

A Preliminary Light on Depictions in Rock Art of Bundi District, Rajasthan (With special reference to faunal depictions)

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Abstract: In last decade, rock art study in India has become truly multidisciplinary and much emphasis has been laid. The study has progressed from the stage of discovery of rock paintings, identification of animals depicted in rock art and their chronological sequence to more applied aspects. This article throws a primary light on the depicted animal motifs in the rock art sites located in Bundi district. More than 30 rock art sites have been reported by the scholars and explorers in this region. Most of the rock paintings are belongs to Mesolithic to historical period. However, some of the paintings may be as early as upper Palaeolithic but it needs detail study.

Keywords: Animal, Archaeology, Paintings, Prehistory, Rajasthan, Rock Art.

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The district of Bundi is situated in the southeast part of Rajasthan, between 24° 59' 11" and 25° 53' 11" north latitudes and 75° 19' 30" to 76° 19' 30" longitudes east. Remarkable features of its surface, physiographic and soil compositions make this region a typical physical unit. The river Chambal forms the southern and eastern boundaries, separating the Bundi and Kota Districts. It forms for nearly the whole distance, the southern and the eastern boundaries of the district. Mangli is the biggest tributary of the river Mez and forms the famous gorge of Bhimlat. It joins the Mez near Bhains Khera. The stream of Eais rises in the Bhainsrorgarh tehsil of Chittaurgarh and joins the Chambal at Dabi in the forest of Bagchach. Talera is a tributary of Ghora Pachhar which it joins near Pipalda. Three small rivulets named Palka, Dhaneshwar and Dabi join it at the Barudha dam. Ghora Pachhar rises in the lake of Bijolia and flowing north east into Talera tehsil, joins the river Mangli at Sangawada. There is a small dam over the river at Gararda.

The western portion of the Bundi is occupied by schist belonging to Aravalli system, among which a few outlying crops of quartzite belonging to Delhi system. Sandstones of the upper Vindhyan age are faulted down against the Aravalli schist and a few outlying crops of the same stone are found resting upon the schist on the northern side of the fault. The rocks of this district belong to mainly to the Vindhyan and Aravalli formations. The junction of the upper Vindhyan with the older rocks of Aravallis reveals an extremely long fault or great throw, which has brought almost horizontal strata of

the Vindhyan sandstone in contact with the highly folded and foliated schist of the Aravallis. The great fault is roughly parallel to the course of Chambal (Dhoundiyal 1964: 3-6).

History of Early Research

In 1953, late Shri Wakankar observed the painted rock shelter (Wakankar 1987: 116-120) when he was passing through the Darra in the district of Kota by train. Narayan Vyas and his colleague explored the bank of river Bilas, A tributary of Parvati, and brought to light one hundred and twenty-eight rock shelters, of which thirty-six contain paintings. While some of these paintings were of prehistoric period, others are of historical times. Most of the paintings are drawn on wall surface and projected ceilings of the rock shelters. The paintings are executed in monochrome in red and dark red colour, depicting bear, monkey, deer, rhinoceros, dog, ox, buffalo, horse, fox, scorpion, camel, antelope, elephant, bull and peacock. There are also paintings representing the sun and moon, circle, square, intersecting circles, dancing human figures, man with an arrow, man with a bow and arrow, running animals, male drummer, standing male wearing mask, etc. Particularly noteworthy is a painted single lined *Brahmi* inscription assignable to circa second century BCE. Kapildhara is situated 17 km south east of the village Kishan Bilas on the bank of river Barni, a tributary of the Parvati. On the right bank of the river, fifty-eight rock shelters were documented, of these seventeen contain paintings. The paintings are generally similar to those in the Kishan Bilas rock shelters (*IAR* 1981-82: 56).

Kumar and others (Kumar 1981: 227-285, 1983, 1992: 56-67, 1996: 51-52, 2001: 5-35, Kumar et al. 1988: 43-53) explored the Valley of Chambal in the district of Kota and Baran and throws light on the different aspects of rock art of this region. Sh. Omprakash Sharma “Kukki” discovered rock art sites in the districts of Bundi, Kota and Bhilwara. He also discovered some rock art sites along the river of Chhaja (Sharma 1998: 69-70, Kukki 2010: 90-92). Shri Jagat Narayan Srivastva and other scholars also reported some of the prehistoric rock painting sites in the Hadoti area (Srivastav 1981: 329-331, Jagatnarayan 2010: 41-47, Jagatnarayan et al. 2005: 105-107, 2013: 106-107). Chhavni Baroda, Revarpura, Manjhika, Khal, Khatkad, Lohali in Bundi district and Rangpur of Kota are reported as ostrich egg shell sites in the area. Dr. Mohan Lal Sahu also published his Ph.D. thesis (Sahu 2007) on the topic of cultural study of rock art sites of Alaniya river valley, a protected site of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Rajasthan. The recent work carried out on the study of early rock art of Hadoti Plateau in south-eastern Rajasthan (Abbas 2007-08, Shaik 2008, 2014a: 134-163, 2014b: 742-771) also throws light on the antiquity and different aspects of rock art of the area.

Subject Matter

In the rock paintings of Bundi district, we found that the artisans had a wide range of subjects. The early rock paintings found in the Bundi district belongs to from the beginning of rock art and continued up to the Historical period. The earlier paintings are superimposed by later paintings; for example, intricate patterns are superimposed by younger rock paintings of the later phases. The main subjects of prehistoric rock paintings of studied area are intricate patterns, animals, and as well as human figurines. Rock paintings belonging to the Mesolithic and later periods mainly depict hunting scenes and animals in their natural habitat. Human figurines are generally depicted as hunters in the rock paintings. The subject matter of the paintings may be classified such as human figures (man, woman, indeterminate), animals (different species), scenes (hunting, battle, music and dance, rituals and family), mythology, nature, decoration and material culture. Human figures have been divided

into various sub-groups: man, woman, boy, girl, infant, anthropomorphic figure, hunter, horse rider, elephant rider, bull rider, soldier, attendant, drummer, man with axe, man engaged in other activities, drinking, dancing, copulation, masked man, ritual performers and mother goddess (includes pregnant women). They did not limit themselves to game animals and their hunters but also painted several aspects of the daily life of their society, drawing bands of running and fighting soldiers, horseman and elephant riders etc. Figures are generally micrographic but a few animal figures are life size and many half-life size. Most of the hunters are shown in groups. Sometimes hunters would operate alone. They had a large variety of games. There are also scenes of collecting vegetable foods. Scenes of day-to-day activities and some of the paintings might have been drawn simply for purposes of decoration. The animal herds are generally composed of different species. Buffalo (Plate 1 & 2), bull (Plate 3 & 9), gaur (Plate 4), nilgai (Plate 8), deer, monkey, tiger (Plate 6), bison (Plate 5), bird rider (Plate 7) and *langur* are depicted in them. The animals are composed in several horizontal rows one above the other. Study of the animal figures in life-size proportions and in naturalistic outlines found in the paintings suggests that they were drawn right from the beginning of rock art. The body portion of the animal figures was sometimes decorated with or without intricate or geometric pattern designs. The artists of this area were capable of drawing the most naturalistic as well as the most elegant and simplified expressions of fear and delight. The large sized animal's drawings were painted for worship after or before killing the actual animal. Probably the hunting scenes were inspired by hunting magic. The rock paintings of animals are represented in a systematic and explicit manner. All the components of an ideal ecosystem indicate the presence of a consistent flow of floral biomass comprising woody plants, shrubs, grasses, in the vicinity of the study region. Primitive man also used plants, fruits, and tubers etc. which are used by the tribal populations in nearby region also. It seems there was frequent infighting in the historic periods among the rulers of the neighbouring lowlands. Kings and chieftains are shown seated on decorated elephants under canopies. There were two types of cavaliers- one riding on the horses, decorated with flags, ornaments, saddles and reins and the others on caparisoned horses.

Colour Composition

The colour use by rock art painters were mainly derived from minerals. Hematite red was the most common colour of prehistoric cultures. Ten colours have so far been counted in the rock paintings of Bundi district. These are white, creamy white, yellow ochre, raw sienna, orange, dark orange, light red, dark red, burnt sienna, burnt umber, green etc. The main colour is used for paintings is red and white. Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ figures are depicted in dark red colour. The next commonest colour is light red (pure hematite red) and white. Red colour is generally used for paintings in the rock shelters under study. This red colour is a mineral colour. There are multiple stores of copper and iron ore in the region under study (Sharma 1997: 25-35). These metals are obtained from hematite and chalcopyrite minerals. Some of the paintings are made by green colour, believed to be earliest paintings in the area.

Technique

Rock paintings are depicted on the surface of the shelter without any preparation of the ground by plastering, grinding or smoothing, although there was a preference was given to smooth and plain ground for the rock art. The nature of the surface was an important and solo factor in choosing a site for paintings. Sometimes colour is applied in background before paintings. Figures at considerable height were probably painted by artists standing on scaffolds or branches of trees. Painted surfaces

were used several times by artists of different periods without obliterating the older figures. Thus, superimpositions or overlapping of figures of different styles may be observed in the painted rock shelters of this area. The transparent and opaque colour techniques are more common in rock paintings of the district.

Chronology

Though there is no dispute about the historicity of the Mesolithic rock paintings, it is quite likely as Wakankar believed that some of the early depictions in rock paintings in green colour do belong to the upper palaeolithic phase of Indian prehistory. The possible reason for the supposition is that faceted green earth (what he calls terra verta) has been found in the upper palaeolithic deposits in one of the excavated rock shelters (II A-28) at Bhimbetka. Although some researchers have found green paintings preceded by red paintings. Here emphasis has to be given to the style rather than colour of the painting. Rock paintings in green, were found at three rock art sites namely Kavarpura, Ramtol and Naldah in Bundi District and at Chattaneshwar in Kota District. Depictions of human as well as animal figures in green were found at Kavarpura, Ramtol and Naldah. A study of the depictions of animal figures found at Kavarpura suggests that they were drawn during the chalcolithic period. Depictions of animal as well as human figures found in the rock shelters of Ramtol and Naldah were also drawn during the Chalcolithic period. The study of the style of the rock paintings in green found in the rock shelters of Kavarpura, Ramtol, Naldah, Cable Nagar and Chattaneshwar suggests that they were drawn during the Chalcolithic period. This discovery suggests that the rock paintings in green were not drawn during the earliest phase of rock art. The use of green depends on the availability of raw material to prepare the pigment. Different coloured nodules available in the vicinity of the rock art sites were utilized to prepare the pigments (Shaik 2014b: 742-771).

Faunal Depictions

Rock art depicts not only contemporary life in an ancient society, but also many of the fauna and flora contributing to the ecological setting. The paintings seem to indicate a good symbiotic relationship between fauna and the contemporary human population. The ecological conditioning prevailing while the painters were at work can be largely revealed by studying the ecology of these animals represented in the paintings that are present today. According to scholars, the faunal data represented in the rock paintings can be divided into three palaeo-communities named Stream and stream bank community, Mega-terrestrial community and Arboreal community (Badam and Sathe 1996: 23-35).

The aquatic sources of the district could be inhabited by turtle, crab and also some varieties of fish. Probably these small creatures were potential sources of food for early man inhabiting these shelters. Although, their portrayal may even be symbolic, representing the presence of water or a related environment. Mega-terrestrial community is the most predominant community represented through out the paintings of all periods. The members include large to small sized herbivores with mixed feeding habits of grazing and browsing (elephant, buffalo, chital), scavengers (hyena) and small mammals.

The large bovids are well known for their adaptability to macro-environment. These animals can be recognized as grassland traversers, making best use of perennially available grasslands (Badam and Sathe 1996: 23-35). These areas covered with primary and secondary forests, might have controlled their movements. Water bodies which are usually found in open grasslands in humid climates certainly fulfilled the basic water requirements of these animals.

Water buffalo needs a habitational environment associated with permanent water bodies and a staple source of grass for fulfill is ecological requirements. Most of its time spent wallowing in water; which acts as an important factor for normalization of its environment temperature (Fahimuddin 1975). Water buffalo spend much of their day submerged in the muddy waters of Asia's tropical and subtropical forests. They have wide-splayed hooved feet which are used to prevent them from sinking too deeply in the mud. These adaptations allow them to move in wetlands and swamps. Water buffalo also prefer to feed in grasslands on grass and herbs.

Cervids generally survives in swampy grasslands with water bodies, particularly in dry season. Cervids like sambhar (*Cervus unicolor*), barasingha (*Cervus duvauceli*), chital (*Axis axis*) and baring deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*) must have thrived in this area since all these environmental requirements easily met. There are three sub-species are existing today in different ecological zones of India named *C.d. duvaucelu*, *C.d. ranjitsinhi* and *C.d. branderi* of which the latter inhabits in central India (Badam and Sathe 1996: 23-35). For investigating the ecological condition of barasingha, ecological studies were carried out by the scholars at Kanha National Park; district Mandla of Madhya Pradesh which indicates semi-evergreen and wet-evergreen forests as the habitational areas for this animal (Martin 1977: 61-132, Groves 1982: 620-629). Three factors are responsible for control their environments; scarcity of water, abundance of grass cover and climate conditions (Badam and Sathe 1996: 23-35). Forest and better drained areas attract barasingha with the advent of monsoons, while the drier conditions may direct them from glades to woods (Martin 1977: 61-132). The chital and sambhar are found less frequently in swamps and traverse woods. Sambars are primarily browsers that live in woodlands and feed mainly on coarse vegetation, grass, and herbs. They are diurnal animals who live in herds of 5-6 members, grazing on grass, sprigs, fruit and bamboo buds. These deer are seldom far from water and, although primarily of the tropics, are hardy and may range from sea level up to high elevations such as the mixed coniferous/deciduous forest zone in the Himalayan Mountains sharing its range with the Himalayan musk deer. These deer are found in habitats ranging from tropical seasonal forests, subtropical mixed forests (conifers, broadleaf deciduous and broadleaf evergreen tree species) to tropical rainforests. Their range covers a vast majority of territory that is classified as tropical rainforest, but their densities are probably very low there. In these areas, the deer probably prefer clearings and areas adjacent to water. The spotted deer are found in large numbers in dense deciduous/semi-evergreen jungles and open grasslands. The highest numbers of Chital are found in the jungles of India. Chital feed upon tall grass and shrubs and hence they occur in such jungles. Chital are a tiger's favourite prey and hence they live in jungles where they get plenty of shade and tall trees so that the tiger can easily camouflage. Axis deer most commonly occur in herds of ten to fifty individuals, with one or two stags and a number of females and young. They are often fairly tolerant of approach by humans and vehicles, especially where they are accustomed to human disturbance. They do not occur at higher elevation forests where they are usually replaced by other species such as the sambhar deer. Axis deer eat primarily grasses and vegetation, but also eat their shed antlers as a source of nutrients.

Wild boar is another animal which is frequently depicted in rock paintings of India. The body of the wild boar is compact; the head is large, the legs relatively short. The fur consists of stiff bristles and usually finer fur. The colour usually varies from dark grey to black or brown, but there are great regional differences in colour; even whitish animals are known from central India. During winter the fur is much denser. Dense forest with sufficient tubers, shrubs and aquatic sources could have been frequented by boars in a humid, wet Mesolithic phase. Pig was one of the most staple sources of food.

Discussion

The first group of paintings appears to belong to Upper Palaeolithic period consisted intricate pattern and stick shaped human figures. Rock art of this period presents a simple having faith and advanced technology. The human figures with “S” shaped body in this period depicted either in dance or running position. Big feature of elephants, boars, and gaurs are also there. Animals and their activities have been painted in naturalistic way. Although depiction of tiger, lion is noteworthy. The second group of paintings belongs to Mesolithic period. Microliths both geometric and non-geometric tools are also reported during the exploration from some of these rock art sites. The style technique and colours depicted in the paintings are similar to Bhimbetka and Panchmarhi paintings. In the Mesolithic period, the artist caught the moments of adventures and the spirit of meeting their challenges bravely even that of death. The depiction of human figure both ladies and men, before lion at Bhimlat is quite interesting. Numerous motifs, designs, animal, human and imaginative forms and symbols were depicted with the expression and presentation of human perception of reality such as fauna, life, techniques etc. in different ways. The figures have been done mostly in gently flowing fine lines reflecting dynamic action, vitality in form and directness of visual perception, a keynote of the Mesolithic art. Pre-cattle domestication hunting food gathering stage of life represents figures executed in free line drawings and some animals are filled in with colour.

Mesolithic art of this region presents a vibrant cultural life in a wide range of themes and styles. Mesolithic man had developed the art of basketry as well as rope-making and weaving of reeds and palm leaves. Arrows and bows for ceremonial purposes were often decorated. Hunting was the task of the male members of the society, while family nourishment and rearing of children were the responsibilities of the females. Pregnant women, childbirth and a mother with a child are drawn occasionally. Hunting was a part of the economy, but the number of bones in Mesolithic deposits is so limited that it seems meat was a delicacy for certain occasions. Fish, tortoise, deer, antelope, *Bos gaurus* and rhinoceros were their favourite prey. The elephant is rarely shown being hunted. Dance had developed in an organized fashion.

The third stages of paintings are associated with the Chalcolithic period. The self-relying cattle domesticating economy gradually led to a secure and comfortable life as compared to that of hunter-food-gatherers. The figures are generally overlapping with the earlier ones. The humans and animals start becoming more and more schematic and stylized. Their size in general goes on reducing, though a few big figures are also there. The early introduction of copper in the upper Chambal Valley was probably because of the impact of copper producing Chalcolithic cultures in the river and hill valleys of Rajasthan, probably somewhere in Chittaurgarh and Bhilwara regions. On the basis of depiction of rock paintings in this region it can therefore assumed that cattle pastoralism was one of the main occupations of the inhabitants. The food economy included aquatic and avian fauna. Hunting of the birds was probably one of the major subsistence activities in this region. A variety of birds like fowl, goose, vulture, and crane were killed for the food.

In the historic period, many Buddhist symbols and inscriptions, sometimes along with figures, appeared. Besides, bird riding scenes are also there at Gararda in Bundi district (Sharma 1998: 69-70).

On the basis of depiction of rock paintings in this region it can therefore assumed that cattle pastoralism was one of the main occupations of the inhabitants. The food economy included aquatic and avian fauna. Hunting and snaring of the birds was probably one of the major subsistence activities in this region. A variety of birds like fowl, goose, vulture, and crane were killed for the food.

The depiction of horse in the rock paintings resembles with the historical association. The significance of this animal in the historical Age culture, as reflected in the historical aspects of the region, can be appreciated in the light of its role in facilitating local mobility. Probably they formed part of the food refuses as suggested by similar evidence from other chalcolithic and historic sites (Badam 1982:1-22, Thomas 1988: 822-961, 1992: 75-80).

Probably the early settlers of the rock shelters had a pragmatic outlook and vision behind such meaningful and beautiful paintings. The painted figures might be the beginnings of a cord keeping system by the early settlers to pass on the information from generation to generation and appears to be a beginning of information technology. From these figures or icons, the children and younger generation might have given information about herbivores and carnivores dwelling around, further the animal figures might have been used to teach not only about their shape habitat and their behavior but also about the danger perspectives. Rock art is the evidence of earlier art activity in India since prehistoric period. Rock art provides an insight into the world view of hunting gathering population. It tells us about the hunting gathering techniques and weapons and also about their material culture, dress, ornaments and social and cultural life of ancient communities.

The artistic presentation of rock art does not corroborate in their antiquity but also, they expose their cultural heritage of bygone days. The rock art presents regional influence in their life style with all around environment responsible for their human activities. Saraswati (1995: 2-3) writes "Rock art, in one sense is an orphan. Those who produced it are no longer alive to defend their works or world view". Burkitt (1992) writes "it is the only man's handiwork that has survived from prehistoric times which can be accurately studied; many sides of human experience must remain matters of speculation". Paintings provide a visual expression of the artistic impulses of the primitive folks, and illustrate different aspects of their way of life. Sh. V.H. Sonawane (1996: 11-14) thinks that rock art is mostly conditioned by human response to a changing environment and is a reflection of the combined effects of locality and cultural contexts. Further he says that the signs and symbols depicted in rock art and certainly had a meaning for their authors. Kumar (1992: 56-67) says "study of regional characters in rock art and other forms of this purakala helps indigenous man in finding the roots of his identity and personality in the distant past". After examining the rock paintings of Badami, Bhimbetka, Mandasaur Hazaribag and other sites, it is opined that the 'antique art' originated as applied method of silent communication (Thakur 2009: 154-162). Malik (1995: 4-12) explains that rock art has a grammar of paintings, which may be deciphered in terms of movements from various points of view like musical, pictorial, physical, spiritual etc.

Rock art represents possible regional influence in life style with regional responsible environmental conditions for development of human activities at every site. In a way it communicates, reviving of traditional values and their relations with environment, a basic transformation of value system with interactions between man and his environment (Thakur 2009: 154-162). Rock art is the natural cum cultural heritage properly as well. There is need to introduce mass awakening regarding protection of antique art and of the sites as well (Mathpal 1993: 47-49, Johns 1993: 55-56).

The rock paintings of animals are represented in a systematic and explicit manner. All the components of an ideal ecosystem indicate the presence of a consistent flow of floral biomass comprising woody plants, shrubs, grasses, in the vicinity of Vidarbha region. Primitive man also used plants, fruits, and tubers etc. which are used by the tribal populations in nearby region also.

Conclusion

Closer inspection of global rock art sites shows that pre-figurative rock art preceded figurative in most cases consists of a fairly restricted range of elements or form constants, which are found in numerous variants or which may be built into elaborate mazes or geometric arrangements. The basic elements of all archaic rock art are dominated by curvilinear motifs, such as concentric circles spirals and their variants and intermediate forms including geometric motifs. Indian rock art is no exception to this widely accepted phenomenon. The paintings consisting of geometric patterns or intricate designs form the most conspicuous stylistic feature of this earlier style. The paintings consisting of intricate geometric patterns covering large space of virgin rock surface and succeeding depictions of deified animals decorated with such geometric patterns can be cited as the best example to explain the Indian situation in this context. The motif engraved on the Chandravati core and its variations found elsewhere in numerous early rock paintings clearly denote some religious connotations in prehistoric art.

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Rock art depicts not only contemporary life in an ancient society, but also many of the fauna and flora contributing to the ecological setting (Badam and Sathe 1991: 196-208, 1996: 23-35). The paintings seem to indicate a good symbiotic relationship between fauna and the contemporary human population. The ecological conditioning prevailing while the painters were at work can be largely revealed by studying the ecology of these animals represented in the paintings that are present today. The physical setting of the district and nearby region characterizes some perennial aquatic sources named Mez, Hunwalaya, Basoli-ki Nadi, Dabushya, Bala Nadi, Nayagaon ki Khal, Borda ki Nadi, Udan, Suri ka Khal, Sawatgarh ka Khal, Soran ka Khal, Machali, Trijuni, Majneri, Chandrabhaga, Mangli, Eais, Talera, Ghora Pachhar, Palka, Dhaneshwar, Dabi etc. These aquatic sources could be inhabited by turtle, crab and also some varieties of fish. Probably these small creatures were potential sources of food for early man inhabiting these shelters. Although, their portrayal may even be symbolic, representing the presence of water or a related environment. The members include large to small sized herbivores with mixed feeding habits of grazing and browsing (elephant, buffalo, chital), scavengers (hyena) and small mammals. The large bovids are well known for their adaptability to macro-environment. These animals can be recognized as grassland traverses, making best use of perennially available grasslands (Badam and Sathe 1996: 23-35). These areas covered with primary and secondary forests, might have controlled their movements. Water bodies which are usually found in open grasslands in humid climates certainly fulfilled the basic water requirements of these animals.

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