

Rare Rock Art Site of Telangana: Historical Evidences and Developments

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Abstract

*The authors have surveyed the little known paintings of the **Rare Rock Art Site of Telangana** bringing to light the varied work of artists active from the Palaeolithic to the present day. By classifying the images and observing their local superposition and global parallels, they present us with an evolving trend – from the realistic drawings of large deer by hunter-gatherers, through the symbolic humans of the Iron Age to the hand-prints of more recent pilgrims and garish life-size modern ‘scarecrows’. Here are the foundations for one of the world’s longest sequences of rock art.*

Key words: Rare Rock Art Site of Telangana, Palaeolithic, richest cultural resources

Indian Rock Art:

The rock art is one of the richest cultural resources in the world, which depicts the earliest expressions of humankind. This prehistoric art perhaps comes to signify the underlying philosophies and the world-view of the ancient people, and tells us about the soul of a community, its thoughts, beliefs and emotions. It is associated with the cultural values, particularly in countries like India and Australia, where this art is a part of the living cultural heritage of its native population.

Fortunately, India has one of the world's six major Prehistoric rock art concentrations of stone age era, and is the first country in the world to discover the same (in 1867 A.D. at Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh). The other places of the globe are South-Western Europe, Russia, North Africa, South Africa and Australia. The term 'Rock Art' is generally used for all types of artistic activities found on rocks and is classified into two main forms; 'pictographs' and 'petroglyphs'. The pictographs refer to painted figures and are also termed as rock paintings and petroglyphs include engravings, carvings, brushing, dotting and cup marking. The pictographs are found on rock shelters, while petroglyphs are usually confined to open rocks and boulders.

On the basis of the study of style, superimpositions, theme, subject matter, patina, colour and context of the rock paintings, one can suggest a provisional and relative chronological sequence for Indian rock art until the paintings and other art forms can be dated directly. In the study of prehistoric rock art, it is essential to observe the stylistic features, superimpositions and colour of the paintings. The earliest paintings are often in a highly fragmented state and are covered with thick patina, in such conditions it is very difficult to study the subject matter in the rock paintings. Dating rock paintings is the most challenging part of the study of rock art research in India (as well as in other regions), but it is the most crucial aspect as well.

Some of the rock paintings were dated to the later Palaeolithic period and a few have been assigned to the Historical period. Though, questions have been raised about assigning the rock paintings of human figures (e.g. 'S'/stick/square shaped human figures of Mesolithic period were shown as equipped with bow and arrows and the human figures of Chalcolithic period were shown as equipped with bow and arrows or metal axes) to certain cultural periods on the basis of the theme and subject matter of the rock paintings (Boivin 2011) as the practice of depicting rock paintings has been followed by certain tribal communities (Rajan 1991b; Selvakumar 2011).

Importance in Indian rock art studies:

Another aspect which has to be given importance in Indian rock art studies is that the studies of rock art in terms of ethnographic studies about the tribal people who live in the vicinity of the rock art sites still practice painting various types of designs and those of the animals. The study about the living practice of drawing rock paintings at Mallachandiram in Tamil Nadu suggests that the living practice of drawing rock paintings at Mallachandiram (Rajan 1991b), Miapur in central India and in Hazari Bagh region in upper Damodar valley in Jharkhand (Bulu Imam 2014). Such kind of ethnographic studies will be helpful in terms of building up ethnographic analogies. But such kind of ethnographic studies are helpful to understand the purpose of the rock paintings (in present day context), but it has to be observed carefully that what kind of paintings/motifs, symbols, animals etc are being drawn and it is evenly important to observe who is drawing the paintings and their purpose as well as meaning.

Rock art is a form of landscape art, which is found only in certain regions of India. Rock Art includes age-old designs placed on boulders and cliff faces, along with cave walls as well as ceilings, ground surface of rocks etc.

Different Forms of Rock Art:

The rock artworks are further divided into three forms namely pictographs (painted on the surface), petroglyphs (carved into the rock surface), and earth figures (engraved into ground). The study of the unique rock art sites offers good insights into our history, right from the pre-historic ages.

Rock paintings found in Telangana depicts the love humans had for art and nature, in a period as early as 10,000 BC. The paintings have also revealed a plethora of wild animals that had existed all over the region then.

There have been more than 50 rock art sites, right from upper Paleolithic age, about 40,000 years ago, to Megalithic period (about 4,200 years ago), identified in Telangana, which makes the region a treasure trove of ancient rock arts.

Pandavula Gutta

Warangal district in Telangana is home to many Prehistoric habitation sites. Paleolithic Rock art paintings have been found at Pandavula gutta (Regonda mandal) and Narsapur (Tadvai mandal) in the district. A stunning rock painting at Pandavulagutta in Warangal district, depicted a Giraffe, which is considered surprising, since giraffes are found only in Africa now.

These paintings offer a rare glimpse into the prehistoric man's rock art identified on walls and ceilings of caves, rock shelters and isolated boulders. The rock art paintings depict wild life like bison, antelope, elephant, tiger, crocodile, leopard, horse, scorpion, crab, fishes, porcupine, insects, tortoise, lizard, langur, vultures, eagle, crane, peacock and butterfly.

Other shapes like swastika symbol, circles and squares, icons for hut, fence, sun and honey combs, and weapons such as bows, arrows, sword and lancer are also present in these paintings. Pandavulakonda (Pandavulagutta) site was first discovered in the year 1990 by archaeologists Ramakrishna Rao and S. S. Rangacharyulu of the Department of Archaeology and Museums.

The paintings also feature geometrical designs and impressions in green, red, yellow and white pigment colours. Besides these rock paintings, inscriptions of Rastrakuta times and fresco paintings of late medieval period have also been reported from these hillocks. Some of the paintings were superimposed, depicting highly developed anatomical features and curves.

A book called "Rock Art Sites in Telangana" was, jointly published by the Departments of Tourism and Archaeology and Museums, in year 2015. Among the sites mentioned in this book, the Pandavulagutta is rich in terms of number of paintings, rock shelters and its habitation, right from the Mesolithic to medieval times.

The rock art site investigations:

The rock art site investigations have been carried out in February and December 2008, these confirm that the shelters are composed of grey granites (Medak, Mahabubnagar and Anantapur districts), leuco- granite (Warangal district), garnetiferous quartzofeldspathic rock (Khammam district) and quartzite's (Kadapa and Kurnool districts).

In these locations, both pictograph and petroglyph art sites are observed, but majority of the shelters show pictograph art. The conservation status of pictograph art reached to various degrees of deterioration from fair to SSD in the sites of Khammam, Warangal, Medak, Mahabubnagar and Anantapur districts, while it is SSD to DOD in Kadapa and Kurnool districts. The causative factor for the deterioration is the rain water leaching and superimposes of Fe-Mg oxide solution coatings over the painting panels. This process is controlled by the presence of structural elements (joints and fractures), which allows the percolation of rain water in the rock shelters of the investigated regions.

The comparison of weathering rates, ages of panels and disposition of colour stains, gave a conclusion that the light colour (natural kaolin) base developed due to the alteration of feldspars in to kaolin and coated on the surface of panels prior to art making in the sites of grey granites. The coloured bands (red, light yellow etc.) formed due to chemical decomposition of accessory minerals under oxidizing conditions, superimposed over panel surfaces of quartzite's later to the paintings.

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