

The Reclusive Rhinoceros in the Rock Art of India

*Prabash Sahu**

Rhinoceros, the armour-clad pachyderm, roaming freely in the alluvial grasslands and riverine flood plains has fascinated the human mind right from the prehistoric times. Presently inhabiting the marshy lands in Asia and Africa, five species, viz. the white or square-lipped rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*), the black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) of Africa; the one-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) of India; two-horned rhinoceros (*Didermoceros sumatrensis*) of Sumatra and one-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) of Java have traversed a long journey notwithstanding the past vagaries of nature and have left their impression in the rock art. The documentations of their depictions and decipherment of their presence in the rock art of India is given in the following pages.

The Rhinoceros- Habits and Habitats

The word “Rhinoceros” is derived from the Greek words ‘*rhinos*’ meaning nose and ‘*keras*’ meaning horn. This nose-horned animal having one or two horns on the upper surface of the snout belonging to the family Rhinocerotidae is an herbivorous mammal. Grey or brown in colour, the rhinoceros bear thick skin often forming a plate like fold especially at the shoulders and thighs resembling armour. Most rhinoceroses are solitary in nature, but for the white rhinoceros who live in

* Associate Professor, Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University, Nagpur, prabashsahu@gmail.com

groups. The rhinoceros thrive in areas which support grasslands in proximity to water sources. They are found in Savannah and tropical and u tropical forest regions.

Rhinoceros in Archaeological Records

Rhinoceros unicornis or the One-Horned Indian rhinoceros and its predecessors were present in India during the Pleistocene and Holocene periods is attested by fossil records of *R. sivalensis*, *R. palaeindicus*, *R. platirhynus*- from Upper Siwaliks (Pinjor); *R. perimensis* from Middle Siwaliks (Chinji, Nagar and Dhokpathan) *R. decanensis* from Late Pleistocene (near Gokak, Belgaum dist on Ghataprabha- Krishna valley); *R. karnulensis* from Kurnool caves, Andhra Pradesh; *R. indicus* from Ken river in Mirzapur region and fossilized and semi-fossilized bones from Narmada valley; Mesolithic Sarai Nahar Rai, Damdama and Mahadaha in the Central Ganga Plain and Khaksar, Valotri, Kanewal and Langhnaj in Western India. (Badam, 1979)

Rhinoceros in the Rock Art of India

The account by James Cockburn is presumably the earliest account of the presence of rhinoceros in the North Western provinces while on a hunt he discovered the fossilized remains of *rhinoceros indicus* in the Mirzapur region and the simultaneous finding of a painting of rhinoceros hunt in the rock shelter of Ghormangar. The rock shelter at Ronp, 3 miles east of Robertsganj visited by Cockburn is rich in paintings of different periods sometimes superimposed (IAR, 1956-57: 14). Subsequent studies in the Mirzapur region has brought to light many rock art sites, viz. Gochara, Kerwa, Kauva Khoh, Panchmukhi, Soraho, Duara and Karihawa. Rhinoceros paintings have been recorded from Matahawa, Panchmukhi, Ghormangar and Kauva Khoh. Two rhinoceros- an adult and a calf are shown being attacked from behind by hunters holding barbed harpoons at Matahawa (Pl.17.1); a rhinoceros being hunted by a hunter holding a bow at Panchmukhi (Pl.17.2) and another realistic portrayal of a rhinoceros, surrounded by a group of eleven camouflaged hunters, five harpoons piercing the rhino and other such paintings clearly suggests the popularity of rhinoceros in the rock art of the Mirzapur region. The rock of the region is divided into twelve stages under three major groups, viz. Hunting-gathering (Mesolithic representing stages I to IV); Pastoral (Neolithic-Chalcolithic representing stages V to VII and Historical period (stages VIII to XII) (Tewari, 1990).

Situated 36 kms. from Rewa, the rock shelter of Itar-Pahar bears paintings executed in deep red colour superimposed over the earlier ones in white. The theme of paintings includes scenes of hunting and fishing. The faunal representations in the rock art at Itar Pahar comprise deer, wild buffalo, dog, wild ass and rhinoceros (IAR 1961-6: 24). The other rock art sites bearing rhinoceros paintings in the Rewa district include Deor Kothar, Deor Bijawar (Wakankar, 2005: 96) and Jhiriya (Singh, 1998: 138). Only one painting of rhino is recorded from Bhimbetka IIIIF-35/b. A giant rhino having massive body, sharp horn, open mouth, raised ears and twisted tail (Mathpal, 1984: 87). The rock shelters in Adamgarh, Chaturbhujnath Nala, Ghatla, Hathitol, Jaora, Kathotia, Kharwai, Lakhajuar, Moradeo in

Pachmarhi area, Putlikarar and Ramchhajja (Wakankar, 2005) in Central India also bear paintings of rhinoceros. From the Gawilgarh Hills group of rock shelters in the Betul District of Madhya Pradesh, the portrayal of rhinoceros has been recorded in the rock shelter of Mungsadev and Kosum Gupha 3 (Sahu, 2013: 72-76; Bhattacharya-Sahu and Sahu 2015; 63-78; 2017: 103-113). The painting of rhinoceros from Mungsadev (Pl.17.1) shows the animal with an elongated neck whereas the depiction of the animal in Kosum Gupha 3 is realistic, though in outline (Pl.17.2). The animal was also popular in the rock art sites in Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Discussion

The rhinoceros which was a preferred animal in the Mesolithic rock art in India lost its prominence in the later art forms. Though we find its representation in the Harappan civilization in the form of seals and skeletal remains from various sites and sporadic representation in Mauryan, Jaina, Buddhist and eastern Indian context, the animal passed into near oblivion again to be revived in the art form during the Mughals (Manuel: www.rhinosourcecentre.com). There must be myriad of reasons for the disappearance of rhinoceros from popular art of India. One of the reasons for the extinction (not complete disappearance but decrease in population) of the mega faunas like the rhinoceros might be overexploitation.

Barnosky (2008, 11543-11548) suggests three major stages of the growth of human population: (1) hyperbolic growth between 2, 000, 000 B.C.E. and 46, 000 B.C.E. followed by a transition between 46, 000 B.C.E. and 27, 000 B.C.E. to a new hyperbolic trajectory; (2) hyperbolic growth between 27, 000 B.C.E. and 425 B.C.E. followed by a transition (between 425 B.C.E. and 510 C.E.) to a new hyperbolic trajectory and (3) hyperbolic growth between 510 and 1950 C.E. and assigns the second stage for the extinction of megafauna due to overexploitation by monotonal growth of human population.

However, Nielsen disagrees with Barnosky and advocates that “the massive extinction of species of megafauna was most likely not caused by humans” as the increase in the human population around 13550 BCE-9550 B.C.E. the minimal to around 350 per year. He cites other different reasons, *viz.* availability of refuges, the number and type of predators, availability of suitable ecology for sustenance, migration and fertility rate of the faunal species (<http://arxiv.org>).

The disappearance of rhinoceros in post Mesolithic rock art is indicative of the migration of the specie from the Central, Northern and Western India to Eastern India where presently they are settled and thrive in Assam. The dwindling of suitable habitat might have caused this migration, though there is no available archaeological record to prove at present. The scientific investigation of the lake deposits of the Interfluve Surface combined with the study of oxygen isotopes in the teeth enamel of herbivore animals has resulted in the reconstruction of the paleoclimates of the Ganga Plain clearly suggests that there were alternate cycles of low and high rainfall from 20, 000 B.C.E. to 5, 800 B.C.E. (Singh, 2005a, 1-35; b, 1-12). During the period of 10, 500 to 5, 800 B.C.E., the Ganga plain witnessed high rainfall and the expansion of lakes- a perfect habitat for the rhinoceros followed by reduced

rainfall and reduction in lake around 5, 800 to 3000 B.C.E. which probably led to the diminishing of rhinoceros population in the region. The neotectonic activity during 8000-5000 BCE resulted in warping of surface causing disruption in river channels and produced a landscape of incised rivers with cliffs, local mounds adjacent to the lakes and ponds (Singh, 2016, 27). If we assume that the climate of the early Holocene period in India was almost similar then, it is quite probable that the rhinoceros must have lost their habitat forcing them to migrate to a greener pasture. Further researches in this direction might throw welcome light into this sojourn of the rhinoceros.

Acknowledgements

The author sincerely thanks Dr. Nandini Bhattacharya-Sahu, Regional Director (ER) of Archaeological Survey of India and Dr. Sachin Kr. Tiwary, Assistant Professor of Banares Hindu University, Varanasi for the ungrudging help in preparation of this paper.

References

- Indian Archaeology-A Review, 1956-57 & 1961-62, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi
- Badam, G. L.: 1979, Pleistocene Fauna of India, Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute, Pune
- Barnosky, A: 2008, Megafauna Biomass Trade off as a Driver of Quaternary and Future Extinctions, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (Suppl. 1)
- Bhattacharya-Sahu, Nandini and Prabash Sahu: 2015: Artistry in the Rock Shelters of Gawilgarh Hills: Recent Discoveries”, in K. N. Dikshit (ed.) *Puratattva* No. 44, Indian Archaeological Society, New Delhi
- : 2017: Rock Art Treasures of the Satpuras: Recent Discoveries in the Gawilgarh Hills of Betul District, Madhya Pradesh (in) S. Pradhan and D. Gadnayak (eds.) *Rock Art in India*, B. R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi
- Manuel, J.: Depiction of Rhinoceros: Transition from Popular Art to State Sponsored Art, www.Rhinosourcecentre.com/pdf_files/121/1217001002.pdf accessed on 18-02-2019
- Mathpal, Yasodhar: 1984, Prehistoric Rock Paintings of Bhimbetka, Abhinav Publications, Delhi
- Neumayer, Erwin: 1983, Prehistoric Indian Rock Paintings, Oxford University Press, New Delhi
- Nielson, Ron W: The Late Pleistocene of Megafauna Compared with the Growth of Human Population, <https://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/1309/1309.3002.pdf> accessed on 18-02-2019
- Sahu, Prabash: 2013, Animals in the Chalcolithic Art of Central India, (in) R. K. Singh et.al. (eds) *Proceedings of the National Conference on Art and Architecture of Central India*, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Chhattisgarh, Raipur
- Singh, I. B: 2005a, Quaternary Palaeoenvironments of the Ganga Plain and Anthropogenic Activity, *Man and Environment* XXX, No.1, Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute, Pune
- : 2005b, Climate Change and Human History in the Ganga Plain during Late Pleistocene-Holocene, *Palaeobotanist* 54
- : 2016, Geoarchaeology of the Ganga Plain: Relationship between Geomorphic-Climate Change during Late Pleistocene- Holocene and History of Human Settlement. *Puratattva* 46, Indian Archaeological Society, New Delhi
- Wakankar, V. S.: 2005, Painted Rock Shelters of India, Directorate of Archaeology, Archives and Museums, Bhopal
- <https://www.britanica.com/animal/rhinoceros-mammal>, accessed on 18-02-2019



Rock Art

Archives of Our Ancestors



Rock Art

Archives of Our Ancestors

Celebrating Birth Centenary of
Dr. Vishnu Shridhar Wakankar

Editors

NIHARIKA
SACHIN KR. TIWARY



B.R. Publishing Corporation
Delhi-110 052

and



Arnava Shodh Sanstha
Varanasi

Published by:

B.R Publishing Corporation

425, Nimri Colony, Ashok Vihar, Phase-IV

Delhi-110 052

E-Mail : brpc73@gmail.com

First Published 2021

© Editors

ISBN 9789388789929

Printed at Balaji Offset, Delhi

Publisher's note:

All rights are reserved. No part of this publication can be reproduced, distributed, performed, publicly displayed, stored in a retrieval system, made into a derivative work, transmitted or utilized in any form or by any means; electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or any information storage system, without the prior written permission of the copyright holder(s), as indicated, and the publishers.

Jurisdiction:

Any conflict or dispute in relation to this publication shall be adjudged in accordance with the laws of India and the matter shall be subject to the jurisdiction of the Courts, Tribunals or any other Forums of New Delhi, India, only.

Disclaimer:

The views, facts, contents, any copyright material used and analysis arrived at in this publication are solely of the Author(s) who assert/s the right to be identified as Author(s); the Publisher does not take any responsibility for the same in any manner whatsoever.

Cataloging in Publication Data--DK

Courtesy: D.K. Agencies (P) Ltd. <docinfo@dkagencies.com>

Rock art archives of our ancestors : celebrating birth centenary
of Dr. Vishnu Shridhar Wakankar / editors, Niharika, Sachin
Kr. Tiwary.

pages cm

Contributed articles.

English and Hindi.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 9789388789929

1. Rock paintings--India. 2. Petroglyphs--India. 3. Art, Indic.
4. Wakankar, Vishnu Shridhar. I. Wakankar, Vishnu
Shridhar, honouree. II. Niharika, 1958- editor. III. Tiwary,
Sachin Kumar, 1985- editor. IV. Arnava Shodh Sanstha
(Vārānasi, Uttar Pradesh, India), publisher.

LCC GN799.P4R63 2021 | DDC 709.0113 23

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	xi
<i>Editorial</i>	xv
<i>Acknowledgment</i>	xxiii
<i>Contributors</i>	xxv
<i>List of Figures</i>	xxix
<i>List of Plates</i>	xxxii
<i>Photos</i>	xxxvii
Memories	
I. Dr. Vishnu Shridhar Wakankar: The <i>Pitamaha</i> /Grandfather of Indian Rock Art <i>Sachin Kr. Tiwary & Niharika</i>	lix
II My Elder Brother <i>Sau. Vaidehi Sowale</i>	lxv
III. मेरे अग्रज <i>सौ. वैदेही सोवले</i>	lxvii
IV. A Boituary on Padma Shri Dr. Vishnu Shridhar Wakankar (04.05.1919-03.04.1988) <i>Sidharth Yeswant Wakankar</i>	lxix
V. In Memoriam: Padma Shri Dr. Vishnu Shridhar Wakankar <i>T. P. Verma</i>	lxxiii
VI. पुरातत्त्व के महाप्राण डॉ. विष्णु श्रीधर वाकणकर <i>नारायण व्यास</i>	lxxv
VII. कला समग्र पुरातत्त्ववेत्ता डॉ. विष्णु श्रीधर वाकणकर <i>रेखा भटनागर</i>	lxxix

- VIII. मालवा के इतिहास पुरुष और देश के गौरव पद्मश्री विष्णु श्रीधर वाकणकर
भंवर लाल श्रीवास lxxxiii
- IX. Tribute to My Guru Padma Shri Late Vishnu Shridhar Wakankar (Haribhau);
Father of Indian Rock Art lxxxvii
Meenakshi Dubey Pathak
- X. डॉ. विष्णु श्रीधर वाकणकर और विरासत-वैविध्य lxxxix
श्रीकृष्ण 'जुगनू'
- XI. डॉ. विष्णु श्रीधर वाकणकर की इतिहास दृष्टि और शैलकला – xcix
अध्ययन के क्षेत्र में उनका योगदान
सीताराम दुबे

Papers

1. Indian Rock Art: Not Prehistoric 1
T. P. Verma
2. आद्यमानव युगीन भीमबैठका 21
नारायण व्यास
3. Rock Art in the Pachmarhi Area of Madhya Pradesh (India) and Its Preservation 41
Meenakshi Dubey-Pathak & Jean Clottes
4. Hunting Techniques as Discerned from Rock Paintings of Bhimbetka Group 47
of Rock-Shelters; District Raisen, Madhya Pradesh
J. Manuel
5. Mumba Rockshelter and Not Bhimbetka Rockshelter 53
Dhanpat Singh Dhania
6. Evidences of Repainted Animal Figures: Importance of Style in Rock Art Studies 61
Shaik Saleem
7. Petroglyphs on Lateritic Rock Formations from Kerala 65
Ajit Kumar
8. नव-अन्वेषित पाषाणिक उपकरणों के आधार पर शैलचित्रों का तिथि निर्धारण 73
(धरमजयगढ़ तहसील के विशेष संदर्भ में)
जाकिर खान एवं शुभ्रा रजक
9. Interpreting Visual Accessibility of the Maraiyur Rock Art: 85
Some Perspective from the Landscape Archaeology
Nihildas N.

10.	The Gawilgarh Hills Rock Shelters- <i>A Sui Generis</i> of Central India <i>Nandini Bhattacharya Sahu</i>	91
11.	An Attempt to Interpret Rock Art at Tatakoti; Bagalkot District, Karnataka <i>Mohana R.</i>	97
12.	Mesolithic Paintings and Prehistoric Site Around Akkampalli Village; Kurnool District, Andhra Pradesh <i>K. Ramakrishna Reddy</i>	103
13.	Study of Rock Art in Raisen District; Madhya Pradesh, India: Results of Recent Studies <i>Shaik Saleem</i>	107
14.	Discovery of Cupule Site at Dharmapura; District Chitradurga, Central Karnataka <i>Mohana R.</i>	117
15.	Newly Discovered Rock Paintings at Rainkhol Hill; District Korba, Chhattisgarh <i>Arun Raj T. & Atul Kumar Pradhan</i>	121
16.	शैलचित्रों की कहानी गुफाओं की जुबानी <i>ओम प्रकाश शर्मा 'कुक्की'</i>	125
17.	The Reclusive Rhinoceros in the Rock Art of India <i>Prabash Sahu</i>	129
18.	Lakhudiyar: A Rock-Art Site in Kumaon Hills, Uttarakhand <i>Niharika</i>	133
19.	Recently Explored Rock Art Sites from Kolare Pahari in Sonbhadra District, Uttar Pradesh <i>Swtantra Kumar Singh</i>	147
20.	Nataraja in the Rock Shelter of Bhimbetka <i>Vandana Khedikar</i>	163
21.	Indian Rock Art/Paintings and its Conservation <i>Vinay Kumar & Sulekha Banerjee</i>	167
	<i>Plates</i>	175

