on the capstone of one of the dolmened cists and on a menhir of is interesting evidence as it is being noticed for the first time in the region.

On the surface of the capstone of one of the burial, forty nine cup-marks have been observed (Fig. 16). The cup-mark patterns seem to point to north-south, assuming that the dolmen has not changed its orientation while falling down. Out of this forty nine cup-marks twenty cupules divided in two rows, each having ten, running parallel to north south direction and in centre

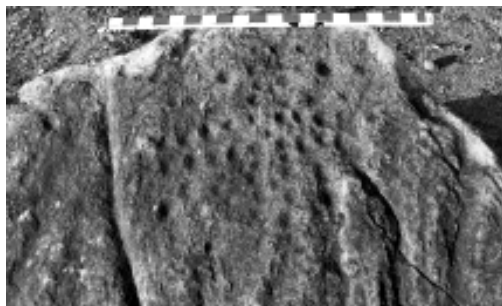


Fig. 16 : Cupules on the Capstone of Burial

of these, one cupule has been carved out. Whereas this line of cupules again crossed in east west direction with the sixteen more, eight in each line found in linear pattern divided in two rows again. The other cupules are scattered around this linear criss-cross pattern in indefinite ways. Interestingly the left side of these cupules cluster, one engraved mark running east west measured around one meter, which is uncommon feature associated with cupules (Pawar 2012b).

One of the menhirs has 36 cup-marks, which again runs north-south. Here these cupules have not been found in any particular form and most of them are weathered and eroded. These cup-marks or cupules possibly could have been associated with the astronomical situation of the time when the burials has been erected.

Muktai

Muktai (20°34'0.36''N & 79°31'55.07''E) is generally known to the villagers as a pilgrim place as every year at the time of *ramnavami*, villagers gathered in this place for *puja*. Doma is the nearest village to this site which is approximately 9 km from above mentioned Hirapur site whereas 5 km from *Vaghai* hill rock shelters. A total eight rock shelters have been noticed at this place, but unfortunately few of them have been occupied by a modern temple. Rock shelter no. 3 has several cupules carved out on the floor covering an area of 2 meter. These cupules are very deep as compared to other sites and they are executed



Fig. 17 : Cupules Inside of Muktai Shelters



Fig. 18 : Engravings on Slab inside of Shelter

randomly without having proper alignment. From the centre towards the left side 7 cupules has been carved out whereas on the right side 18 cupules have been found (Fig. 17 : see page no 38).

Engraving Sites

Four different sites within the vicinity of Perjagarh-Nagbhir hills have evidence of engravings. Two sites belong to natural rock shelter groups whereas two other sites are manmade shelters made during Early Historic times. The associated material culture with these engravings and the depictions differs from site to site. Execution of these engravings might helps to understand the psychology behind this art.

Nagargota

An interesting engraving has been observed at Nagargota rock shelter where 15 grooves have been engraved on one rectangular slab at the ground surface of rock shelter. (Fig 18). These grooves are carved in parallel with each other without criss-crossing each others. It is very difficult to understand the specific pattern of this

engraving. Probably these strokes were made during use of this slab for sharpening some kind of stone or metal tools (Pawar 2006).

Ambai-Nimbai

Ambai-Nimbai (20° 38''52.56' N, 79° 34' 63.3' E) is the name of very huge cave

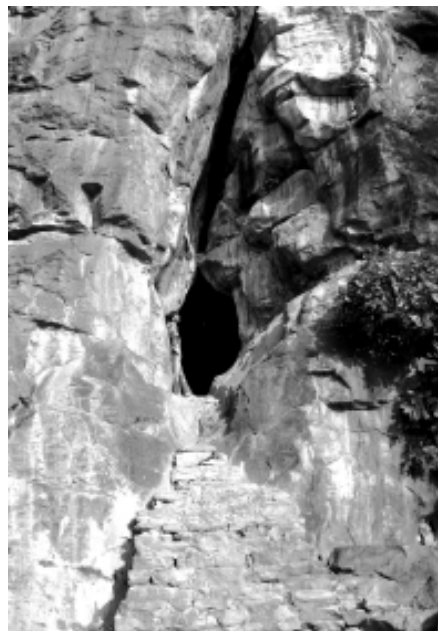


Fig. 19 : View of Entrance of Ambai-Nimbai

located a few meters away from the earlier mentioned Jhari village. This cave is roughly 5 meters in breadth whereas it is approximately 30 m in depth (Fig. 19). The exact measurement of the cave length has not been made due to the natural factors like water seepage and bats. At the entry point of this cave, on the right hand of the cave wall, a very interesting engraving has been noticed (Fig. 20). This engraving has five different



Fig. 20 : Engraving on the Right Wall of Shelter

elements in which a human figure facing right, a star and some kind of fruit can be clearly identified. The remaining two elements in which some dot like depiction and leaf like figure are executed.

Kunghada

Kunghada (20°38'10.88"N & 79°38'51.07"E) village is situated east of the Perjagarh-Nagbhir hills on the Nagpur-Nagbhid road. Here outside the village boundary five caves have been noticed which are locally known as 'Pandav-Gufa'. Out of these five, four are man made whereas one cave does not show any human interference at the wall of the shelter. Interestingly on the floor of this natural cave/shelter two different engravings have been found (Fig. 21).

In the first engraving five different figures have been engraved together in which four are rectangles with lines or strokes radiating from the corners (Fig. 22 : see on page no. 40). In one rectangular figure instead of lines semi circle has been used which looks like the *Godhani* symbols found in the painted rock shelters of central India and the exterior walls of the *Gond* community at Dharul in Betul district of Madhya Pradesh (Pawar 2013a, 2013b). A figure with two axis making + symbol is surrounded by all these four rectangular figures. The central figure has two axis crossing each other and making



Fig. 21 : View of Kunghada Cave

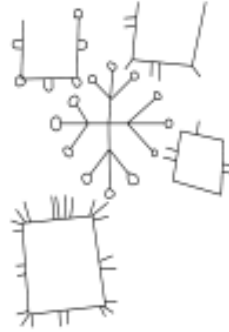


Fig. 22 : Engraving with Godhani Design



Fig. 23 : Engraving with Human depiction

angle of 90 at the centre has three strokes at each direction of these axis. All these strokes has small circle on its point.

In the second engraving depiction which is just 50 cm away from above mentioned engraving various unidentified depiction have been executed on flat surface. Only one human figure in the centre has been identified which is shown similar to the rock art of central India (Fig. 23).

Pullar

Pullar (20°51'27.63"N 79°30'14.36"E)

is situated nearly 30 km from these hill ranges towards Nagpur. Presently this site comes under recently declared Umred-



Fig. 24 : Satbhoki Caves in Pullar



Fig. 25 : Engravings of Deer, Elephant & Circles with Plus Sign

Karandala tiger sanctuary, which becomes an obstacle for visiting this site. This site has a group of Early Historic caves divided in two clusters named as Chandala and Satbhoki caves (Fig. 24). A few engravings have been carved on the top surface of the Chandala caves. These engravings include the figures of elephant, deer and humped bull in animal world. However there are other depictions which includes the circular symbols having + sign inside of it. A total six circles with + sign have been carved out with these animal figures (Fig. 25).

Concluding Remarks

All these discoveries deserve a special place in the rock art studies of Maharashtra as they have filled the gap on the rock art map of India. It is again important to make a link between the rock art found in Maharashtra and adjoining Central Vindhyan rock art. A comparative study in the rock paintings at Dongargaon/Vaghai hill and the Central Indian rock art suggests that there is not much similarity in the style of the paintings. Whereas a few figures like deer show similarity with the Panchmadhi and Bhimbetka paintings, the other figures

indicate similarities with the Southern Indian style of rock paintings.

The microlithic assemblage inside of the Nagargota shelters with a thick habitation deposit suggests that these Rock paintings might have drawn from the Mesolithic period onwards and continued till the Early Historical period. Cultural continuity in the material culture can be found at this site. This site gives the evidence of cultural occupation in the form of rock paintings as well as artifacts. Whosoever might have occupied these shelters after the Mesolithic people seems to have great respect for the paintings drawn by the first occupants as is revealed from the fact that these later people, to a large extent, did not damage the earlier paintings by superimposing or overlapping them, and possibly avoided harming these paintings.

An extensive survey followed by excavations at selected sites would help us understand.

- 1) Nature and shape of microliths with thick habitation deposit within the shelter put up question that the Vidarbha Mesolithic are earlier than other sites like Bagor, Langhnaj etc.?

2) In the vicinity of Pandubara rock shelter Megalithic cairns and Dolmen were found. Did the Megalithic builders occupy the caves?

Rock paintings at Navtala show a close similarity with style of those Vaghai Hill painted rock shelters. As far as period is concerned, due to the paucity of quantity of paintings at Navtala because of fallen rock shelters it is very difficult to draw certain conclusions. However the places like Navtala is definitely most suitable for prehistoric settlements.

An observatory at Irave-Jhari gets special attention as it is the first example of its kind of anywhere in the open air sites in India. Petroglyphs are not new to Indian rock art studies but the certain circular pattern with specific numbers is very interesting to understand the legacy of later astronomical observatories or time watch which is found in medieval times. The size of cupules in this observatory are very small and they are shallow which suggests that possibly they had been carved out with a pointed stone or antler.



Fig. 26 : Paleolithic tool in the Vicinity of Cupules at Irave-Jhari

Other clusters of cupules found near to this observatory/time watch are again very curious. These cupules are found on the open air hillock and interestingly they are in descending orders (9, 8, 7 & 6). Below this hillock is a small stream from which quartzite cores cleavers and hand axes were collected (Fig. 26).

Large numbers of cupules are executed meticulously on the capstone of Hirapur megalithic burials. Though the association of cupules with the megaliths is not a new phenomenon, the occurrence of these cupules at this site is interesting. These cupules are carved on sandstone which has been brought at this site from the nearby sandstone hills, which are just a few kms away from the site. The other above mentioned discoveries on the same hill range lead to the consideration of whether these cupules have been carved after their association with megaliths or whether these cupules were already there and coincidentally megalithic builders brought these slabs at site. All these cupules on the capstone are badly weathered and eroded and seem to be carved out with help of stone due to absence of any iron chisel marks. Deepness of these cupules raises questions about their antiquity. Linear criss-cross pattern suggests that they might belong to early Iron Age, whereas non-iconic form of these cupules over menhir and their condition indicates the possibility of their belonging much before this period. The more recent discoveries of cupules results in the possibilities of more sites and places on this hill range from which we can learn more about the workmanship of early Petroglyphs executed by our ancestors.

Muktai rock shelters lead to curiosity about the occurrence of these cup-marks only in one small shelter. However there are other shelters also, but those shelters do not show any evidence of cup-marks. Indefinite patterns and the depth and size of these cupules has shown that they are much older as the Irave-Jhari cupules. Though the author has not found any certain archaeological material inside the shelter, the nature of these cup-marks leads to the idea that these cupules had been executed with the help of stone and not by any metallic equipment.

Engravings at Nagargota rock shelter do not show any iconic depiction but the possibility that they were made by sharpening of tools leading to vertical strokes must be considered. However the choice of only one slab origination of all the vertical strokes from only one point does not fit with sharpening. Both possibilities can be considered because in the Early Iron Age/ Early Historic period this natural rock shelter converted into apsidal cave.

The engraving at Ambai-Nimbai is very significant to understand man and nature relationship. In this engraving the human figure is shown with a star and also the figure of some fruit and the leaf kind of design suggests that artist as shown human figure walking at night time near to a tree.

Kunghada engravings are made certainly in the Early Historic period as the surrounding caves are Buddhist. These engravings are important to understand the depiction of *Godhani* type of figure which is rarely engraved. The continuity of this

symbol can be drawn from early times (Mesolithic period onwards) upto modern period. Another engraving at the same shelters is mischievous, as only one human figure can be identified but again the way of carving is exactly like that of the paintings.

The occurrence of the engravings on the surface of Chandala cave suggests that perhaps elephant was prevalent in Eastern Vidarbha region at that time. Again circular symbols having + design are found in the rock paintings of Central India and the Pachmadhi region too. The exact purpose of this symbol is not known but this could be very popular during this period, as it has been found in form of paintings and engraving too.

This area has great potential for archaeological and especially rock art studies but due to the restriction of forest authorities and revolutionary tribal activities not much work has been done. However this present work by author is important to understand rock art pattern of this area which is adjoining both to Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. It is necessary to preserve these paintings because for the first time in the Maharashtra region rock paintings has been noticed.

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