



## ROCK ART AND TRIBAL ART OF ORISSA: AN ETHNO-ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

SADASIBA PRADHAN\*

### ABSTRACT

*The state of Orissa situated in the east coast of India has a rich repository of rock art with an assemblage of 6778 rock pictures, be it painting or engraving, which coexist complementary to each other as documented in 106 rock shelter distributed in eleven districts. The state is equally rich with tribal art as the state houses as many as 62 primitive tribal communities who largely subsist on hunting and gathering. The paper presents an account of ethno-archaeological perspective drawn from Saura art. The paper demonstrates how cult and myth can move a primitive community (Sauras) to some sort of artistic expression and how such ethnographic information can be used in the interpretation of primeval rock art.*

### RIASSUNTO

Lo Stato dell'Orissa, situato lungo la costa orientale dell'India, possiede un ricco repertorio di arte rupestre, con un insieme di 6778 immagini rupestri, pitture e incisioni, che coesistono in complementarietà come documentato da 106 ripari nella roccia distribuiti in undici distretti. Lo Stato è ricco anche di arte tribale, dal momento che ospita 62 comunità primitive tribali che vivono principalmente di caccia e raccolta. La comunicazione presenta una relazione della prospettiva etno-antropologica derivata dall'arte dei Saura. Essa dimostra come il culto e i miti possano spingere una comunità primitiva (i Saura) ad una sorta di espressione artistica e come tali informazioni etnografiche possono essere usate nell'interpretazione dell'arte rupestre primaria.

### RESUME

*L'état d'Orissa situé sur la côte orientale de l'Inde possède un riche dépôt d'art rupestre, constitué d'un ensemble de 6778 images rupestres, soit peintes, soit gravées, qui coexistent de façon complémentaires, comme cela est répertorié dans 106 abris rupestres, eux-mêmes répandus dans onze districts. L'état est également riche de part son art tribal, étant donné qu'il accueille 62 communautés primitives subsistant largement par la chasse et la récolte. Cet article présente un compte-rendu de la perspective ethno-anthropologique tirée de l'art Saura. Il démontre comment les cultes et les mythes peuvent pousser une communauté tribale (les Sauras), à une sorte d'expression artistique et comment telle ou telle information ethnographique peut être utilisée dans l'art rupestre primaire.*

Within a period of one and half century of the first reported discovery rock art (Smith. 1906 : 185-95) India has emerged as one of the three countries with largest concentration of the world heritage of rock art, the other two being Australia and South Africa. A cursory survey reveals that rock art is reported through out the length and breadth of the country with its largest accumulation, nearly two third of the total, in quartzite and sandstone belt of Central India, mainly in the Vindhya, the Satpuras and the Kaimur ranges, located in the states of undivided Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Central India abounds with paintings and petroglyphs are negligible, almost absent compared to the vast assemblage of the pictographs.

The state of Orissa situated in the east coast of India lying between the parallels 17° 49' & 22° 34' N and 81° 23' & 87° 29' E found its place in the rock art map of India in 1933 when K. P. Jayaswal (1935) reported one of the earliest evidences of rock engravings in India from the rock shelter of Vikramkhola in the present district of Jharsuguda (erstwhile Sambalpur district). Thereafter several scholars namely N. P. Chakravorty (1936), Charles Fabri (1960) G. C. Mohapatra (1982), S. N. Rajguru (1950), J. P. Singh Deo (1976), Behera (1992) and Neumayer (1992 & 1993) have enriched either

---

\*Dr. Sadasiba Pradhan  
Professor Dept. of Ancient History & Archaeology  
Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, India, 751004  
spradhan55@yahoo.co.in



through their interpretations or by exploring new rock art sites. In the present paper an attempt is made to present a consolidated report on as many as 106 rock art sites including the earlier 12 reported sites documented by the scholar himself in eleven districts of Orissa. More than one decade of field work resulted in the discovery of as many as 94 new rock art shelters that preserve as many as 6778 rock pictures, of which 2425 (35.78%) are paintings and 4353 (64.22%) are engravings. And out of 106 rock art shelters, while 49 (46.22%) shelters document engravings, 18 (16.98%) shelters report engravings along with paintings and 39 (36.80%) shelters are exclusively with paintings (Table - 2), a rare phenomenon, not reported so far from any other region in the Sub-continent of India (Pradhan 2001).

The rock art sites are distributed across the State in the districts of Bargarh, Cuttack, Jharsuguda, Kalahandi, Keonjhar, Khurda, Mayurbhanj, Nuapada, Sambalpur, Sundargarh and Suvarnapur. The two districts of Sundargarh and Sambalpur located in Western Orissa account for highest concentration of rock art sites in the state. The obvious reason for such distribution is probably because of the favourable geomorphological situation; roughly corresponding to the Vindhyan sandstone formations of Central India, which accounts for more than one third of the country's rock art heritage. Western part of Orissa is an extension of the Chhotanagpur plateau and the Chhatishgarh basin. The geomorphological set up of this area is comparable to the geomorphological set up of the rock art sites of Central India. Here in Orissa the rock formation is represented by the sedimentaries of fossiliferous, purple, ferruginous sand stone, silt stone, shales and grits. The rocks are soft, medium grained sand stones and red shale of Cuddapah group, which weathers easily. Sandstone hills topped by extensive plateaus with thick vegetation are dissected by several seasonal and perennial streams and nallas. It is at the escarpments that the nature has carved out cavities of varying dimensions. Such naturally formed rock cavities and rock shelters mostly situated near a water hole or a perennial stream hidden behind dwindling foliage preserve the Prehistoric relics in the form of paintings and engravings on the walls and ceilings of the shelters along with stone artefacts lying embedded on the floors of the shelters. Besides the sand stone formations rock art is also documented in granite and quartzite formations, which is very limited in number. No instance of engraving is noticed in the quartzite formations while only one instance of engraving is seen in granite in Suvarnapur. The distribution pattern is; a) 86 rock art shelters in sand stone formation, b) 14 rock art shelters in granite formation and c) 06 rock art shelters in quartzite formation.

The subject matter of the rock pictures is by and large non-thematic and non-figurative abstract patterns and motifs in the midst of a few animal forms. The patterns and motifs include a host of triangles resembling female genitals, honeycombs, rhomboids, grids, diamond chains, serpentines, cross hatches, dots, brackets and a series of geometric and non-geometric intricate and enigmatic patterns resembling more or less with carpets, nets, saws, denticulate, blades, harpoons etc. repeatedly drawn in paintings as well as in engravings. They often vary from simplest dots and lines to more elaborate and complex square or rectangular or oval shapes, filled with a series of parallel vertical or horizontal or wavy or criss-cross lines. In Central India such motifs are used for filling the body of human and animal figures (Wakankar and Brooks- 1976: 97) where as in Orissa they are independent patterns. Palm, foot and cupules are the popular motifs both in engraving and in paintings (in paintings dots have taken the place of cupules). Repeated representation of the same pattern in engraving as well as in painting give an impression as if they were meant for transmission of some kind of a symbolic message like the icons of the Sauras (Mohapatra 1991 and Pathy 1996). Unlike elsewhere in the Sub-continent, engravings constitute a special feature in Orissa, which co-exists with paintings, both being complementary to each other. A great variety of animals are also depicted. They include deer, antler, sambar, boar, tortoise and lizard, hare, rhinoceros, tiger, porcupine, snake, lizard, frog, fish, tortoise portrayed in different moods and postures such as standing running, looking back, up and down. Triangles resembling female genital is the main subject matter in the petroglyphs of Orissa. Anthropomorphs are totally absent in engraving and almost negligible in paintings compared to other subject matter. Horned head gear, stiff body wielded with stick and drawn in dark red was the feature in the earlier phase. Triangular body with the head represented by a dot and wielded with sword and shield and musical drums in white is the feature in the paintings of later period.

#### I. Painting

Pigments used for drawing these pictures were drawn from natural earth colours. Red is (ferric oxide), readily available in the locality and often in the rock crevices itself as in Manikmoda

and Rail UKT - X and Hathigumpha. Locally known as geru, haematite is also found in the lateritic deposits in the locality.

The earth pigments were ground up into fine powder in the natural depressions of the bed rock either with a hammer-stone or with a pestle, as found from the habitational deposits of the rock shelters. Pulverised colours were mixed with water and then painted in twig or hair brush. Scholars often speculate about the use of binding materials like glue, blood and animal fat, which were believed to have been mixed with the pigment before use. But no such evidence so far, has come from any part of India (Tiawri 1990: 56-59). Earth colour like geru and lime have natural adhesive properties which probably accounts for their popularity as a much sought after colour even today. In this context the scientific observations of Henri Moissan may be mentioned. A Nobel Prize winner in Chemistry, who for the first time revealed through his laboratory test that the paints used in Palaeolithic paintings consisted of hematite or Manganese oxide mixed with Calcite and small grains of quartz. He did not find the trace of any organic material that could have been used as a binder (Jan Clottes 1997 : 37). In a very few cases of paintings the original pigments of ochre have survived. In most cases the original pigments have long since been weathered and washed away. What we see in rock paintings, to day, is the stains left by the chemical oxidation of ochre. After application of the paste of ochre the finer microscopic particles in ochre penetrate into the pores of the rock surface where they undergo a process of oxidation in a given time and humid climatic condition. As a result of this even though the original pigments have long since been washed away the rock surface is left with a deep stain of the pigment, which at places are concealed and preserved by a thin and transparent patina of silica. Sometimes the patina is so thick that the underlying paintings remain invisible as observed at LMD-II. They become visible in rainy seasons when they get moist by rain water particles.

## II. Engraving

Engraving is a special feature documented in the rock art of Orissa. Out of 106 rock shelters while 49 (46.22%) sites document only engravings and 18 (16.98 %) shelters document engraving along with paintings.

The techniques adopted for engravings are varied. The contour is usually prepared by deep incised lines. The groove in cross-section has the shape of "V" or "U". The groove measure 2.00 X 0.75 cm in average in width and depth respectively. The grooves and the lines are not always regular. The degree of irregularity denotes to the quality of the image. It is a difficult task to ascertain exactly what tools were used for preparing these petroglyphs. It is quite probable to presume that some pointed stone implements like burins, gravers and pointed quartz crystals were used. Though no definite tool has yet been found; the deep grooves and firm lines suggest that a pointed stone chisel was struck by a hammer to execute the engraved lines. The other aspect of the engravings is the polished grooves, which was achieved either by rubbing a pointed stick of hard wood and moist sand or by rubbing moist hematite or the application of both, one after the other because in most cases the grooves retain hematite of different degree what we prefer to call "pictoglyph" or pigmented engraving. While the earlier underlying forms, patterns and animals are drawn with broad outlines, the incisions in the overlying later figures are thin and shallow, which speaks of the perfection and maturity the artist had attained in the later executions. Any geometrist would envy the precision in which lines have been drawn on the rough and tough surface of the rock.

Another style noticed in the rock pictures is the scooping of the inner surface after the contour line of an image is drawn. The shallow depression was possibly made by striking a hard pointed stone that produces small indentations. Like the grooves in engraving the scooped out surface is then finished by the application of pointed wooden stick and moist hematite as evident from the polished and smooth surface that retains traces of hematite and the recovery of faceted lumps of haematite from the rock shelters. Deer and lizard drawn by this technique are very impressive and artistic in delineation of their figure in silhouette.

It is interesting to note that the rock art sites in Orissa are locally known either as Lekhamoda meaning rock shelter with writing (lekha = writing and moda = shelter (moda is a corrupt pronunciations of madua meaning shelter), or Ushakuthi meaning worship hall or ritual chamber (Usha = worship or ritual and kuthi = hall or chamber) or Ushakupa meaning ritual cavity (Usha = ritual and kupa = cavity), or Lekhapathar meaning stone that has got writing (Lekha = writing and pathar = stone). Often they are associated with the epic heroes such as Rama, Sita and Bhima, who believed to have stayed there during their exile and accordingly named the rock shelters as Bhima-



mandali, Pandava Bakhara(chamber), Sitakund, etc. Lekhamoda and Ushakuthi are the two popular generic names applied to the rock art shelters irrespective of their locations and subject matter of depiction. Local people identify one Ushakuthi or one Lekhamoda from the other by identifying the hill in which it is located such as Deulluga-Ushakuthi or Ulapgarh-Ushakuthi. Sometimes the reserve forests are named after the rock shelters like the reserve forest of Ushakothi near Rajbahal or the reserve forest of Chhenga pahad near Kanika in Sundargarh district and the reserve forest of Vikramkhol in Jharsuguda district. It is an usual practice with the Hindus and tribals living in the plains to decorate and beautify their places of worship with a great variety of alpanas or colourful designs drawn mostly in red, black, white and yellow. Hindus make elaborate paintings in their houses, made out of the pulverized paste of rice, during the harvesting seasons. Sauras, a primitive tribe, make elaborate ritual paintings in their houses as a way of their life. Hence it is quite natural for the local people to attribute the works of art in the rock shelters to some kind of ritualistic significance of the past or of the heavenly and semi-heavenly bodies, as they believe, and call them as Ushakothi or Ushakupa. The local people, however, do not attach any special significance to these rock art sites. To them the works of art in the shelters are the works of the heavenly bodies or that of the ghosts. They even often consider it a taboo to touch such works of art, which probably acted as blessings in disguise for the antique art from spoliation and disfigurement by human vandalism. Whatever disfiguration these rock shelters have suffered like the ones at Manikmoda, Vikramkhol, Ushakupa and Ulap are from the picnickers and tourists coming from outside and not from the local people. Probably because of this local belief most of the rock art shelters survive in their natural state of preservation and have escaped major onslaught of human vandalism.

### III. Antiquity and Chronology

Another important aspect of the Rock art of Orissa is the material culture recovered from these painted and engraved shelters. Investigations revealed that about 65% of them yielded microliths and about 12% yielded pottery. In order to ascertain the exact nature of the material culture buried in the floors of these rock shelters trial excavations were conducted by the author in Feb-March 1995 at LMD VI (Lekhamoda-VI) (21054'.251"N and 83044'.168"E; MSL -348 M.) located in the reserve forest of Chhenga pahad in Hemgir tehsil of Sundargarh district (Pradhan 2001 : 47 - 55) . The rock shelter was selected for two reasons. It preserves both engravings and painting along with an occupational deposit.

The excavation revealed that microliths dominated the assemblage of artefacts from the bottom to the top of the habitational deposit in the rock shelter. The microliths at the bottom is aceramic and is devoid of its association with round and polished stone implements or ring stones. This may be attributed to the Mesolithic period when the rock shelter was first occupied. In layers (1) and (2) the microlithic industry was primarily based on blades followed by points. A large number of parallel sided blades are retouched. Simple points are made of both flakes and blades whereas crescent points are mostly made on blades. Hence the industry may be called an assemblage of "blade and point". Barring a few broken and large sized tools, the average size of the microliths varied from 16 x 4 x 2 mm to 26 x 6 x 3 mm. The size of the tools depended on the size of the blades taken out from the fluted cores found in large number in the context. The presence of triangles and trapezes along with the retouched parallel sided blades made the industry geometric; an advanced stage of the Mesolithic technology. The occurrence of crescent points made on blades is another feature attributing to this hypothesis. Crescent is present in all the microlithic industries ranging from the Mesolithic to the Chalcolithic through the Neolithic. It serves as a cutting tool when mounted in a sickle or when in the form of a transverse arrowhead or barb as a hunting implement. While the occurrence of points is indicative of hunting subsistence economy the presence of single side-backed blades along with concentric points and trapezes is suggestive of some cutting implements, either singly or in composite tools like the sickle blades. Scrapers have largely been made on the flakes and blades and a few are also made on cores.

The occurrence of burins and graters in the assemblage gains significance in view of the presence of the rock-engravings on the wall of the shelter. Burins and graters are very effective in making line drawings through incisions on the sand stone. Engravings in the rock shelter were presumably drawn with the help of these tools. The faceted haematite nodules found from layer (2) were presumably moistened and rubbed in the grooves for colouring the engravings. Taking into account the other associated materials like microliths, Neolithic celts, hammer and ring stones and pottery in association with faceted haematites the engravings on the wall may be assigned to layer

(2) which in turn may be assigned to the Neolithic – Chalcolithic period. The 20 cm deposit below layer (2) and atop the bed rock bearing non-geometric microliths may be assigned to the late Mesolithic period, when the rock shelter was first occupied. Some of the engravings may be assigned to this period as well. The occurrence of large number of simple artefacts, both finished and broken, along with a large quantity of chips, flakes, cores and pebbles amply suggest that the rock shelter was a habitation-cum-factory site from the Mesolithic to the Chalcolithic periods. The shelter, however, was continued to be occupied during the early historic period as well as illustrated by the paintings of human figures wielded with sword and shield and musical drums and the discovery of iron chisel from the layer (1) of the habitational deposit.

#### IV. Pounding holes

Another significant aspect noticed in the rock shelters is the presence of quite a good number of circular holes on the floors of the rock shelters. They are conical or funnel-shaped in profile. Measuring from 8 to 24 cm in diameter at the mouth and from 6 to 38 cm in depth the inner surface of these holes are smooth. Their distributions are very wide and are also found in open flat rock surface as well. Scholars often identify them as cup marks and cupules. When enquired the local people identify them as grinding and pounding holes. Even today the tribals like Sauras and Juangs use portable stones with such holes for grinding and pounding the grains. In this context one rock painting from the rock shelter at Kathotia explains the functional significance of such holes in the rock shelters. In the picture a woman is shown grinding pounding in a conical hole with the help of a stick like the Saura woman pounding today for removing husk from the grains. In every Saura house hold such stones are laid on the floor for grinding and pounding the grains. The tribals appear to have retained this as a continuity of tradition. The presence of the grinding holes in the rock shelters thus further supplements that the shelters were habitation sites.

#### Ethno-archaeological perspective

In the background of the above discussions an attempt is made here to show how ethnographic information on the production of art as noticed in primitive tribal societies can be used in the interpretation of archaeological assemblages of rock art; an Endeavour to apply the Middle Range Theory linking contemporary human behavior with the archaeological record. The use and abuse of ethnographic analogy has been an area of debate between archaeologists and anthropologists. The ethnographic interpretation of rock art initiated by Tylor (1973), Spencer and Gillen (1899), Breuil (1952), Binford (1967), Morwood (1975) was seriously objected by Laming (1959) and Leroi Gourhan (1968) who held the view that Paleolithic art should be interpreted in its archaeological context in its “own language, and not in the accents of nineteenth century...” (Leroi-Gourhan 1965:35). Clegg (1985) and Frankel (1995) also held identical view by saying that the notion of continuity of tradition from past to present in Aboriginal society is more apparent than real – as viewed through our “ethnographic spectacles”; and emphasized on interpreting rock art with archaeological data only. They consider rock art as a vast reservoir of database of the past human behavior and therefore form a part of the wider scientific discipline of archaeology.

Notwithstanding the role of archaeology in interpreting rock art certain patterns and motifs including some figurative representations remain beyond recall and convincing explanation. It is a human instinct to question what does a pattern or motif mean? In the absence of a satisfactory explanation we are prone to attribute ritualistic and enigmatic significance. In such a handicap situation ethnographic analogy may be applied as one of the many possibilities for generating ideas for the explanation of rock art. In the words of Morwood (1992:2) “in the study of prehistoric art, ethnographic case studies which document the functional relationship between art, ideology, social organisation, resource use, and the transforming processes by which the material evidence for these relationships is incorporated into the archaeological record, have obvious utility”. Such information can be used as a source of ideas for explaining structural paltering in prehistoric art system. Tacon (1992:11-19) discussing on the validity of ethnographic interpretations holds the view,

“Analogy adds an ethnographic perspective to prehistoric data and provides models that may be appropriate for the understanding of archaeological data. Analogies should not be drawn at random, however. They should be carefully considered and, whenever possible, based on a culture or cultures historically related to the prehistoric people under study. This direct historical approach ... is the most straightforward form of analogical deduction and assumes the observed practice is a development, with an unknown but limited degree of change, from observed earlier data.

“When a group of people has not surviving counterparts, analogies should be based on cultu-



res that exploit similar environments in similar ways. In other words, the culture under study and the culture from which analogies are drawn should inhabit similar ecological environments and be at a similar subsistence level. This “parallel” analogy cannot be used to focus on specific but is useful in interpreting processes or modes of operation of classes of data. Analogies can even be drawn from diverse cultures if the class of data examined relates to ecological and subsistence variables in a known manner. Wherever possible, analogies should not be used on their own. Their most useful use is for the suggestion of hypothesis that can be accepted or rejected by other means.”

Analogies should not be confused with factual data. Since human behaviour, by and large is more resistant to change, analogies should be carefully drawn for interpretation. Religion and iconographic representations of religious beliefs are particularly resistant. Discussing about the change in human behaviour Nicholson (1976) and Schapiro (1953), hold the view that, only under very strong pressure fundamental beliefs and symbolic meanings change over the centuries. This is especially true of religious iconography and art associated with ideology. However, such pressure (such as acculturation) can be detected in the archaeological and historical records and can be taken into account accordingly. To quote Tacon “In fact, analogy use in the interpretation of prehistoric art and religion can be one of the most illuminating investigative tools available, but it should always be combined with other approaches”.

One of the most controversial formulations of rock art interpretation is the neuropsychological model propounded by Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1988: 202) in 1988. The model owes its origin to the ethnography of the southern San (Bushmen) in Africa, according to which it is the Shamans who executed the paintings and engravings as experienced during an altered state of consciousness. The model states that the human neuropsychological system generates a range of luminous percepts that are independent of light from an external source. These visual phenomena generally take geometric forms such as grids, zigzags, dots, and spirals and are experienced as incandescent, shimmering, moving, rotating, and sometimes enlarging patterns that grade in to one another and combine in bewildering arrays. Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1988: 203-204) further expanded the model to three stages that appear to be common in the progression of mental imagery during altered state of consciousness. The first stage is the perception of simple geometric shapes, which they termed entopic. In the second stage subjects try to make sense of these images by elaborating them into iconic forms. In other words, the brain attempts to recognize construe the perceived images as culturally meaningful items (for example a grid may represent a giraffe). The final stage marks the transition to fully iconic hallucinations, in which the images are often associated with culturally influenced items, memories or powerful emotional experiences.

Taking into account the aforesaid discussion on the relevance of ethnographic interpretation of rock art the vast wealth of Saura art is being discussed. Sauras are an important and colourful Tribes of Orissa, known for their paintings. Notwithstanding the presence of 62 tribes in Orissa the tribe was chosen for ethnographic study in view of their rich heritage in paintings and engravings, a phenomenon unique to the rock art of Orissa. They subsist on exclusive exploitation of the natural resources by hunting of wild animals, birds, reptiles; gathering of edible fruits, roots and leaves; selling fire wood and partly by terrace cultivation on the hill slopes.

For drawing the ethnographic analogy the following methodology was adopted, during the collection of data drawn from ten villages in each case.

(i) Individuals and village elders conversant with the community traditions and different aspects of art and religion were interviewed.

(ii) The artists who produced the art and the priests who were associated with consecrating or propitiating the art were interviewed.

(iii) The heads of the household who regularly gets the paintings drawn in their respective houses were interviewed.

(iv) The works of art were photographed along with their artists.

The data so obtained were then compared to the similar data collected by Elwin (1951; 1955;), Mahapatra (1991), Dash (1991), Patnaik (1991), Prusty (1991), Behuria and Dash (1991), Dash (1992), Mohanty et al. (1992), Sahoo (1992), Kanungo (1992), Behuria (1992), Patnaik (1992) and Pathy (1996).

The comparative study reveals that the beliefs, myths and the rituals associated with the entire process of production of Saura paintings wherever it is practised have largely remained unchanged. During the last 50 years since Elwin (1951, 1955) documented whatever little changes are noticed as a result of acculturation, or expansion of modern education or use of synthetic colours procu-

red from the local markets, have failed to distort the basic character and functional goal as the art is conceived from the socio-religious context of the community wherein art performs an important function in the Saura way of life unlike the modern society where art is either a leisure-time or a highly specialised activity; making it truly art for art sake. Because the art is inspired and directed by religion the creation of the paintings involves an elaborate activity, which is almost standardised and continued with a great respect and veneration.

When the primitive mind fails to comprehend the cause of unnatural tragedies like earthquake, burnt of the lightning, killer epidemics, even attacks by tiger or other ferocious animals, attribute the cause to malevolent gods and spirits who need to be propitiated and appeased by drawing icons. The icons or the pictograms (Mahapatra 1991:11) also described as pictographs (Elwin, 1951:183) are conceived and created in three stages. In stage one the shaman identifies the spirit or the power that has caused the disease, or death or that needs to be propitiated for the welfare of the family-whose icon to be drawn. In stage two the icon is drawn on the house wall either by the artist (Ittamaran) or the Shaman (Kuranmaran) if he knows how to draw. And in stage three the icon is consecrated by the shaman through an elaborate ritual involving invocations to all gods & spirits of the Saura world and the particular spirit, in whose honour the icon is prepared, to come and occupy the house. All sorts of fruits, roots, grains, corns including wine were offered and finally either a goat or a fowl is sacrificed followed by family or community feast.

When a member of the family falls ill or the family experiences or apprehends of any unusual happenings in the household the village shaman is invited to find out the cause of such suffering i.e. which malevolent spirit that is causing the problem and desires to be propitiated. In order to identify the malevolent spirit the shaman rubs white rice (aura or unboiled rice) on a winnowing fan and simultaneously utters incantations until the spirit is searched out. When the spirit is identified the shaman informs the head of the household about the spirit and the icon to be drawn in honour of the spirit.

Then the head of the house contacts the picture-man or the ittamaran for a date to draw the icon. Necessary arrangements are made. The day before the icon is drawn the designated house wall is given a red wash with the help of locally available haematite clay (geru) mixed with water by the housewife. If the artist does not belong to the same village he comes to the house the evening before he is to start the work. If the shaman and the householder are not clear in their dream about whose picture to be drawn, then the ittamaran sleeps besides the wall, designated for painting, with a view to getting a dream. And usually in the next morning "he knows exactly what he has to do". In the morning the artist and the other members of the family take their bath. The housewife in her empty stomach places the ritual rice, fruits, vermilion, lamp, ghee, incense sticks and a pot of wine next to the wall for painting. She also prepares a white paste made out of pulverized-powder of white rice mixed with water and hands over the white paste to the ittamaran for drawing the icons.

The ittamaran before drawing the icons invokes the blessings of important gods and spirits, he then offers some wine on the earth and on the wall where the painting is proposed to be drawn and says, as documented by Elwin (1951 : 187) "I am an ignorant fellow : I know nothing : but I have been told to make you a house. If I make any mistake, do not punish me, for it will not be my fault". He himself takes some wine before settling down to the work. He uses a brush made of either bamboo split or a twig from khejur. He then concentrates in drawing the picture on the red canvas on the wall with white pigments. He conceives the total layout of the painting. He visualises the entire composition in accordance with the occasion and decides the format suitable to the composition and wall space available. Since the central theme of most Saura icon is to make a house for the supernatural and ancestral spirits, it is represented by a square or a rectangle. Hence the artist begins by sketching the outline of the frame and then proceeds to fill it with human figures representing the spirits in honour of whom the icon is drawn.

In drawing a human figure he first makes an outline of the body, either with a single triangle or with two opposed triangles that meet tip to tip. He then fills the triangles with additional application of white pigments. Lines are then drawn at the bottom for legs & in the sides for hands. A dot is given at the top for the head. In drawing the animals he follows the similar technique. For an elephant he draws a rectangular or oval body then adds legs, tail, head and trunk. The space within is filled with white and finally the rider is drawn. A horse is made with two opposite triangles placed horizontally and then legs, tail, head and rider are drawn in sequence. Care is taken to indicate the diagnostic traits of the animals like deer's horn, bull's hump, monkey's tail & boar's snout



After the painting is completed the Shaman is called who, through his incantations, invites the spirit in whose honour it is made to come and inspect it. The shaman goes in trance; the spirit comes upon him and utters its criticism through his lips. Often the spirit complains of not giving a comb that was so dear to him, or a bicycle that he was riding, or the dog he had petted when he was alive. The deficiencies are immediately compensated by the ittalmaran, thereby the composition gets overcrowded. After the picture is completed to the satisfaction of the spirit or God the elaborate ritual of consecrating the icon is performed by the shaman. Flowers, fruits, roots, rice, grain, corns, vermilion, incense sticks, ghee and wine previously arranged are offered. Finally a fowl or a goat depending on the financial ability of the person is sacrificed. The blood of the sacrificed animal is smeared on the painting. The shaman concludes the proceedings by suspending a new earthen pot from the roof against the picture. The pot contains a portion of the offerings like white rice, cooked food, bidi (country cigarette), coins, garlic, corn and grains. After the ritual is over the householder hosts a feast for his kith and kin with meat and wine. The ittalmaran and the shaman break their fast by joining the feast. Sometimes the householder makes a token payment to the ittalmaran and the shaman, though it is not binding or fixed.

The ittal so drawn is regarded as a little temple within the house - the one-dimensional home of the dead, the heroes and the gods. Offerings are made before the pictures on every ceremonial occasion like the first eating ceremony known as adurs of mango or kandula and the harvesting festivals. The icon is kept preserved and worshipped until it is repeated the next year. Since the paintings are repeated in the same wall and on the same space again and again one can observe the earlier paintings dimly behind the bright outlines of the latest paintings.

The icons include drawings of men, women, animals, birds, lizards, flowers, plants, heavenly bodies like sun, moon, stars; agricultural and hunting implements and weapons; means of transport like bicycle, jeep, train, aeroplane; household furniture like tables, chairs, cots etc. and other conceivable things the Sauras are exposed to. The popular motifs next to human figures are peacock, monkey, lizard, horse, elephant and dog. The implements widely depicted are sickle, bow & arrow, ploughshare, spear and gun. Banana plant laden with fruits is a popular motif. Trees laden with beehives are another popular motif .

Elwin categorized these icons into the following seven types;

- (i) Icons designed to promote or preserve the fertility of the crop.
- (ii) Icons dedicated to avert disease
- (iii) Icons made to assist easy childbirth.
- (iv) Icons made in honour of tutelary.
- (v) Icons made in honour of the dead.
- (vi) Icons made for those who have gone abroad - (the tea gardens of Assam).
- (vii) Icons representing hills and shrines

Besides the above there are other situations when the icons are made. For example; (i) when some deities or spirits get tired while passing by the village and want to halt cause illness to some one in the village and demand an icon for rest; (ii) when somebody does not offer tobacco to the forest deity (Benasum) while carrying on forest activities is inflicted with illness. For a cure an icon has to be drawn in honour of Benasum; (iii) when the son does not continue with the shamanistic tradition of the father, the spirit of the deceased father and of the deities become unhappy and inflict illness demanding icon for cure, (iv) when some deities or entities get tired of isolation or loneliness convey their desire for an icon in the dream of the householder. Non-compliance causes illness., (v) when mother's breast becomes dry and the child suffers, icon for Tutiyumsum (deity of mother's breast & nipple) is drawn. The list is long.

Thus for any thing and everything the Sauras draw icons for their general well being and success in their struggle for survival. The life-style of the Sauras who live in close interaction with supernatural entities, is unique and different from the other primitive communities of the state. Art, prompted by sources of beliefs and myths, form a part and parcel of the Saura life in their struggle for existence. Elwin aptly remarked, "among the Hill Saoras there is no art that is not inspired and directed by religion..." He further states that in the pictographs one can see "in a remarkably vivid manner how cult and myth can move a people to some sort of artistic expression; here are the records of their dreams, their eschatological hopes and fears, the dramatization of their theological beliefs. And these things are set out in a style, which, however crude it may seem to the sophisticated eye, is to them a triumph of technical achievement, a support to tribal morale, a cause of pride and



self-respect". (Elwin 1951: 212-14).

The icons mostly include the deities and their associates and attributes. For example, the earth goddess is associated with hoe / plough share and earthworm. The fertility goddess is associated with a plantain tree laden with bananas or a woman with a pot on her head. The forest deity is associated with hunting & cutting, implements like bow and arrow, spear, axe, knife gun and dog along with game like deer, antler, boar etc.

Lizard is a pet of the underworld entities. The colourful peacock largely found in the surrounding is the guardian of the icon. The icons are mostly symbolic and rarely abstract. They are made with a purpose rather than for display. They are for the eyes of the spirit, not of men. Hence, they are kept hidden behind pots and gourds, suspended from the roof right against the paintings. In fact, it is desirable that human beings do not look at them for there is always danger that a careless word or an unguarded giggle may offend the spirit. The women are not allowed to touch them during their menstrual period.

Besides paintings the Sauras also do a bit of carving and engraving of the village shrine and the image of the village deity Sahibosum and other household objects and artefacts like the wooden measuring pot (mani), the liquor container (dani), ear rings (jhumpi), musical instruments like flute (tiruidipet), kendra (an musical instrument resembles a violin) (ranai), drum (tudum), etc hunting implements like bow (yanga), arrow (aam), axe (angi), catapult (labbar), sword (kadip), spear (sel-la), knife (katru), etc. While icons (paintings on walls) are strictly religious and ritualistic engravings on artefacts are secular art.

However, as a result of expansion of modern education, group activities of the Christian missionaries and close interaction with the adjoining Hindu communities this rich tradition of Saura art is on the verge of extinction. Those who have converted to Christianity have completely abandoned the tradition of wall painting as they no more live in the Saura world of primitive belief. The percentage of converts among the Sauras is now more than 20%. Non-convert, educated and affluent Sauras living in the plains have discarded making icons as superstitious and blind beliefs. In the village San Kujendri (in Gunpur tehsil of Rayagada district) with a settlement of more than 350 Saura houses the author could document paintings in only 12 houses. The author was disappointed not to find a single painting in Dambasara, another Saura village in the same locality. Even with the Hill Sauras the tradition of making icons is on the wane on account of the expensive ritual it involves which, a normal Saura subsisting on selling forest products & fire wood and working as agricultural labourer cannot afford, even though he continues to live in the Saura world of supernatural entities. In the village Rijingtal an important hill-settlement of the Sauras in Puttasingh area (in Gunpur tehsil of Koraput district) wall paintings could be documented in seven houses in a settlement of 116 houses.

Because of their proximity with the adjoining Hindu community, the Sauras, through the process of acculturation have started adopting some of the Hindu traits in the paintings and in their religious life. Symbolic representation of the Goddess Laxmi being represented by a Lotus in Saura icon is very interesting. Hindu god Lord Jagannatha, which is considered as the original deity of the Sauras is also found depicted in icons. Despite such elements of intrusion and in a stage of disappearance the Saura pictogram, wherever is practised still retains its originality because of its ritualistic functional character and not as an art for art sake.

Body decoration is another testimony of the artistic impulse of the Sauras. The female tattoo their face, chest, hands and legs. Usual motifs of some human forms and a variety of floral motifs are executed. They believe that such decoration of the body keeps it immune from external dangers. This tradition of tattooing one's body is widely practiced in tribal India, which in turn has also greatly influenced the Hindus of the adjoining areas. The Binjhal girls are tattooed on their ankle on attaining puberty, signifying that she is eligible to beget child or to attain motherhood. On the day of tattoo a feast is hosted for the family and friends over a ritual sanctifying the girl that spreads the message in the community that she is eligible for marriage. Binjhals are another important tribal community in Orissa subsisting on hunting, gathering and limited cultivation. They are hard working and do not sweat even in hard work and hence called Binjhal meaning "non-sweating". They are also known for their bamboo works.

Thus the tribals living in remote isolated areas being cut of from the mainstream of civilization practise a great deal of art as continuity of tradition. The purpose is both magical as practised by the Sauras as well as art for art sake. Elwin (1951 : 2) who made an extensive study on Saura icons remar-



ked, "The art forms and probably so also the process of production and even the underlying ideas, have been inherited by the Sauras as the continuity of tradition." Leroi Gourhan (1968 : 48) aptly remarked "In the life of a society models of weapons change very often, models of tools less often, and social institutions vary seldom, while religious institutions continue unchanged for millennia", which may sound valid for Saura icons. In India the Hindus today in their daily worship recite the same hymns composed and recited by the Rig Vedic Aryans 4000 years before. To quote to Andreas Lommel (1968) "it is impossible to draw a hard and first line between the vanished primitive cultures of the past and those which still survive in different geographical locations in the world, for those of the present are the heirs of the former. For a proper understanding of the primitive cultures and their art, it is necessary to understand the whole range of cultures, from the most primeval ones". Whatever be the motivation behind the creation of rock art, the present discussion brings out certain ethnographic parallels with rock art in terms of colour composition and delineation of the subject matter. Further studies, however, may offer us useful tools for decoding the non-thematic and non-figurative pictorial codes in rock art.

## NOTE

The presentation will be supplemented by 70 visuals that include maps, rock pictures and Saura icons and the whole process of making icons.

## REFERENCES

- Anati, E. 1964 Camonica Valley, Jonathan Cape, London, Thirty Bedford Square.
- Anderson, C.W. 1998 "Rock Paintings in Singanpur", Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Vol.4, No.2: 298-306.
- Bednarik, R.G. 1988 Archaeological Potentials at the Parowan Gap Site", Utah, AURAPCH : 10.
- Behera P.K. 1992 "Prehistoric Rock Art Paintings to Fertility Cult and Other Subjects of Orissa". Pragdhara, 2, 1991-92, : 7-17.
- Behuria, N. 1992 "Myth as the Ideological order among the Juangs". In. R.N. Dash (ed). Art and Culture of the Jung. Orissa Lalit Kala Akademi, Bhubaneswar : 19-25.
- Behuria, N.K. and J. Dash. 1991 "Art, Symbolism and Ritual in a Nonliterate Society : A study of the social context and Modern relevance of Saura icon", In Dinanath Pathy, (ed.), 1991 Tribal Art, Primitivism and Modern Relevance, Bhubaneswar
- Binford, L.R. 1967 Smudge-pits and hide-smoking: the use of analogy in archaeological interpretation. American Antiquity, 32: 1-12.
- Biedermann, Hans. 1992 Dictionary of Symbolism, Translated from the original German by James Hulbert, New York,
- Brentijes, B. 1969. African Rock Art (trans. Anthony Dent), J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., Aldine Press, Letchworth, Hertfordshire.
- Breuil 1952 Four Hundred Centuries of Cave Art (English Edition) Montignac.
- Brodrick, A.H. 1948 Prehistoric Painting, London, Avalon Press Ltd.
- Chakravarti, N.P. 1936 The Vikramkhola Rock Inscription Annual Report of Archaeological Survey of India, 1930-34, I : 229.
- Chakravarty, K.K and R.G. Bednarik. 1997 Indian Rock Art and its Global Context, Delhi (Motilal Banarasidas Publishers Pvt. Ltd. and IGRMS, Bhopal).
- Clegg, J. 1985 Comment on D. Groenfeldt's "The Interpretation of Prehistoric Art", In. Rock Art Research. vol.2 (1) : 35-47.
- Clottes, Jan. 1997 "New Laboratory Techniques and their impact on Palaeolithic cave art :37 In Conkey, Margaret W., Olga Soffar, Deborah Stratmann & Nina. G. Jablonski, (ed) Beyond Art : Pliocene Image and Symbol San Francisco, Memoir of the California Academy of Sciences. No. 23.
- Cockburn, J. 1899 "Cave Drawing in the Kaimur Range, North West Provinces", Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, London :89-97.
- Conkey, Margaret W., Olga Soffar, Deborah Stratmann & Nina. G. Jablonski, (ed) 1997 Beyond Art : Pliocene Image and Symbol San Francisco, Memoir of the California Academy of Sciences. No. 23.
- Dash, R.N. 1991 "Tribal Art of Orissa, its roots and continuity", In Dinanath Pathy (ed.), Tribal Art, Primitivism and Modern Relevance, Bhubaneswar : 92-99.
- Devid Lewis Williams, J. 1983. The Rock Art of Southern Africa (The Imprint of Man Series), Cambridge University Press.
- Elwin, V. 1951 The Tribal Art of Middle India, A personal Record. Oxford University Press : 183-214.
- Elwin, V. 1955 The Religion of an Indian Tribe, Oxford University Press, Bombay.
- Fabri, C.L. 1936 The Vikramkhola Rock Inscription, Editorial remark, Annual Report of Archaeological Survey of India, 1930-34, I : 230.
- Frankel, D. 1995 "The Australian transition : real and perceived boundaries", Antiquity, 69 (265) : 649-55.
- Giedion, S. 1962 The Eternal Present : The Beginnings of Art, Bollingen Foundations, New York
- Gordon, D.H. 1958 The Prehistoric Background of Indian Culture, Bombay, N.M. Tripathi.
- Gordon, D.H. 1960 The Pre-historic Background of Indian Culture, 2nd Edition, Bombay.
- Heizer, Robert F. and Mortine A. Baumhoff 1962 Prehistoric Rock Art of Nevada and Eastern California, University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles.
- Indian archaeology 1969-70 A Review (IAR) : 61.
- Jayswal, K.P. 1933 The Vikramkhola Inscription, Sambalpur District The Indian Antiquary, Vol. LXII : 58-60.
- Leroi-Gourhan, A. 1965 Treasures of Prehistoric Art, Abrams, New York.
- Leroi-Gourhan, A. 1968 The Art of Prehistoric Man in Europe, Thames and Hudson, London.
- Lommel, A. 1966 Landmarks of the World's Art : Prehistoric and Primitive Man, London, Paul Hamlyn.
- Luis Pericot -Garcia, John Galloway and Andreas Lommel

- 1969 Prehistoric and Primitive Art, Thames and Hudson, London
- Mahapatra, S. 1991 Tribal Wall Paintings of Orissa. Orissa Lalit Kala Akademi, Bhubaneswar.
- Mohapatra, G.C. 1982 Notes on the Vikramkhola and Ushakothi Rock Shelters in Orissa, *Man and Environment*, VI, 97-100.
- Morwood, M.J. 1975 "Analogy and the acceptance of theory in archaeology. *American Antiquity*, 40(1) : 111-116.
- Morwood, M.J. 1992 "Introductory essay on ethnography and the archaeological study of art", *Rock Art and Ethnography*, Occasional AURA Publication No.5, Melbourne :2.
- Neumayer, E. 1983 Prehistoric Indian Rock Paintings, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Neumayer, E. 1992 Rock pictures in Orissa. *Puratattva* 1991-92, 22 : 13-24.
- Neumayer, E. 1993 Lines on Stone, The Prehistoric Rock Art of India, Manohar Publisher and Distributors, New Delhi.
- Pathy, D. 1996 The Painted Icons, Wall Paints of the Sauras of South Orissa. Harman Publishing House, New Delhi.
- Patnaik, K.N. 1991 "Primitive Art as the lifeline of Tribal Communities", In Dinanath Pathy (ed.), 1991 Tribal Art, Primitivism and Modern Relevance, Bhubaneswar.
- Pradhan, S. 1995 "Rock Art of Orissa, A study of Regional Style", *Purakala*, 6, 1-2 : 5-13.
- Pradhan, S. 1995-96 "Rock Engraving in the Rock Shelters of Upland Orissa", *Puratattva*, 26 : 32-42.
- Pradhan, S. 1997 "Prehistoric Art", In. P.K. Mishra & J.K. Samal (ed). *Comprehensive History and Culture of Orissa*. Kaveri Books, New Delhi : 46-53.
- Pradhan, S. 2001 Rock Art in Orissa, Aryan Books International, New Delhi
- Prusty, R.P. 1991 "Tradition and Change in Saora Art", In Dinanath Pathy (ed.), *Tribal Art, Primitivism and Modern Relevance*, Bhubaneswar : 100-102.
- Rajguru, S.N. 1950 *Journal of the Kalinga Historical Research Society* : 245.
- Sandors, N. K. 1968 Prehistoric Art in Europe, Penguin Books Ltd. Harmondsworth
- Schapiro, M. 1953 'Style' In A.L. Kroeber (ed.), *Anthropology Today*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 287-312.
- Senapati, N. (ed) 1971 Orissa District Gazetteers, Sambalpur, Cuttack.
- Senapati, N. (ed) 1975 Orissa District Gazetteers, Sundargarh, Cuttack.
- Singh Deo, J.P. 1976 Prehistoric Cave Painting of Jogimath Donger, *The Orissa Historical Research Journal*, Vol.XXII, No.2 : 21-22.
- Smith, V. 1906 "Pigmy Flints", *The Indian Antiquary*, Vol.6 : 185-95.
- Sonawane, V.H. 1984 An important evidence to date rock paintings of Mesolithic period. In K.K. Chakravarty (ed). *Rock Art in India*, New Delhi.
- Sonawane, V.H. 1996 "Rock Paintings of Gujarat", In. R.K. Sharma & K.K. Tripathi (ed.) *Recent Perspectives on Prehistoric Art in India and Allied subjects*, New Delhi.
- Spencer, B. and F.J. Gillen 1899 *The native tribes of Central Australia*, MacMillan and Co., London.
- Tacon, P.S.C. 1991 "If you miss all this story, well bad luck" : Rock art and the validity of ethnographic interpretation in Western Arnhem land, Australia. *Rock Art and Ethnography*, M.J. Morwood & D.R. Hobbs (ed), Occasional AURA Publication No.5, Melbourne : 11-18.
- Taylor, F.J. and Taylor, L.M. 1988 "New Zealand Rock Drawing", *AURAPCH* : 16.
- Theodule, Ribot 1915 "La Pensee symbolique" in *Revue Philosophique*, LXXIV, Paris.
- Tiwari, R. 1990 *Rock Paintings of Mirzapur*, Lucknow.
- Wakankar, V.S. and Brooks, R.R.R 1976 *Stone Age Painting in India*, Bombay, D.P. Taraporewala and Sons Co.
- Zimmer, Heinrich 1990 *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, ed. By Joseph Campbell, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi.