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PLEISTOCENE ART OF THE WORLD

Short articles



LATE PLEISTOCENE ART OF INDIA

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Gist: In India iconic art is preceded by non-iconic art, thus it follows the global phenomenon in the evolution of rock art. The present evidence indicates that transition from non-iconic to iconic art in India happened in late late-Pleistocene period. The evidence is mostly in the form of mobiliary art and is culturally associated with an Upper Palaeolithic industry.

Petroglyphs discovered from Chattaneshwar and Raisen in central India present the appearance of simple motifs for the first time in Indian rock art. At Chattaneshwar in Rajasthan the small and shallow cupules have been arranged in an oval form with a cross inside it, while at Raisen in Madhya Pradesh the motif has been created with the help of an engraved circle with two radiating lines and a few cupules. Mention may be made of simple designs engraved on ostrich eggshell pieces from Patne and Ravishankar nagar, Bhopal. That from Patne has been dated to $25\ 000 \pm 200$ BP. However, a rhomboid design engraved on the cortex of a fluted chalcedony core is an advance form of design. As the flutings are damaging the design, hence it is considered to be Upper Palaeolithic. The core was discovered by V.H. Sonavane from Chandravati in Rajasthan.

V. Wakankar discovered two small disc shaped finished beads from a human skull from an Upper Palaeolithic strata at Bhimbetka. Finished and unfinished ostrich eggshell beads were discovered from Patne in Maharashtra, Bhimbetka and Khaperkheda in the Narmada valley, Madhya Pradesh. The latter is an ostrich eggshell bead manufacturing site which yielded both finished and unfinished beads and debitage along with an Upper Palaeolithic industry.



Ostrich eggshell piece with an engraved simple design on it, from Patne, Maharashtra. Upper Palaeolithic.

We have been studying early petroglyphs in central India under the EIP Project since 2001. It established the unambiguous Lower Palaeolithic antiquity of early petroglyphs from Auditorium cave, Bhimbetka and Daraki-Chattan in the Chambal basin. In this study we have also observed that the petroglyphs from Chattaneshwar and Raisen represent the beginning of motif development and the pre-iconic phase in Indian rock art that precedes the earliest iconic form of rock paintings. Thus, on the basis of circumstantial evidence we have put them in the late Pleistocene. Definitely, this needs to be tested by further scientific research.

When we consider late Pleistocene mobiliary art objects along with petroglyphs of the same period (based on circumstantial evidence), it becomes evident that the development of motif was a pioneering step of the hominins, which later on opened a new world for the manifestation of human creativity in the form of simple and complex designs, animal and human forms. A picture of the dawn of Indian art starts emerging. The pioneering efforts of motif development from cupules and engraved lines were followed by simple ostrich eggshell designs and an advanced form of rhomboid design on the patinated cortex of a chalcedony nodule. The intricate designs, which are earliest in the stratigraphy of rock paintings in India, represent a very advanced stage of designing sense and skill of execution. The creation of simple animal and human forms was the hallmark of human creativity achieved in the following stage. The dynamic green dancers and bovid hunters in the rock art of central India are the earliest such examples of early human creativity in the late-Pleistocene period. Once it was achieved, the artists observed no limit for creating a new world of their perception of reality and imagination in a variety of forms, styles and themes in the following Holocene period.

The early rock paintings in the form of intricate designs and compositions of dynamic dancers superimposing them possess many elements used by modern artists. What is more significant is that these works appear as spontaneous creations, coming right from the heart without any intellectual burden and impositions.

Besides, people in the late Pleistocene period also developed an interest in decorating themselves by using ornaments made of beads, and also the skill and efficiency to produce small and smooth beads on ostrich eggshells. The evidence of late Pleistocene art discussed here is associated with an Upper Palaeolithic industry which ranges in a tentative time span from 40 000 to 10 000 BP.





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