

Some Preliminary observations on Ambapani rock art site, Chhatarpur district, Madhya Pradesh, India

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Abstract: Rock art reveals great potentialities for progressive historical cultural studies from the prehistoric times to present times. In the present work, it has been attempted to make a systematic study of Ambapani rock art based on the field exploration, scientific documentation and analysis of artefacts. All these details are especially helpful to understand the extent to which it has decided the archaeological and historical framework of the region. Ambapani is a rich rock art site in the Kishangarh region of Chhatarpur district, located on a mountain cliff near Patori village. The figures painted on the shelters are ranging from Prehistoric to Historical period. A brief discussion of this art heritage will provide a rich tradition of ancient human activities in this area.

Introduction

The Ambapani rock art site lies in the south-eastern portion and about five kilometer from the Patori village, which is part of Bijawar sub-division of Chhatarpur district (Fig. 1). The rock art site was reported for the first time in 2010 with descriptions of the findings¹, but after that there was no detail discussion on this site. In recent years a number of rock art sites were reported from this locality², so there is a need of study of the rock shelter and understand its cultural pattern, nature, colour composition etc., and reconstruction the cultural activities of this region, which were narrated through different colour composition.

In regard to physical settings the Ambapani site lies south-east of Bijawar Sub-division in the Chhatarpur

district, is an extensive part covered with Kishangarh range of Bijawar reserved forest area. This is a dry deciduous mix jungle with small seasonal water channel, deep cutting narrow valleys, which has played a vital role for diverse eco-system as well as ethnic people for their subsistence and extract natural resource³. The long narrow cliff added valley along with water body has attracted people of different period as well as wild animals for their shelter and for subsistence. These are the basic co-relation between the human-nature relationships which are transformed to develop different cultural practices and possible the pictographic, by the rock art author of those days.

They recorded some of their important activities on in different colour, size and methods available proper to the rock surface in the areas. The site is closely located on the perineal water source of river Ken or Karnavati besides a small perennial water source locally known as Burhani nalla. The water body of Karnavati bisect the

¹ Gupta, Ravi 2010. KishangarhKeSameepAmmPaniPahariMe mile DurlabhShelChitra. *Bharat Kesari*, 27 November, Saturday 2010. Online at: http://www.bharatkesari.com/showarticle.aspx?p=unique_pictures_found_in_amma_pani_pahadi_news_kishangad. (Hindi).

² Tiwari S.K, 2000. *Riddles of India rock shelter painting*, Sarup and sons. New Delhi, p. 62.

³ Laurad, C.E. 1907. *The central India state Gazetteer series, eastern states*, (Bundelkhand) Gazetteer, Vol- VI-A-text, Lucknow (1995 reprint).

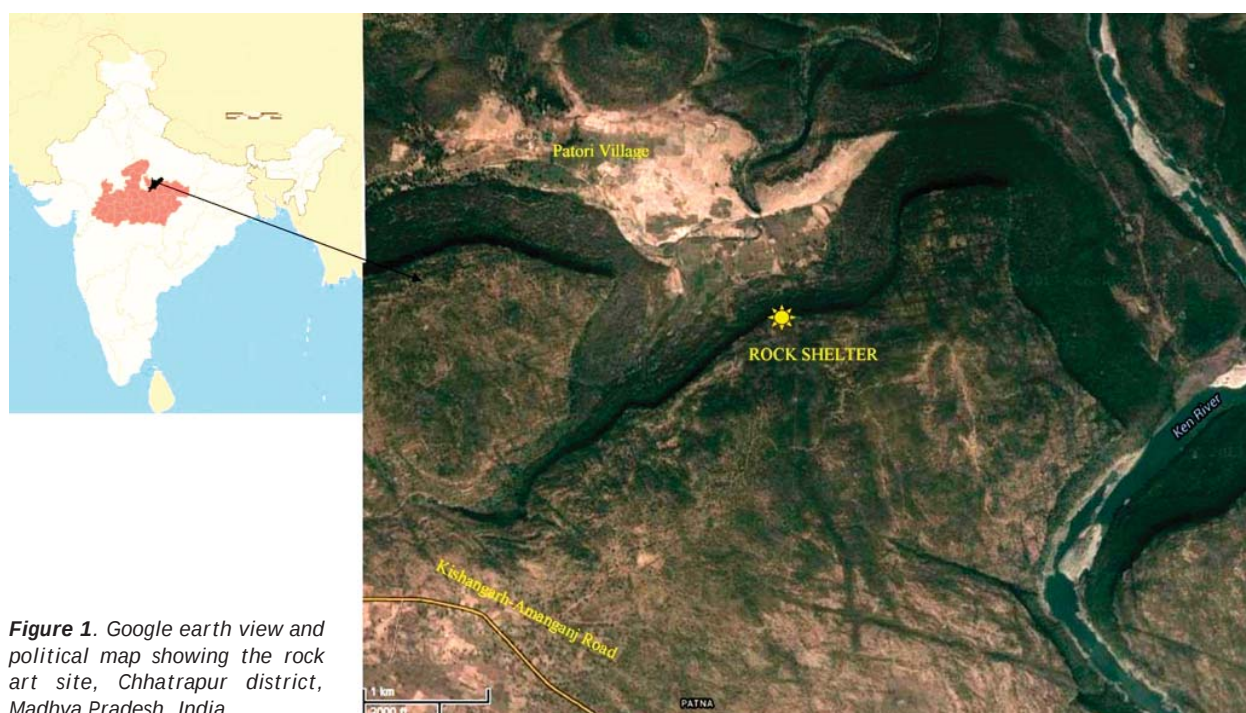


Figure 1. Google earth view and political map showing the rock art site, Chhatrapur district, Madhya Pradesh, India.



Panna Tiger Reserve Forest, which is also acted district boundary for chhatarpur and Panna. However the present site is fall under Kisangarh range of Bijawar region of Chhatarpur district. It is also noticed that this area has possess a number of rock art sites such as Ghongra, Manosaya, Hatnitod etc.

Populations as the Gond, Kondars and Sond are a well documented aboriginal groups living in this region along with Hindu caste people, exploiting several natural resources since long past. Extensively the Gond oral traditions claim that they inhabited in this part and centralised in the Gondwana territory for several thousand years. There are several historical documents; archaeological entities including hero stones of the ethnic group support their stronghold in the region. This area has one of the concentration zone of Bundelkhand rock art histories which are mainly located at Bijawar's forest zone. The ethnic unit Gond are primitive in nature and still practice traditional way of life in many ways but the Sond are sub type of main Gond tribe and adopted some modern cultural aspects. The other ethnic group, the Kondars, has a separate cultural identity with different cultural practices.

The rock art

To reach the site one has to follow Bijawar-Amanganj metallic road via Kisangarh upto Bihor bara village then turn left towards the Panna Tiger reserve forest (KN-5 Tower), it is just out skit of the boundary of the Tiger reserve project and located on a cliff of Kisangarh extension of the mountains ranges. The present site is also approachable from the Patori village which is located north-west direction at the distance of four kilometres approximately, but it needs a steep climbing the cliff. Just below to the small shelter there is a perennial

water source still used by the local villagers during summer. This could be suggested that the primitive/ancient people have knowledge of water bodies because of that they used the settlements close to it with other security measures. The site is popularly known as Ambapani because of the perennial water source. The rock shelter of the site is formed of sandstone, mostly yellowish-buff colour.

The Burhana nalla is a seasonal streamlet running left and at about two kilometres north to the painted rock shelter. The natural rock shelter is full of rock painting related to animals, human activities and abstract motifs. The pictographs are depicted in cluster form to narrate a story or theme. It is noticed that the animals' pictographs are not related to hunting purpose and quite natural in execution. The shelter is quite big and easy approachable from upper side. Its floor surface is damaged so it is difficult to trace any antiquity or ancient deposits. The shelter is roughly 'C' shaped and paintings are concentrated on selected surface of wall and over hanging projection of the ceilings (Fig. 2). Presently the shelter has four major concentration of pictographs executed besides other sporadic representation of lone images. The depictions of group pictographs are basically thematic in nature whereas the single representation are non-thematic and contribute different rare species.

The subject matter of the rock art of Ambapani is quite varied. It contains not only human figures but also animals, birds, trees as well as geometrical and floral patterns in different forms. Most of the illustrations in the pictographs are in different shades of ochre, which was presumably prepared by utilizing the hematite nodules. Almost all these rock art have executed on the smooth surfaces of the inner walls and ceilings of the rock shelters and caves. Because of this, the present authors found not only in the prehistoric period but also in the historical period imitation of the earlier pictographs on rock continued



Figure 2. General view of the Ambapani rock art shelter.

for centuries together. In many examples, it is noticed that the paintings of the earlier period are superimposed by the subsequent paintings due to which sometimes it is very difficult to identify the paintings of a particular phase. The discovery of rock paintings depicting pre-historical lifestyle has not only added a new dimension to Indian history but have also clearly lead to the conclusion that indigenous culture all over the world is uniform.

Every shelters are commonly located close or very near to the water sources. Not surprisingly, these shelters by virtue of their strategic locations attracted the nomads who chanced to discover them in the course of their hunting and gathering excursions. In the course of their stay, they left behind the traces in the form of artefacts and other objects lying embedded in the floor deposits and their signatures in the form of pictographs and petroglyphs on the walls and ceiling of the rock shelters.

The pictographs executed on the rock surface generally have horizontal or vertical compositions oriented towards left, right or top. Drawing of triangles, squares and undeciphered symbols like cross in double branded circle and cross in a square are ingenious for paintings from other known caves. Some X-Ray style figures of animals are also depicted. Some geometrical and floral patterns have been depicted.

The human figures depicted in both the spots, some of them individually but mostly in groups, are in different actions as running, walking carrying some load or holding some weapons, stick, animal and sometime indistinct objects in hand, dancing etc. Most of the human figures are stick like whereas some other has full limbs eyes, ears, nose, etc., that are not clearly visible. In the north side of the shelter front many human with headgear long hair have painted in dark red colour.

The theme

The Ambapani shelter is rest with high cliff and has a long projected high over hanging roof, rough wall along with few shaped and smooth surface wall, wide opening towards north direction. The paintings are

mainly located on the curve wall surface and there are four concentration depiction showing animals, human activities, geometric and abstract figures. The shelter is about 15.00 meter long in east-west direction and 8.00 meter high from the present floor level.

In clusters the placements of the pictographs are constituted by a majority of warfare scene (Figs. 3-8). The warfare scenes basically focus on cavalry along with spears, swords and shield. In activities of war, scene depicted a warrior shooting arrow towards his enemy who most probably fell down from his horse because the horse also wounded by an arrow piercing near neck, and back to it another horse and horse rider forcefully coming (See Fig. 3). In another similar theme projected close, a different colour composition represents a warrior seated on a long necked horse is fighting with surrounded infantry who fought with swords, shields and bow and arrow. The warriors are represented in rectangular as well as bi-triangular form body with colour fill and other slanting stroke decoration on body (see Fig. 4). Few partially deteriorated pictographs of horse rider and infantry warrior are noticed in rough surface at further left to the previous clusters (Fig. 5).

In another cluster, quite similar type paintings exist but here the horse body is much decorated through criss-cross and slanting line. The outer line of the horse has been drawn in thick broad line and its tail is represented through a bunch of wavy line, and the neck hair is decorated in small slanting strokes in series. But, in comparisons to the body, the legs are small, the neck is too long, head is small in nature. It is quite impressive that the horse is in motion depicted through the front legs are bent, and the horse rider depicted through two spear type weapons in his right hands and rein in his left hand whereas in his waste is represented with a sword. Body of the horse rider is roughly rectangular type. Besides that these, the cluster represent with a number of warrior along with different animals identified as deer, chital, ant-eater, bison etc. (Fig. 6).

Another cluster represent two horses, horse rider along with seven warrior and one bird like image just below to the horse. It is rare pictograph, in which the left hose rider has represented beheaded (Fig. 7) and the head is depicted little away in-between the body and neck of the horse, another man walking in front to the horse and holding the rein. Body of the horses are decorated vertical and horizontal broad division and filled

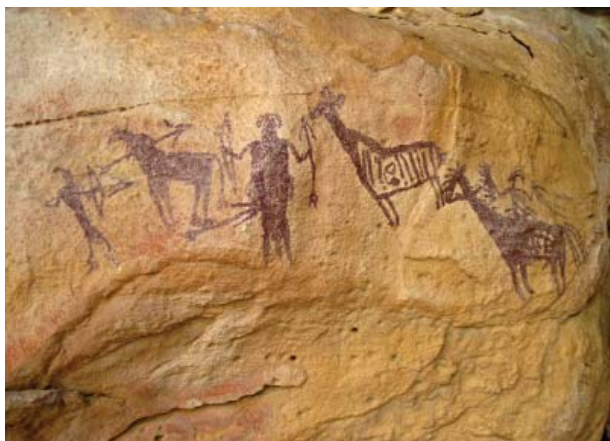


Figure 3. Close-up view representing warfare scene on rock shelter.



Figure 4. Representation of horse rider and other warfare.

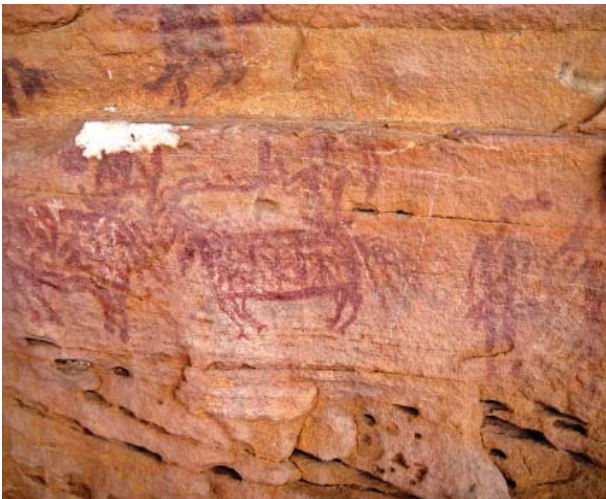


Figure 5. Warfare pictograph on wall surface and human vandalism means of chipped out on rock shelter.



Figure 6. Warfare activities in brown pigment, Ambapani rock shelter.



Figure 7. Warfare painting showing headless horse rider on brown pigments, Ambapani rock shelter.



Figure 8. Warriors in war dress and weapons. Deliberately chipped out of in few areas by local villagers, Ambapani rock shelter.

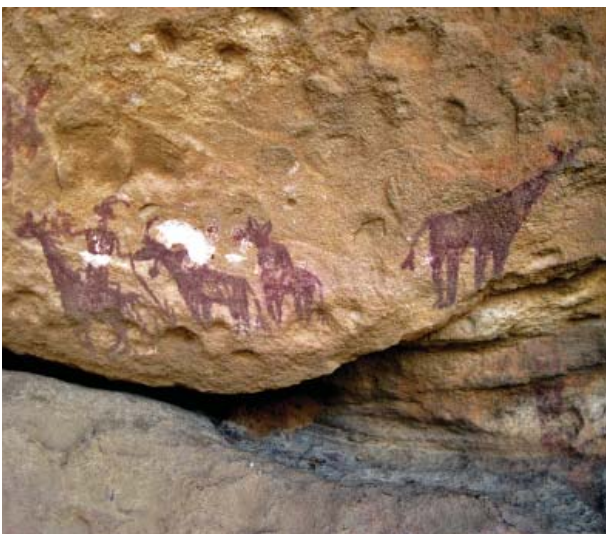


Figure 9. Animal represented on wall surface of Ambapani shelter.



Figure 10. Animal representation on shelter wall surface.



Figure 11. Animal represented in natural on wall surface Ambapani shelter.



Figure 12. Paintings represent in black pigments.



Figure 13. Animal representation on white colour pigment.

with slanting line. The warriors are represented through bi-triangular body without any filling of colour, the bird figure is crown decorated in long segmented branch at tip portion. The dress pattern, head gear and war weapons are also noticed different variety in which the dress with lower garments and well developed drapery or upper garments noticed almost all warfare images (Fig. 8). The head gear are decorated with furs and all warrior are well armed and holding common war weapons like bow and arrow, shield and swords, spears etc.

Animal's representation is very common. The

animals are show in cluster form and even in single sporadic depiction. The animals are depicted full of life and motion through the fore leg and hind leg movements, the tail curves and size and shape of body. Some figure of animals are fill with colour and naturalistic where few are fill with different decorative pattern (Figs. 9, 10, 11). It is noticed that almost all animals' neck is quite long in comparison to its original features. Colour compositions for the execution of animals are ochre, red, brown, white and black. Paintings white and black are rare (Figs. 12, 13) and ochre red occupy dominant variety.



Few white painted animals' motifs are superimposed over brown painted animals, the brown painted animals are identified as deer and related to hunting scenes whereas the white painted animals tail is long and upward curve because of these feature identified as monkey (see Fig. 13). The folded fore leg and hind leg of the monkey signify the motion/movement. But presently most of paintings are washed away due to water. Black colour is also a medium of painting reported from the shelter, in rare instance few pictographs are traced out the shelter wall surface. In this connection the images are identified as man and animals (See Fig. 12).

In some instance there were three to two phases of painting superimposition in few areas of the shelter. They basically draw the figure of animals as noticed and recognise besides that a little abstract painting is also noticed.

The Problem

The present shelter is prone to natural as well as man-made problems facing for its pictographs. The painting surfaces in some area are de-faced due to washing out of the natural pigments (Fig. 14 and 15). The percolations of rain water into the shelter surface affecting the pictographs through the deposition of salts and mineral components over it, and also provide atmosphere to growth of cryptogammic matter. It has been noticed that in few pigment cluster a kind of hammer stroke and chipping blow off few flakes from the support, this was a deliberately human vandalism caused by local villagers

(see Figs. 5 and 8). It is interesting to note here that the Konder belief that the pictographs were made by Gond so they tried to destroy it. In recent years flow of visitor to the site can cause problem through graffiti especially marked on the shelter surface.

Discussion

After detail examination of these shelters on cliff over hanging as part of small term study, the paintings were photographed properly for future analysis. In few area some superimposing and obliterate pictographs are difficult to segregate in phases so those paintings are not used for proper study. Exact dating of the rock painting is not possible because it is primary observations based on present available data, however in chronological method and assessment with other nearby rock art site, the rock art are datable to Chalcolithic period to Historical period as per its style notation, colour composition, content and subject recorded in shelter surface.

Most of the figure style are not identical but apparently similar so these are groups under respective assemblages for statistical analysis. The Ambapani pictographs has share several characteristics with the main stream rock art. Each painting panel serves a separate one, and possible have indicate different thematic responses at the site. The human activities recoded on shelter have basically of warfare scene. The animals are not sharing their basic elements with other animals. It is noteworthy to mention that the animals' motives are executed wide range of colour and the neck portion is quite long which may compare to the giraffe



Figure 14. Deterioration of pictographs through rain water. Ambapani rock shelter.



and even confuse many time but in compare to other these animals are identified as horse and Nilgai. So it is summarise that the paintings of the shelters are of different time frame as per their execution style, colour composition noticed at site. We invite rock art scholars, to paid their attention in the details for future research and to understand ancient societies.

The paintings were the reflections of their social, cultural, religious and economic life. As the process of evolution, continued primitive men devised the techniques of drawing paintings to express his feelings of daily life through pictures. Their main object of drawing were objects of nature like sun, moon, stars, animals, birds, plants, trees etc. Besides, they used to draw several activities of everyday life like hunting,

Redefining the scope of rock art

Rock art, as the term implies, is the art on rock. In other words, any type of artistic activity found on rock is rock art⁴; although it is still debatable that which type

of art it is. If we consider the true sense of word 'rock art' which can be defined as artistic activities on rocks, apart from various rock paintings all the mural paintings, such as those found at Ajanta, Elora and elsewhere, rock engravings, bruising and even inscriptions and various major and minor rock edicts executed on rock surfaces in time and space should also be brought under one umbrella of 'Rock Art' for better understanding.

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⁴ Mathapal, Y. 1995, *Rock Art in Kumaon Himalaya*. Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Aryan Books International, New Delhi, p. 1.



Figure 15. Deterioration of pictographs through rain water.



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