Study of Rock Art Discovered from Some Newly Explored Rock Shelters in Panna District of Madhya Pradesh, India: A Preliminary Report

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Abstract: In this paper, we have presented our preliminary analytical data on rock paintings recovered from some of the newly discovered prehistoric rock shelters of Panna District in Madhya Pradesh state. Results described in this paper are based on the extensive exploration of various painted rock shelters of the Panna District during the season of 2019. We have recovered three rock art sites. The analyzed paintings are presented systematically along with the main text. Each rock shelter has been described with respect to number of paintings of human, animals, flora-fauna etc. Analytical results revealed that the themes of paintings are mainly hunting, dancing, battle scene, food gathering, cattle rearing, and figures of animal, decorative motifs, handprints, historical paintings and geometric designs. The paintings recovered from all three rock shelters were made by using red or ochre (Geru) colour. Geomorphological and geographical estimations also suggested that these prehistoric rock art sites were mainly located near the water source and forest lands.

Keywords: Rock Paintings, Rock Shelters, Themes, Prehistoric Site, Mesolithic, Panna District, Madhya Pradesh

Introduction

Rock art paintings are one of the significant witnesses of the skill of creativity/writing of prehistoric human. It tells us about the way of life of the prehistoric societies, their cultural activities, creativity, style of daily life and their ritual practices. These rock art paintings are unique evidence of the earliest written documents of human life (Mathpal, 1984). Literary archaeological data on rock paintings indicate that India is well known for the prehistoric rock art and it is one of the sixth major part of the world rock art heritage. First evidence of rock art in Indian sub-continent was discovered by A.C.L Carlyle in 1867 from Sohagighat near Mirzapur, Central India (Mathpal, 1984). Later on,
various scholars continuously discovered a number of new rock art sites from this region. It is also evident that Central India is well known for the prehistoric research especially rock art studies, because most of the rock art sites are concentrated in central India. It is observed that the natural physical world including plants, animals and landscape is healthiest and desirable in central India. Most of rock shelters in this region are found mainly in the sandstone hillocks of Vindhyan. Central India is mainly an expansion in the state of Madhya Pradesh state. In Madhya Pradesh rock paintings, most of the paintings found are predominantly pictographs comprising petroglyphs. But in recent studies scholars have recorded petroglyphs from many sites. Even in the rock paintings and their themes, there is the predominant narrative and figurative rather than abstract and non-figurative, as found in the nearby states such as, Odessa, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh (Biswas, 2012).

First prehistoric stone tools in Panna district were reported from ‘Bariyarpur’ archaeological site by Rajan and Joshi (1956-57), during the exploration in river valley of Panna, Damoh, Satna, Rajgarh and Rewa region. During the exploration they have found the Paleolithic artifacts from Bariyarpur site in Panna district, which is located in the bank of Ken River. The most important tools among them were developed bifacial madras Handaxe culture artifacts. Rajan and Joshi (1956-57) also discovered one more microlithic site along with these sites in Panna district of Madhya Pradesh during the same exploration and it was archaeological site ‘Jamunai hills’. It is situated near Pahari-khera area. Later on, R.V. Joshi in 1958 explored the river valley of Sonar, Bearma and Kopra, and discovered fifteen new prehistoric sites. The notable findings were Paleolithic tools and series II tools (Joshi, 1958-59; Joshi 1961). Allchin (1959) reported some new middle Stone Age sites in Central India. Some of the important remains he recovered were ‘Pandav Fall’ and lithic assemblages from ‘Baghin river gravels’ in Panna district. Shri R. Sengupta picked up the early Stone Age tools from the site ‘Saduwa bridge’ on the way of Panna to Navgoan city. Sengupta (1961-62) also discovered a riverbed (Nullah) along with one meter thick deposit of a course-grained clastic sedimentary rock (conglomerate).

Painted rock shelters in Panna district were first discovered in 1961-62 by K.P. Jadia from the prehistoric site ‘BrahspatiKund’ near Brajpur village. This rock shelter is situated in the Vindhyan range of Baghin River basin. The paintings of these rocks shelters are mostly depictions of hunting and dancing scenes (Jadia, 1961-62). Mathpal (1976-77) reported some long-necked figured animal from the archaeological site Brahspati Kund in Panna district. After a decade Gupta (1984) carried out an exploration in Panna district and discovered eight new rock arts sites. These sites are Barachh-Pandvan, Barachh-Pandvan-II, Majha-Pahar, Tapkaniya, Hathidol, Putarihau Ghati, Kanlayanpur and Biladi (Gupta, 1984). Subsequently, two more rock art sites were explored by Manoj Govil during the archaeological field work in Panna district and these painted rock shelters are ‘Ganga Jhiria’ in Panna National Park area and ‘Jardhova’ near Akola village (Govil, 2010). Pushpendra Nandan discovered a number of rock art and microlithic sites in Panna district during his Ph.D. fieldwork, some of the rock art sites explored by him.
are Gharoghati, Chhapta Nala (near Akola), Amarkantak (Akola), Hanuman Bhat (Pawai), Sira Pahar (near Saleha), Sidhnnath (Gunor tahsil), Baghin Tat (near Brahspatikund). However, the important microlithic sites discovered were Ramkhriya, Kauyaseha, Gunor and Pawai (Nandan, 2013). Rajendra Dehuri in (2015) discovered a rock shelter near village Belha in Panna district. It is having two painted shelters and depicted scenes in paintings analyses from these shelters are mainly hunting, gathering and figures of animals (Dehuri and Roy, 2015). Besides this, Vijay Kumar in 2017 also recovered many rock shelters during the field survey in Banda-Panna district border region. The significant discovery of his fieldwork was important rock shelters, which are locally known as Chereliha Pathar Totuniya, which is five kilometer east of village Kothitola, and Keorahai Khol near Mahuwa Dandi; Putariyan Pati near village Putariyanpeti; Lakhanseha Ari in Lakhanseha Jungle and Rai ka Rapta two kilometer north of village Luhari.

The aforesaid accounts clearly indicated that so many prehistoric rock arts and microlithic sites in India have been discovered by various scholars in this region. However, the data of only few explored sites were analyzed systematically for publishing the report. The areas of this region are not explored till today, because the landscapes of these areas are very typical and challengeable. Due to the same reason these areas were also ignored by the scholars and researchers. Panna district is also one of them as major part of this area consisting of hills and dense forest (National Park) with abundant wildlife animals such as, leopard, bear, wild boar, deer etc. It is also clear from the literature that every new discovery provides a unique set of archaeological data. The findings of archaeological data and their interpretation plays an important role in locating the sites within the context. This is undoubtedly helpful for upcoming research and also useful in the development of archaeological study at local as well as national level, but it may be depending on the quality of records globally (Banarjee et. al., 2015).

After going through the aforesaid studies, we have found that a number of areas in Panna district of Madhya Pradesh state and adjoining region are still unexplored, so it inspired us to carry out the present study in those areas. Keeping in view the same, we conducted an extensive exploration to discover rock art and prehistoric sites in Panna district of Madhya Pradesh. During field work first author conducted extensive exploration in all the prehistoric sites of Panna district, which were reported by different workers and investigated some rock shelters in this region. He finally discovered three new rock art sites in this district of Madhya Pradesh.

Study Area
The physical setting of any area provides a platform for the human settlement and to perform their activities. District Panna is situated in North-Eastern part of Madhya Pradesh. The district extends between 79.45° to 80.40° East longitude and 23.45° to 25.10° North latitude. The total area of the district is 7135 square kilometer. Panna is surrounded with district Satna to the north-east, district Chattarpur to the north-west, district Damoh to the south-west and district Katni to the south (Sinha, 1994). Major part
of the district covered by National Park and reserved forest. Main River that flows in the district is Ken River and its major tributaries are Sonar, Bearma, Baghin, Patne etc. During the present study the exploration was carried out in the Panna Tahsil of Panna district and three new rock art sites were discovered which are (1) Sher ki chul (gufa), Sarangpur, (2) Bade Dev, Rakseha and (3) Hatyara and Bedhak Kunda (Figure 1). Geomorphological conditions of district Panna are a prominent part of the Vindhyan plateau within average height of 350 meter.

Figure 1: Location of Rock Art Sites

Themes of the Rock Art
Morphological analysis revealed that various themes were adopted by ancient people in Indian rock art. The important themes used by prehistoric people were various activities of daily life, hunting, dancing, and rituals scenes. After going through earlier studies, it is observed that practice of rock paintings was started sometimes in upper Paleolithic age and it has continued till present time, which is evident from the fact that such type of art paintings is also being used at present by some ethnic communities of this area. Studies of rock art paintings discovered from Panna district also indicated that in rock art paintings prehistoric people depicted different scenes on their art such as, hunting, dancing, food gathering, fishing, various types of flora and fauna, scenes of war etc. Meanwhile they have depicted different animals in the Indian rock paintings, and these include wild buffalo, bull, deer, rhinos, tiger, neelgai, boar etc.

Fieldwork
First author conducted extensive fieldwork in Panna district of Madhya Pradesh state during session 2019 and explored most of the previously reported archaeological rock art and microlithic tool sites along with some new areas which were unexplored. During
this exploration three new prehistoric sites were discovered from different locations of
Panna Tehsil and Panna district in Madhya Pradesh of Central India. These newly
discovered rock art sites are (1) Bade Dev, Rakseha, (2) Sher ki chul (gufa), Sarangpur
and (3) Hatyara and Bedhak Kunda. These rock art paintings revealed the significance
of artistic works carried out by different habitants, which were active from the Paleolithic
to the Early Medieval period. The significance of these newly explored rock art is the
themes of paintings used by prehistoric peoples. The themes included animal figures,
human-like figures, war scene, hunting-dancing scenes, and other designs. Such type of
rock art paintings mainly belongs to prehistoric to historical period. Various styles,
themes, colours used on rock art as well as other specific features observed in the rock
paintings of different periods are outlined in detail, which is mentioned site-wise in the
following section.

Figure 2: Engravings of Shivlinga and Lady Figurine

Rock Shelter, Bade Dev (Rakseha)
The site Bade Dev (N 24°45.692’, E 80°16.951’ Elevation 1189 ft) is situated near Rakseha
village in the Panna-Pahadikheda Road. The actual location of this site is near to a
seasonal waterfall and rock shelter which is covered by forest, having the landmark of
‘Bade Dev’ temple near to rock shelter. This place also has a historical importance
because we recovered one sculpture of ‘Hanuman’ and one engraved ‘Shivlinga’ with
lady figurine in the form of worshiping and a short inscription (Figure 2). It is locally
known as ‘Panch Pandav’ temple. Sandstone formations of these hills have so many rock
shelters in this area but among them only two rock shelters have been occupied by
prehistoric people. The evidence of occupation was recovered in the form of rock
paintings. Most of the paintings in these rock shelters were vandalized by means of
different activities of local peoples i.e. by writing their names on paintings, firing in the shelters, scraping the painted scenes etc. It is also interesting to note that just close to the Bade Dev temple; we recovered so many scattered microlithic artifacts, which clearly indicated that the depicted paintings in both the rock shelters belong to Mesolithic age (Figure 3).

![Figure 3: Microlithic Assemblages from Bade Dev, Rakseha](image)

Rock shelter-1 of Rakseha is situated on the right side of the waterfall with west facing (Figure 4). It is huge in shape and size but only few paintings were visible in this shelter because most of paintings were adversely affected either by natural disturbances or vandalized by local people. Therefore, several paintings from here were not identified properly. It observed from the analyses of rock paintings that the prehistoric peoples used red or ochre colours for making all their paintings. They used walls of shelter for the purpose of drawing, painting and depiction. It is also evident that majority of the rock paintings were in the form of geometric and non-geometric designs in natural styles. In rock shelter-1 the only depicted scene of handprints of three hands were visible. However, scenes of other paintings were identified by enhancing through DStretch method which were revealed to human figures and animal figures (Figure 5).

Rock Shelter-2 of Rakseha is located on left side of the waterfall and it is facing to north. The depicted scenes of all paintings in this rock shelter were recognized as zoomorphic figures, and some important of them were identified as deer, nilgai and rabbit (Figures 6a and 6b).
Figure 4: View of Rakseha, Rock Shelter-1

Figure 5: Human Figures from Rakseha Rock Shelter-1 (Enhanced by DStretch)
Rock Shelter Nahar ki Chul (Sher ki Gufa), Sarangpur

The prehistoric rock shelter site ‘Nahar ki Chul or Sher ki Gufa, Sarangpur is located in the surrounding of the village Sarangpur, which is under the administration of tehsil and district of Panna. Sarangpur village is about 20 kilometer east from Panna city or district headquarters, on the way to Panna Pahari-Khera road. The painted rock shelter ‘Nahar ki chul or Sher ki Gufa’ (N 24°14.916, E 80°21.598, Elevation 1398 ft) is exactly two kilometer southeast of Sarangpur village, in the Amhai forest. According to the local peoples, nahar or lion resides in this place, hence it is called Nahar ki Chul (cave) or Sher ki Gufa by the local residents. People of this region are generally afraid of these shelters. To reach the site one has to climb the top by using hilly way and the exact path is backside of Sarangpur Ashram, which is totally dense forest area. Another way to reach the site is from the backside of the village Sarangpur and it passes through the agriculture as well as forest lands.

It is interesting to note that in one of the depicted scene of paintings from Nahar ki Chul, five people were dancing in a row and while another group of five people was also dancing but in the scene of second group of paintings, one animal figure is depicted with the group of people. Another scene of paintings was showing a decorative deer which was in running position with painted motive. Just closed to this painting one human figure was configured and it seems that something was on the head of this depiction. An attractive depicted scene of an arc is also significant in one of the paintings of this shelter. In this motive depiction it was shown that a people is seated on the elephant and two tigers are shown in fighting position, in front of the elephant. Besides this, one human being is trying to attack on these tigers, while some peoples are walking behind the elephant and one horse behind these people is also depicted in this painting. However, just below the depiction of horse two decorative round circles are also clearly visible. Based on these depictions we can say that this scene is showing a march for battle by an army because some peoples are shown with the mask on their face, and they are also having weapons (Figure 7).
It has already been described in the earlier sections that the walls and roof of the rock shelters have been used for rock paintings in this archaeological site and for making these rock art paintings red colour was used. The morphological features of the rock paintings recovered from Nahar ki Chul, suggested that these rock paintings may belongs to an early historical period. One rock paintings presented in Figure-8 showing an interesting depicted scene, which looks like a mythical design. This design is similar to the symbols used by the astrologist in modern perspective for the study of horoscopy. In another depicted scene of the paintings one special design is shown which looks like a scene of playing a game. Based on both these depictions we can say that the prehistoric people may be able to understand about astrology and have the knowledge of games.
The rock shelter site Bedhak Kunda and Hatyara Kunda is located near the famous Brahaspati-Kunda and village Varaho Kuddakpur. As per the local story there are five
kundas (waterfalls) on the way of Baghin River, one of them is famous and this is Brahaspati Kunda however, another are Bedhak Kunda, Hatyara Kunda and two more are there but they are unknown. During the field exploration of present study both kundas were explored extensively, because the geomorphological conditions of both these are similar to the Brahaspati Kunda. After systematic and extensive explorations some paintings were recovered from these kundas; significant among them are two painted shelter in Bedhak Kunda and two painted shelter in Hatyara Kunda. It is also interesting that a number of Paleolithic and Microlithic assemblages were also recovered from the surroundings of the Brahaspati Kunda area. Therefore, discovery of the Stone Age artifacts suggested that this area was occupied by humans during earliest Stone Age time.

![Human Figure from Hatyara Kunda, Rock Shelter](image1)
![Human Handprint Scene from Hatyara Kunda, Rock Shelter](image2)

**Bedhak Kunda**

From Bedhak Kunda two painted rock shelter were discovered during the field exploration, first shelter located on the right side of the kunda and second shelter just aside of the first shelter. First shelter is north-west facing and it is observed that direct sunlight was always approachable to this shelter, so most of the paintings in this shelter are not visible. Due to the weathering and natural process as well as effects of sun light the depicted paintings are affected adversely. Here the paintings were executed on the walls and ceiling of the shelter and the visible paintings indicated that these were made by using red or ochre colour. Various themes were used for making paintings, some of them are hunting scene, zoomorphic scene, while some are stylishly, made through geometric style and these are filled mainly by zigzag patterns. In one of the depiction of a painting a hunting scene of deer is shown. This painting is showing that one man is trying to hunt the dear by throwing the stick from back side and deer looks like in moving position (Figure 9).

Another depicted scene showing the group of nilgai in a row and they are in moving position. Here also interesting to observe that all the depicted figures of paintings are
made in geometric style. In a depicted scene an animal is also shown but full figure of this painting is not visible, only back portion of the animal is visible, stomach of the figured animal is filled by dot pattern and zigzag lines, which is indicating about the use of decoration in making the paintings. Another painting is made with the figurine of a big bull, it has two big horns and stomach of this bull is also filled by zigzag patterns.

The study of second rock shelter revealed that only one painting is identified from this shelter. The depiction in this painting is one Nilgai with moving position and a little child is also walking along with her backside (Figure 10).

**Hatyara Kunda**

Hatyara Kunda is situated just aside of Bedhak Kunda, though this kunda is having many natural rock shelters but only two shelters of them were used by prehistoric peoples for making paintings. First shelter is big one among all shelters but only few paintings are recovered from this shelter and all of the paintings in shelters were made by using dark red colour. One depicted seen of this shelter looks like that it is made recently. Other depicted paintings are seen in the form of two handprints; only outlines of hands print is seen in the figures and both prints are of right hand (Figure 11). Second rock shelter of Hatyara Kunda is small and only few depicted paintings from this shelter were recovered; these are one decorative scene, one human figure and two birds (Figure 12).

![Decorative Scene from Hatyara Kunda, Rock Shelter-2](image)

**Conclusion**

Studies on prehistoric archaeology evidenced that the rock shelters generally located near rivers, small streams, and water resource as well as forest lands. We also know that
the presence of forest near the shelters must have provided a large variety of game animals and plant foods. Earlier studies also proved that these localities were certainly used by prehistoric peoples for habitational purposes. We have discovered three rock art sites in Panna district of Madhya Pradesh during our exploration. Environmental conditions of the investigated sites also supported that these sites are also located near the water source and forest regions. Most rock art shelters of the Panna area consist of pictographs but no petroglyphs were reported yet from this region. The findings of present study significantly through light on the aspects of various depicted themes of the paintings such as, hunting, dancing, battle scene, food gathering, cattle rearing, animal figures, decorative motifs, handprints, historical paintings and geometric designs etc.

In rock art shelters of Madhya Pradesh most of paintings are depicted thematically such as, hunting scene, food gathering, cattle rearing etc (Biswas, 2012). These paintings are made by using red or ochre (Geru) colour. For making Mesolithic paintings prehistoric people generally used naturalistic and geometric styles. Though, in these new rock shelters we have not recovered much painting in well preserved condition, but quantity of paintings is not necessary for locating the ancient habitational site and only a significant painting can prove the existence of their concerned culture. Study of rock paintings in the region of Panna district of Madhya Pradesh state, we have found a continuity of tradition of rock art from the prehistoric phase followed by historical time and till today, as ethnic communities are using that tradition in the form of wall paintings.

Based on the above description and discussions of the rock paintings, we can say that maximum paintings of the newly discovered rock shelters belong to Mesolithic and Historical phase. Attempts have been made to date these rock art sites through relative dating by using associated archaeological remains. The available recovered evidence of rock paintings and lithic assemblages it is proved that these artifacts and paintings belong to the Mesolithic phase. Our observation suggested that Sarangpur paintings belongs to Early Historical period while painting of other two sites belong to the Mesolithic period because at these archaeological prehistoric sites, we have recovered Microlithic assemblages along with rock art shelters.

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