



Distributional of Rock art sites in Sonbhadra District, Uttar Pradesh, India

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Introduction

In the present work, it has been attempted to make a systematic study of rock art distribution patterns in the Sonbhadra district based on the recent field exploration, scientific documentation, and analysis of artifacts related to rock art found in the course of exploration of the region. As an output of explorations, the author visited and documented 140 painted rock shelters in this region. Out of them, only 125 painted rock shelters are located in the present political boundary of the Sonbhadra district and some of the shelters are located on the boundary of Sonbhadra. This distribution pattern is based on the important features of painted rock art shelters such as their location, subject, style, theme, utilized raw material, and other aspects of rock art sites. Plotting all the 125 painted rock shelters on the map and taking Robertsganj (Panchmukhi group of Shelters) as our core zone and total rock shelters are covered in 30 concentric circles. The annulus (the area between two concentric circles) of these concentric circles is 1 Km. Except few (Mukha Dari, Kohbarwa Ghat, and Railahawa) all the explored sites are located in these annuluses (Fig. 1). This methodological analysis indicates that locations of rock art sites are directly relative to the natural and cultural environment and it is concerning the macro-landscape. The probable association could be an example, water (water-falls, rivers running next to the rock art sites, spring, Nala, etc.), formation of natural rock shelters, variance topographic landscapes, form and shape of the rock outcrop (vertical cliff, bolder, hanging, table, rock slope, etc.), favorable location (hunters or agricultural or environment) highlands, central places in the landscape, other contemporary archaeological remains (stone tools, settlements, etc.), inter-visibility between different sites, audiovisual, landmarks, communication, rock colour, ritual places or several others aspect in this paper.

Painted rock shelter in Sonbhadra district implemented by the early inhabitants. These pictograms are archaeological records for understanding their daily life. These paintings carry a range of meanings and become an important source of information when they are related to a specific context. This research paper is a very pilot attempt at the spatial distributions of painted shelters and motifs in the Sonbhadra district. It helps us to generate approaches for viewing paintings as partial records of prehistoric settlements. This paper focused to obtain a comprehensive or representative sample of regional site distributions and an understanding of the relationship between sites as places selectively occupied by Prehistoric groups.

Study area

Sonbhadra district was carved out from the erstwhile Mirzapur district in 1989. Geographically and culturally, it is a part of the Mirzapur district (Drake-Brockman, 1991). Sonbhadra has a geographical area of 6788 sq. km. It is the second-largest district of Uttar Pradesh. It lies in the extreme south-east of the state, between the Latitudes 23° 51' 54" N to 24° 46' 18" N and Longitudes 82° 40' 24" E to 83° 33' 15" E. Bound by Mirzapur district to the north-

west, Chandauli district to the north, Kaimur and Rohtas districts of Bihar to the north-east, Garhwa district of Jharkhand state to the east, Korea and Surguja districts of Chhattisgarh state to the south, and Singrauli district of Madhya Pradesh to the west. For administrative purposes, it is divided into four Tehsils, eight blocks, and 501 Gram Panchayat in the district.

Previous work in the Sonbhadra district

Archaeological investigations were initiated in this area by J. Cockburn in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He discovered a few painted rock shelters containing several scenes of hunting, dance, and other activities of human life (Cockburn, 1883: 56-64; 1899: 89-97). Later on, several researchers contributed to the cause throughout the twentieth century. It begins with the exploratory work of Rai Sahib Manoranjan Ghosh (Ghosh 1932: 15-20), followed by the teams of archaeologists of the Allahabad University, Banaras Hindu University, and the U.P. State Archaeology (Sharma et al. IAR 1956-57: 11 and 14; Sharma: 1980; Sharma, et al. 1983, Varma IAR 1959-60: 48; Pandeya IAR 1960-61: 67; Sharma et al. IAR 1962-63: 31-32; Narain and Pant IAR 1962-63: 33-34; Sharma et al. IAR 1963-64: 39 and 51-52; Narain and Pant 1964-65: 116-135; Sharma et al. IAR 1969-70: 35-38; Singh et al. IAR 1975-76: 56, 1977-78: 58, 1978-79: 24, 1979-80: 79; Gupta 1967; Jayaswal 1983: 127-133, Varma 1964, 1986: 206-213, 2012; Kesari, 1982, 1984; Pratap 2015; Chattopadhyay 2016: 251-270). During the last quarter of the twentieth century, explorations were undertaken by Rakesh Tewari (Tewari 1982, 1982a: 1-16, 1985, 1986: 105-112, 1986a: 25-29, 1987: 77-88, 1989: 94-106, 1990, 1992: 284-302, 2010; Tewari and Pandey 1988: 97-102; Tewari and Singh 2001: 91-104; Tewari and Singh 2002: 91-96; Tewari et al. 1995: 55-131). Later on, Vibha Tripathi and Prabhakar Upadhyay of Banaras Hindu University again explored this area to trace the antiquity of iron from the archaeological point of view.

Distribution of rock art cluster: based on their location and distance from each other's

We marked all 125 sites on the map and by taking Robertsganj (Panchmukhi Shelters) as our core center author plotted 30 concentric circles. The annulus (the region between two concentric circles of the different radii) of these concentric circles is 1 Km. except few (Mukha Dari, Kohbarwa Ghat, and Railahawa) all the explored sites are located in this area (Fig.1). This map indicates the location of rock art relative to the natural and cultural environment why painted rock shelters are located where it is concerning the macro-landscape (Fig.2).

This map (Fig.1) shows that the maximum painted rock shelters are located towards the west, south, and southeast of Robertsganj. In a few localities number of painted rock shelter construction is much higher. There are a total of seven groups or clusters are marked. Within the cluster, the number of painted rock shelters can vary. There is a clear-cut gap among these clusters. Probably prehistoric people occupied a particular area



Table 1. Name of painted rock shelters in the different clusters.

Distribution of rock art of Sonbhadra area (based on our exploration)						
CL-1	CL-2	CL-3	CL-4	CL-5	CL-6	CL-7
Subgroup's						
Panchmukhi Chanain Maan Kanda Kot Jharia Bashi Ghat Sorho Ghat Bajarahi Pahari Jhandi Pahari Likhaniya (Raja Ka Baithaka)	Kairi Pahar ChatmaPahar Sitaji ki Kohbar Do Muha Pahari Bhalui Pahari Medawar	Domakhri Parwania	Railahawa Kohabarwa Ghat II	Mukha Dari (Mukhafall)	Kerwa ghat Poknahwāghat KhodwaPahar (Matahwa) Lakhma Pahar Hathbanwa (Hathwani) Kanach Tar (Gochrā) Baghama Chattra Maan Kauva Khoh JhandhPahari LalkDari (Hathi Ghorā)	Maukhurd Ramana HarnaHarni Ghomanwa Dharma Dharam Daspru

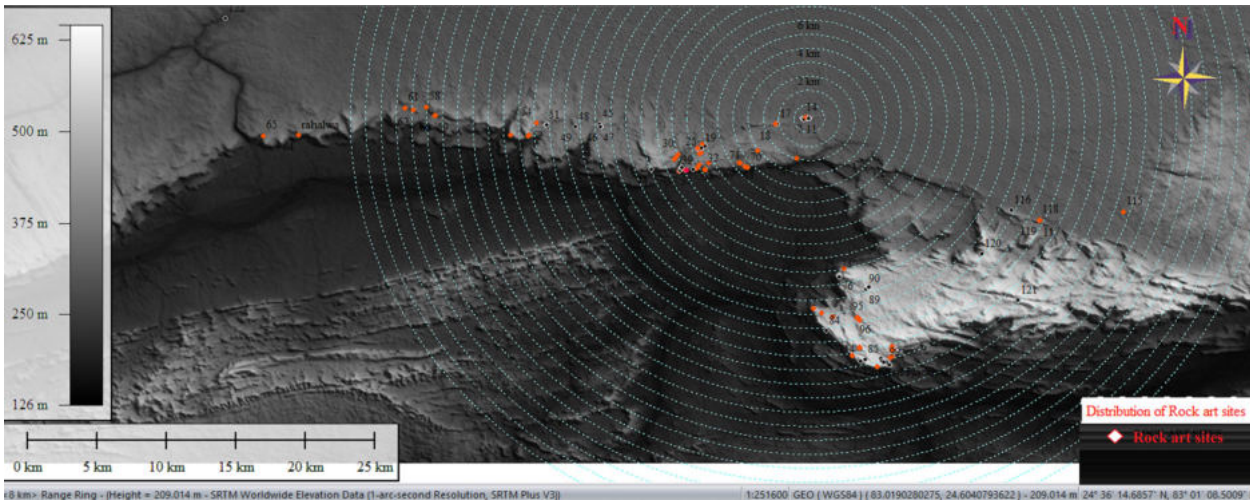


Figure 1. Showing the distribution of rock art in the study area.

in the group and marked their territory to avoid conflict with other groups. The subject of the paintings (some aquatic motifs are only found in a small area), their style, subject, and techniques are also supported the regional distributions hypothesis. This distribution pattern is based on the geographical landscape of all painted rock art sites. These seven clusters are further divided into sub-clusters for understanding the distribution on a micro level with their relationship to other archaeological remains (Table: 1, Fig.2).

Distribution of rock art sites in the different clusters

Cluster 1: Under cluster one, there are seven sub-cluster that can divide based on their location, subject, and other archaeological remains. In the Panchmukhi group, there are more than 17 painted rock shelters are

documented. In this sub-cluster rock art sites are follow the hill edges and all the early paintings are located on the north-eastern part of the hill, in shelters 1,2,5,6, and others. There are only a few stone tools found near shelters 1 and 13. Except for shelter numbers 2, 6, 8, and 13 none of the other's shelters is ideal for habitation. In other shelters, only a few person people can stand at a time. There are several others remains of the temple that belongs to the early medieval period located on the top of the hill. There are some Brahma and Sankha Lippi inscriptions are also found. Shelters number 6, 9, 13, 14, and 15 are mostly have Sankha Lippi inscriptions, and decorative alpana motifs are depicted. Some microliths tools deposits are also found inside and near the shelters. Rhino and others some early paintings are with tools and others archaeological remains are evidence of earliest settlement probably belong to Mesolithic. This locality

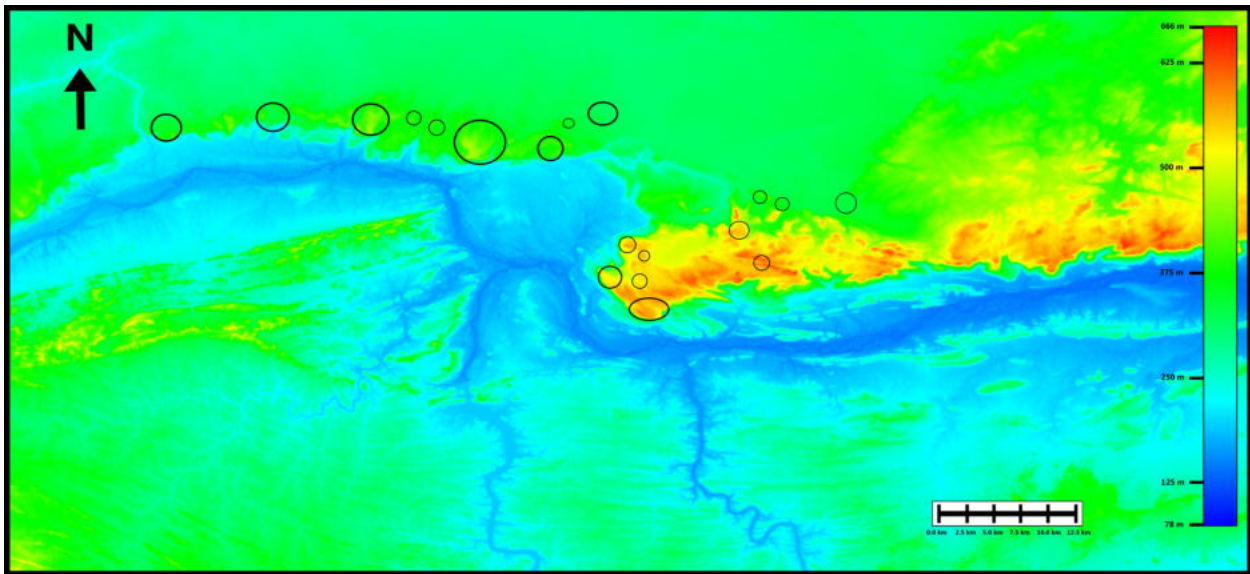


Figure 2. Showing the distribution Subcluster landscape of rock art in the study area.

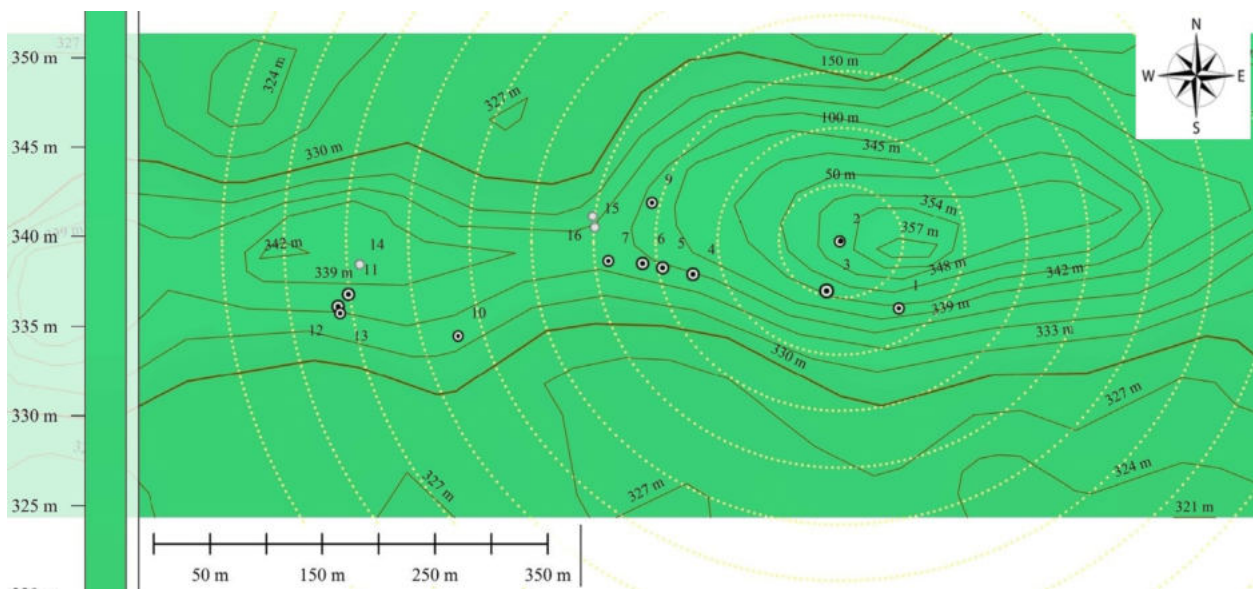


Figure 3. Distribution of painted rock shelters of Panchmukhi group Subcluster of cluster 1. The dotted line represents the 50m distance from the painted rock shelter 2 (Near the temple).

becomes a center of religious activity in the early historical period and was never pull-down (Fig.3). But after the Mesolithic, human population habitation sifted from a hilly area to flat fertile areas.

The second subcluster noticeis near the District Magistrate office locally known as Chanain Maan. It is a very large and multi-storage type shelter. Huge numbers of stone tools (more than a thousand tools and ideal for excavation in the future) are found in the front of the shelter. Probably this locality is the main habitation center of the Upper Paleolithic (Representing tools from Upper Palaeolithicare found) and Mesolithic population. Towards the South of Chanain Maan number of painted shelters is found. This locality is comparably a flat area located on the top of the hill locally known as Kanda Kot and Bahuar. This locality is not only important for a large number of painted shelters but also for Middle Palaeolithic

tools reported (IAR 1956-57: 13-14) by Prof. G. R. Sharma. This locality has some different patterns of rock art sites. Maxim's earliest settlements (painted shelters with stone tools deposits) are found on the foothill. Early historical motifs such as horses, elephant riders, war scenes, and other decorated motifs are found on the top edge of the hill. The word "Kot" itself represents a locality having fortification. Similar evidence was found during our recent exploration. Archaeological remains of fortification (mostly damaged) and a temple of early historical periods still can easily see on this hill. A similar suggestion from local folklore regarding the uncompleted fort on this hilltop is very popular. Towards the south of Kanda Kot, near the river Son, there are several small sizes painted rock shelters located on a cliff area known as Jhari having some earliest paintings of this region. This locality is also related to Kanda Kot legends. From



Jharia, Raja Ki Baithaka painted rock shelter is located towards the north-west and in between these two, there are some other very small shelters with few paintings and clusters of tools (Upper Palaeolithic to Mesolithic) are also found. Likhaniya locality is also known as Raja ki Baithaka (seating place of a king). This is the largest shelter in size and number of painted motifs in this locality. This shelter comprises paintings belonging from the Mesolithic to the Historical period (Fig. 4). This location is ideal for

habitation and hunting. From this shelter, early hunters easily command a bird's view of the area.

Cluster 2: Cluster two is located 5km North-west of Likhaniya (Raja ka Baithaka). In this group, more than 10 painted rock shelters are located within an 8 km radius (Fig. 5). This cluster is further divided into two groups. The first subcluster is a collective of Kairi Pahari and Sita Ji Ki Khobar. Illustrations of Sita Ji ki Khobar and Kairi Pathari are skillful representatives of early historical paintings.

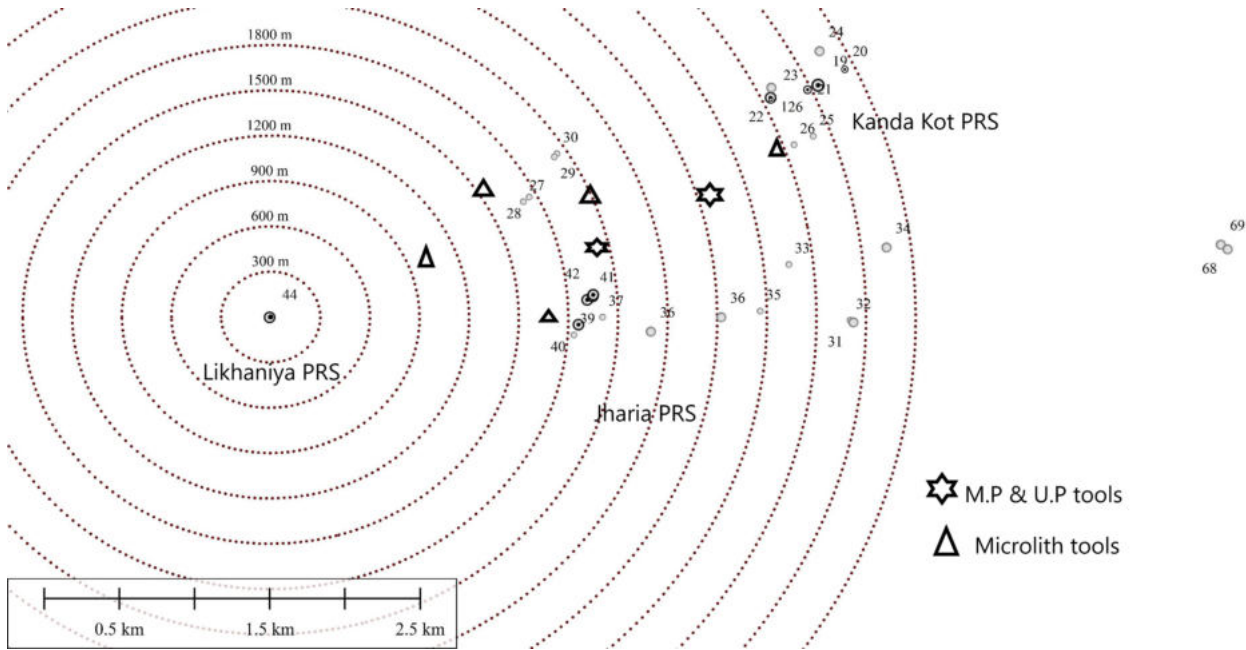


Figure 4. Distribution of painted rock shelters and other stone age sites in cluster 1., dotted line representing the 300m distance from the Likhaniya (Raja Ki Baithaka).

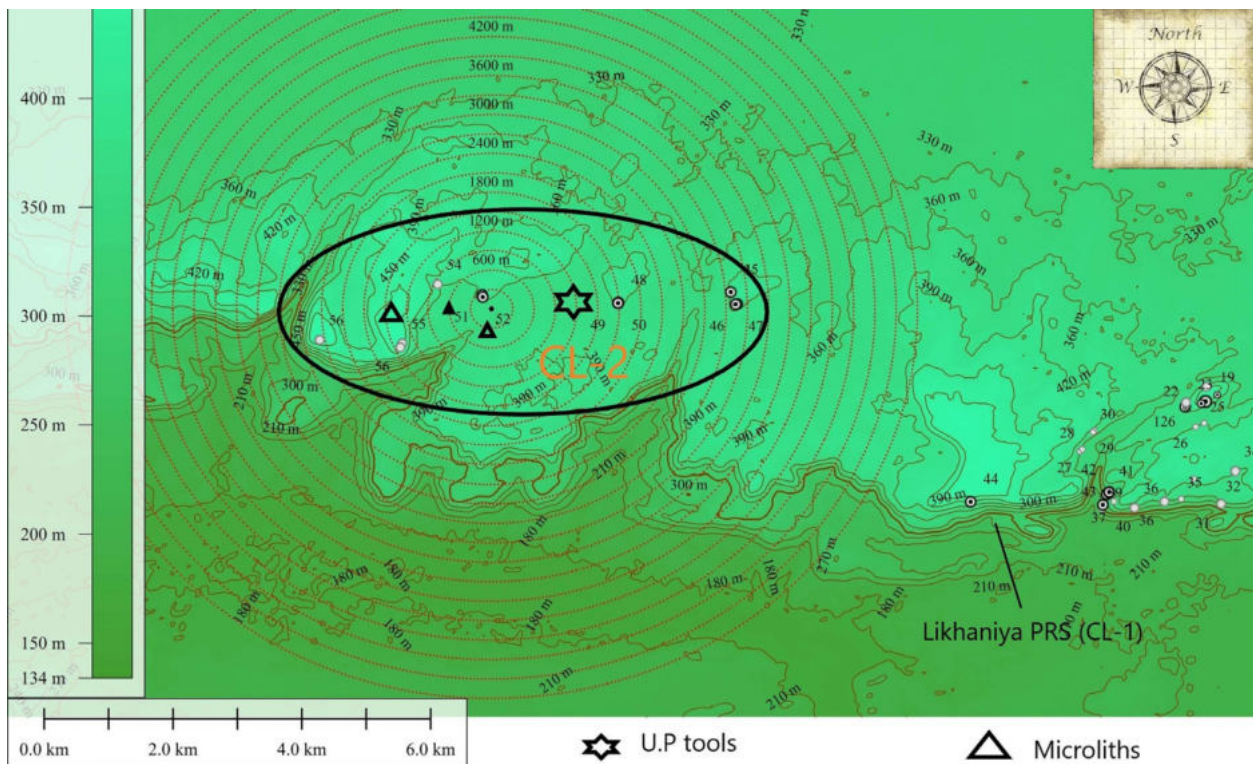


Figure 5. Map showing the distribution pattern of cluster 2 and their relationship (distance) from cluster 1.

The main theme of Sita Ji ki Kohbar is associated with elephant riders, camel riders, decorated Alpana motifs, geomaterial body shapes of humans, peacocks, warriors, and others. This shelter is also related to the folklore of Sita's marriage. In July local villagers conduct a fair festival near the shelter. Approx. 400 m South-west of this shelter there are some Upper Paleolithic tools also reported (Swantra 2021). Kairi Pahari's group of painted shelters subjects is slightly different from other paintings of contemporary painted shelters. There are more than 19 painted hand motifs in positive technique depicted in different parts of the shelter. It looks that possibly; the handprint belongs to the early historic period. All the painted hand motifs are very sharp edges that are the appearance of retouching work. On the other hand, painted motifs from Do Muha Pahar and Mathwa shelter are early in comparison to this group. Bhauli Pahari paintings are generally collective of both early and later periods.

Clusters 3, 4, and 5: Cluster 3 is located 8-10 km west (Ariel distance) from cluster 2. There are numerous microlithic and other stone tools instituted near the shelters but few smaller early paintings are found. War scenes and horse riders are the main subjects of the paintings (Fig.5). Cluster 4 is located near the Upper Palaeolithic and Middle Palaeolithic boundary and has some early paintings with few deposits in the shelters. On the other hand, Cluster 5 Mukha Dari is a big shelter and a large area of paintings belonging to the early Mesolithic to the early historical period (Fig.6). There are several Microlithic including core, flake, and blade are found from the different localities but no other painted shelters are found in our exploration. There is a possibility that in the future more painted rock shelter sites will be found in this locality. (Fig.1).

Cluster 6 & 7: Cluster 6 is located southeast of Robertsganj and it is the most important area to

understand the nature of rock art. This locality has the largest and most painted rock shelters located in this cluster. Maxim shelters are facing south or southwest towards river Son. Maxim painted rock shelters are located on the cliff area. The most important motifs of the cluster are aquatic motifs. Some infrequent representation of fishing, Boat, and tortoise hunting is only found in this locality. Not only do large painted shelters represent the earliest stage of paintings in this locality but also some war motifs related to folklore Lorik also painted. Maxim numbers of painted rock shelters are reported from this cluster. Cluster 7 is located near the Vijaygarh fort locality. There are several other important painted rock shelters located in this region such Mau-Kala, Ramna, Maan-Moon, Ghora-Manager, Bhutahiya, and others but the present study is limited to a few shelters only (Fig.7).

Conclusion

Early Palaeolithic and Middle Palaeolithic artifacts are limited to the river Son valley, the Southern part of the district in the Singrauli basin, and the Dudhi area. No habitation sites, related to the aforesaid phases, are known from the out of this area. It is to be noted that the sites of the Upper Palaeolithic periods are reported not only from the Son valley but extend over the Kaimur hills also. In the Upper Palaeolithic period, the human population starts expanding in the hill area of the Kaimur ranges and utilized naturally formed rock shelters for many purposes.

The location of these painted rock shelters near the perennial water bodies makes them of utmost importance from the strategic point of view as the inhabitants of these shelters could easily get water and aquatic food and games (small animals and bird). Some of these shelters might have been used in the Mesolithic period or even earlier periods as suggested by stone tools found in this



Figure 6. Painted rock panel of Mukha Dari representing the different time phases of painting in Sonbhadra District.

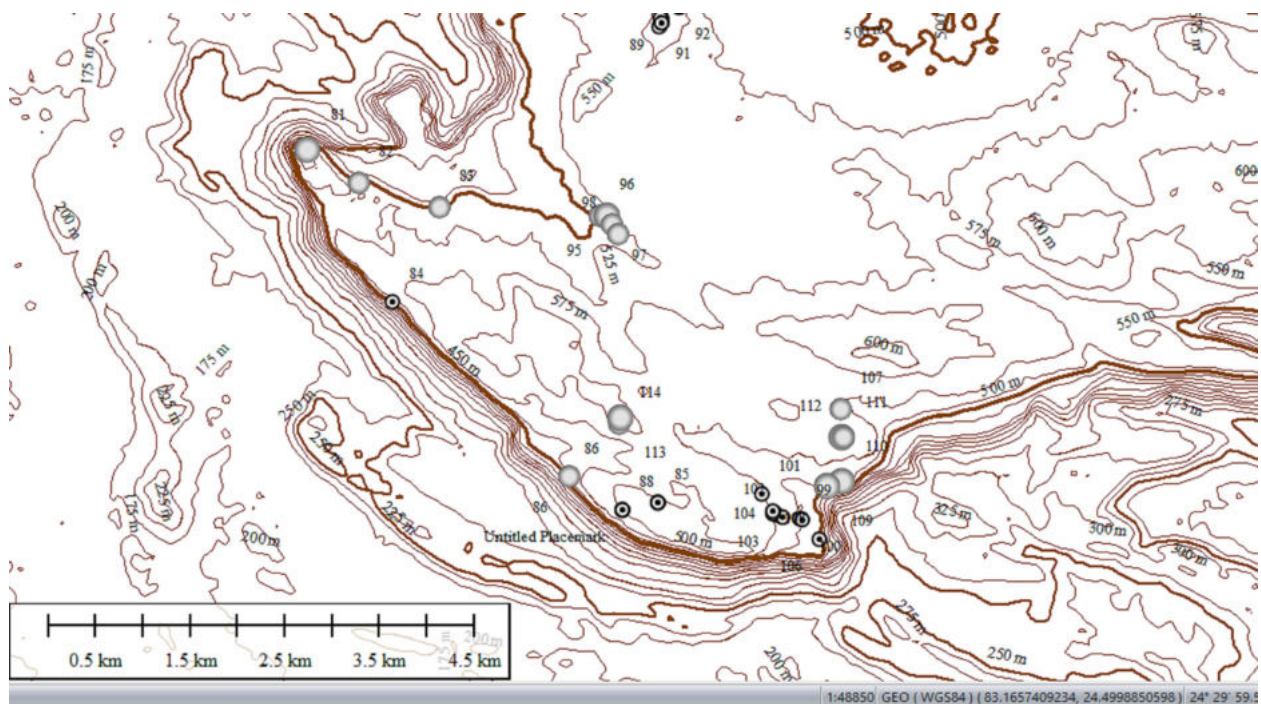


Figure 7. Distribution of painted rock shelter in clusters 6 and 7 and their distance from.

region. However, no surviving painting can be attributed earlier to the Mesolithic period. There are many reported natural rock shelters suitable for habitation, availability of a perennial source of water in the form of deep Kundas, water-falls, deep nalas, and tributaries of rivers Son and Karmnasa. Generally, the painted rock shelters are located at a proper height that provides a bird view of the area.

In our exploratory works in the Sonbhadra region for documentation of rock art sites in the last five years, the author found a good number of the shelters; both painted and unpainted, having evidence of occupational deposits. Large numbers of blade bladelets industries of the Upper Palaeolithic period and stone chips, microliths, and fluted core along with raw materials were found in the shelters. This establishes human activity in the rock shelters right from the Mesolithic period.

Generally, maximum numbers of painted rock shelters are located at a proper height of the hilly area help to oversee a large area and are probably used for visual communication. All the shelters were not occupied for habitation. Some of them might have been used as watching places just like watchtowers of the later period. Locating at the upper places of the hill, small rock shelters could give them the advantage to secure the area. It was also useful for trapping the migrating herds of animals for hunting. The author observed that most of the paintings of this region belong to early rock art with plenty of examples, and in many layers, might be more than 50%. However, most of it is in the form of traces only an author could not make out any sensible form from them.

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El Dr. Vishnu Shridhar Wakankar en sus labores de observación y registro de quilcas en la India.