

AN INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN ART

PART I

Textbook in Fine Arts
for Class XI

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एन सी ई आर टी
NCERT

राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
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FOREWORD

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has constantly been working for the past fifty years to bring in an impact on the country's school educational system. In the recent years, specially with the *National Curriculum Framework (NCF) - 2005*, there has been a significant shift in the development of textbooks, their presentation and inter-disciplinary approach, the typology of exercises, etc. All these efforts have made the textbooks child friendly. At the senior secondary stage, which is also the school leaving stage, students should have more options to move further in different fields of higher education or professional education. With this view, the NCERT for the first time took the initiatives of developing the curriculum and syllabi in different art related areas for this stage.

At this stage of education, the emphasis has been given to a professional approach towards the subject of Fine Arts making it a discipline rather than on creating awareness and knowledge, which was generic in nature till secondary classes. The teaching objectives also shift towards sharpening of skills in fine arts and develop a perspective of design and instead of free expression and doing arts emphasis is on students' expressing themselves in their own style and medium. Also, there has been a need to develop a historical perspective of art in context of the world as well as India. Art History is a part of studies of arts and in itself it is a major area of education from which students learn about their cultural heritage.

It was observed that many of the education boards offer Fine Arts as an optional subject at the senior secondary stage which includes painting, sculpture, applied arts or commercial arts. These were reviewed and a new syllabus was formed. Since this course apart from the practical component include theory which introduces students to the art historical heritage of country's diverse art and architecture, the textbook 'An Introduction to Indian Art' has been developed for Classes XI and XII.

The textbook for Class XI extensively covers the tradition of cave paintings in the pre-historic era and their continuation in mural paintings of Buddhist era and later

on in various parts of the country, Buddhist, Jain and Hindu sculptural and architectural developments. During the Indo-Islamic period and before the Mughal rule, another era dawned upon India, which saw massive constructions in the form of forts and palaces. Different aspects of all these styles have been discussed to introduce students with the fabric of India's culture.

The NCERT appreciates the hard work done by the Textbook Development Committee responsible for making this book. We wish to thank the Chief Advisor for this textbook, Professor Ratan Parimoo, Retired Head, Department of Art History and Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts, M. S. University of Baroda, for guiding the work of this committee. It was a challenge for other art historians involved in making of this textbook for students at the school level and their efforts are praiseworthy. We are indebted to the institutions and organisations which have generously permitted us to draw upon their resource materials and personnel. We are especially grateful to the members of the National Monitoring Committee, appointed by the Department of Secondary and Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development under the Chairpersonship of Professor Mrinal Miri and Professor G.P. Deshpande, for their valuable time and contribution. As an organisation committed to the systemic reform and continuous improvement in the quality of its products, NCERT welcomes comments and suggestions which will enable us to undertake further revision and refinement.

New Delhi
September 2012

Director
National Council of Educational
Research and Training

PREFACE

During the nineteenth century (the period of British rule), a few British colonial officers took active interest to study India's past in collaboration with some Indian scholars and it is out of such endeavours that a systematic study of architectural monuments, sculptures and paintings began in the Indian sub-continent. The first attempt in this regard document the monuments as they represent a very visible evidence of the bygone era. Over a period of time with the archaeological explorations and excavations, many art-historical sites were discovered. Decipherment of inscriptions, and coins played a very significant role in our understanding of the past art traditions. With the study of religious texts, history of religion was studied and identification of icons/sculptures and paintings was initiated, which became a dominant area of early scholarship. Study of art history has developed in association with the archaeological studies, however, it is now recognised as a specialised discipline. In the West, mainly in Europe, the art-historical discipline has grown considerably with numerous methodological inputs, whereas in India it is still in the process of developing its investigating mechanisms.

As the study of art history has grown out of extensive documentations and excavations, one finds description of art objects as a prominent method of study. There are a few significant studies of the early twentieth century, where the concerns are addressed beyond mere description. Subsequently, several generations of outstanding Western and Indian scholars of Indian art history have studied the subject at great depth making us realise the glorious past of the Indian civilisation through its creations reflected in the architectural monuments, sculptures and paintings. We can claim a distinct Indian approach to the arts of the building edifices, the sculpture making and the language of painting in comparison with the European art on one hand and the far Eastern art on the other. Therefore, the Indian art historical studies have emerged as a prestigious academic discipline at a university level education.

While political and religious history contributed towards reconstructing historical developments, sculptural and architectural history has been reconstructed within the time-frame of political history. The styles of many monuments and sculptures have been attributed to the dynastic affiliations like the Mauryan art, Satavahana art, Gupta art, etc. Alternatively the periodisations of art follows religious denominations such as the Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic periods. However, such deterministic nomenclatures are only partially useful for understanding the art traditions.

Often the study of art objects is based on two important approaches, (i) formalistic or stylistic analysis and (ii) content and contextual studies. The first category involves study of formalistic characteristics of architecture/sculpture/paintings, whereas the second category concentrates at various levels of content analysis which has several components such as iconographic study, iconology, narrative and semiotics.

Iconography involves identification of images through certain symbols/signs and relevant myths or narrative episodes, whereas iconology involves study of evolution of such signs and symbols in its historical, social and philosophical context. Today, the methodological framework tries to explore various concerns and issues in the process of art productions and attempts to go beyond the traditional meanings. It may be observed that the political intentions of various religious ideologies are yet to become the part of the larger investigative process. Religious ideologies also were instrumental in shaping the social and economic formulations in ancient India. Therefore, it becomes important to study such factors that have influenced art forms. Large body of material has come from the religious sites but it does not mean that there was no art in non-religious domains. Terracotta figurines are the best examples in this category, however, due to space constraint they have been only mentioned but not extensively discussed. In the present text, the authors have tried to move away from the normative traditional descriptive writings to broader development of art and architectural monuments in terms of their stylistic developments as well as their social and political affiliations.

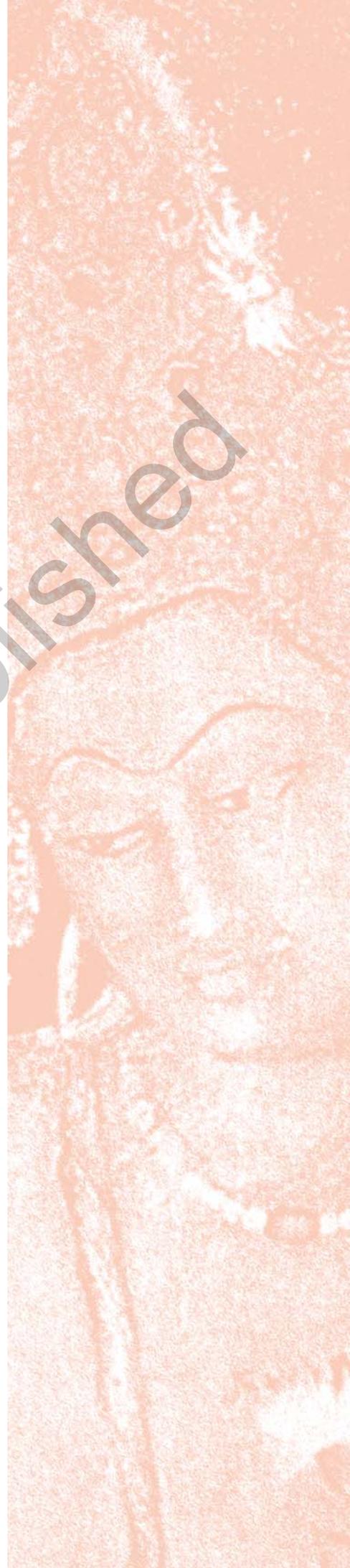
Cultural manifestations have diverse ideologies in the form of architecture, sculpture and paintings. They need to be studied with their religious and social view points, hence, unilinear projection of the cultural tradition needs to be reconsidered as it is away from realities of the ancient past. Different categories of artisans existed in the actual

working situation. A guild of artisans may have been employed by the religious and political authorities for making monuments and accordingly the artisans had to work and devise their execution techniques along with necessary innovations, etc. In this textbook only an introductory outline has been attempted from pre- and proto-historic times till the times of the Islamic monuments during the late medieval period.

Considering the level of the young generation readers belonging to the higher secondary stage, the present book outlines just a few examples to create an understanding of the nature of developments in Indian art. It is not intended to discard such examples which we know are important but all the contributors have made a conscious attempt to present convincing holistic pictures. The chapters in the book provide an outline of different forms of arts from most of the regions of the country.

Human civilisation begins with the emergence of the human being on the earth. In this book a simpler but at the same time a distinct vocabulary has been introduced. The idea is not only to present the vast amount of data available but also to generate interest in understanding the visual traditions of Indian art. For any student of fine arts it is necessary to be aware of the visual tradition in the past as to understand present art production. Understanding of visual tradition enriches visual understanding. Hope the young minds find the book enriching as is intended.

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We are thankful to Ratan Parimoo, *Chief Advisor*, Y.S. Alone, *Advisor* and all the members of the Textbook Development Committee for bringing out this textbook to its present form. Apart from them various people and institutions have been directly or indirectly involved in the development of the syllabus and the textbook, we are grateful to all of them. We especially acknowledge the efforts of Surendra Kaul, the then *Director General*, Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT), who generously permitted us to draw upon the resources of CCRT. We are also grateful to G.P. Bhagoria, *Expert*, Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE).

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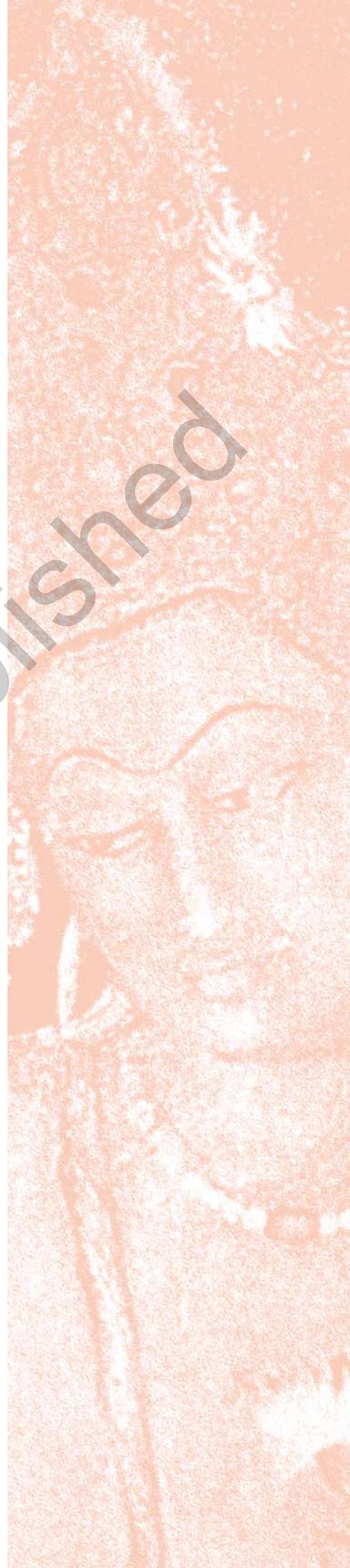
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Gandhiji's Talisman

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test:

Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions?

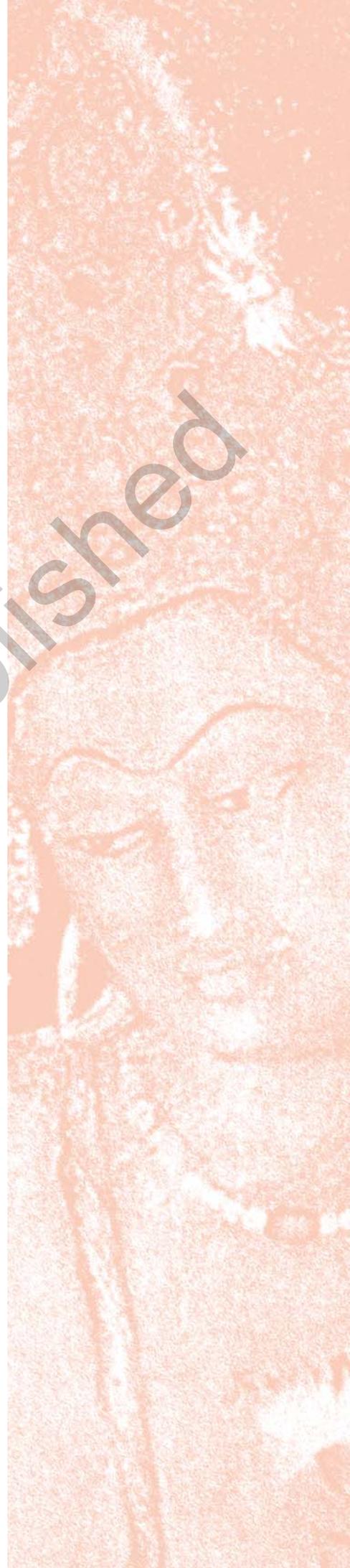
Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away.

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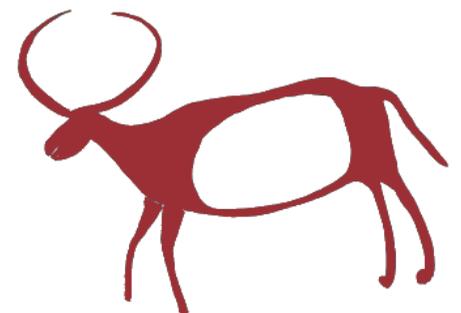
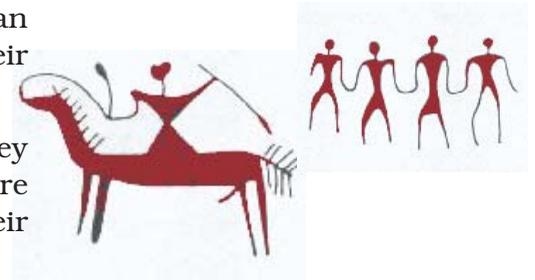
PREHISTORIC ROCK PAINTINGS

THE distant past when there was no paper or language or the written word, and hence no books or written documents, is called prehistory, or, as we often say, prehistoric times. How people lived in those times was difficult to surmise until scholars began to discover the places where prehistoric people lived. Excavation at these places brought to light old tools, pottery, habitats, bones of ancient human beings and animals, and drawings on cave walls. By piecing together the information deduced from these objects and the cave drawings, scholars have constructed fairly accurate knowledge about what happened and how people lived in prehistoric times. When the basic needs of food, water, clothing and shelter were fulfilled people felt the need to express themselves. Painting and drawing were the oldest art forms practised by human beings to express themselves, using the cave walls as their canvas.

Why did prehistoric people draw these pictures? They may have drawn and painted to make their homes more colourful and beautiful or to keep a visual record of their day-to-day life, like some of us who maintain a diary.

The prehistoric period in the early development of human beings is commonly known as the Old Stone Age or the Palaeolithic Age.

Prehistoric paintings have been found in many parts of the world. We do not really know if Lower Palaeolithic people ever produced any art objects. But by the Upper Palaeolithic times we see a proliferation of artistic activities. Around the world the walls of many caves of this time are full of finely carved and painted pictures of animals which the cave-dwellers hunted. The subjects of their drawings were human figures, human activities, geometric designs and symbols. In India the earliest paintings have been reported from the Upper Palaeolithic times.



It is interesting to know that the first discovery of rock paintings was made in India in 1867–68 by an archaeologist, Archibold Carlleyle, twelve years before the discovery of Altamira in Spain. Cockburn, Anderson, Mitra and Ghosh were the early archaeologists who discovered a large number of sites in the Indian sub-continent.

Remnants of rock paintings have been found on the walls of the caves situated in several districts of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Bihar. Some paintings have been reported from the Kumaon hills in Uttarakhand also. The rock shelters on banks of the River Suyal at Lakhudiyar, about twenty kilometres on the Almora-Barechina road, bear these prehistoric paintings. Lakhudiyar literally means one lakh caves. The paintings here can be divided into three categories: man, animal and geometric patterns in white, black and red ochre. Humans are represented in stick-like forms. A long-snouted animal, a fox and a multiple legged lizard are the main animal motifs. Wavy lines, rectangle-filled geometric designs, and groups of dots can also be seen here. One of the interesting scenes depicted here is of hand-linked dancing human figures. There is some superimposition of paintings. The earliest are in black; over these are red ochre paintings and the last group comprises white paintings. From Kashmir two slabs with engravings have been reported. The granite rocks of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh provided suitable canvases to the Neolithic man for his paintings. There are several such sites but more famous among them are Kupgallu, Piklihal and Tekkalkota. Three types of paintings have been reported from here—paintings in white, paintings in red ochre over a white background and paintings in red ochre. These



Hand-linked dancing figures, Lakhudiyar, Uttarakhand



Wavy lines, Lakhudiyar, Uttarakhand

paintings belong to late historical, early historical and Neolithic periods. The subjects depicted are bulls, elephants, sambhars, gazelles, sheep, goats, horses, stylised humans, tridents, but rarely, vegetal motifs.

But the richest paintings are reported from the Vindhya ranges of Madhya Pradesh and their Kaimurean extensions into Uttar Pradesh. These hill ranges are full of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic remains, and they are also full of forests, wild plants, fruits, streams and creeks, thus a perfect place for Stone Age people to live. Among these the largest and most spectacular rock-shelter is located in the Vindhya hills at Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh. Bhimbetka is located forty-five kilometres south of Bhopal, in an area of ten square kilometres, having about eight hundred rock shelters, five hundred of which bear paintings.

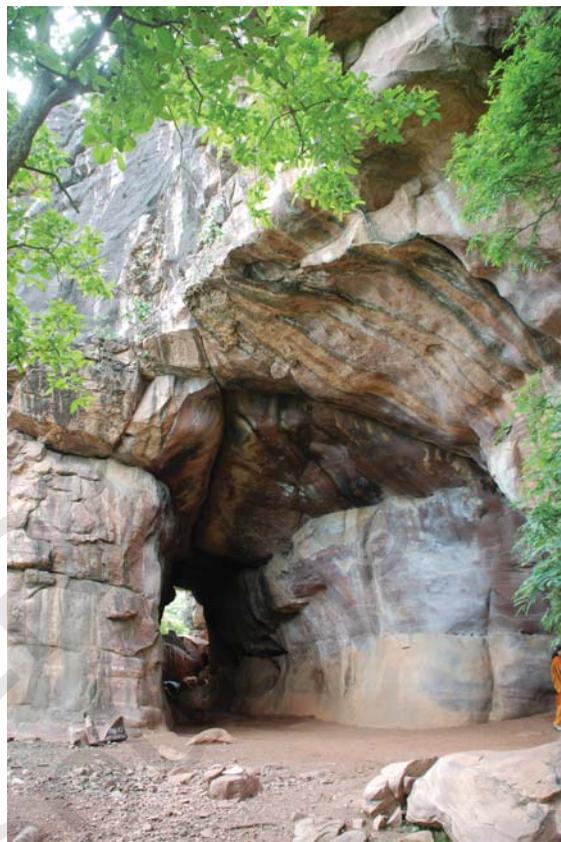
The caves of Bhimbetka were discovered in 1957–58 by eminent archaeologist V.S. Wakankar and later on many more were discovered. Wakankar spent several years in surveying these inaccessible hills and jungles to study these paintings.

The themes of paintings found here are of great variety, ranging from mundane events of daily life in those times to sacred and royal images. These include hunting, dancing, music, horse and elephant riders, animal fighting, honey collection, decoration of bodies, and other household scenes.

The rock art of Bhimbetka has been classified into various groups on the bases of style, technique and superimposition. The drawings and paintings can be categorised into seven historical periods. Period I, Upper Palaeolithic; Period II, Mesolithic; and Period III, Chalcolithic. After Period III there are four successive periods. But we will confine ourselves here only to the first three phases.

Upper Palaeolithic Period

The paintings of the Upper Palaeolithic phase are linear representations, in green and dark red, of huge animal figures, such as bison, elephants, tigers, rhinos and boars besides stick-like human figures. A few are wash paintings but mostly they are filled with



Cave entrance, Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh

Can you figure out what the artist is trying to depict in this painting?



geometric patterns. The green paintings are of dancers and the red ones of hunters.

Mesolithic Period

The largest number of paintings belong to Period II that covers the Mesolithic paintings. During this period the themes multiply but the paintings are smaller in size. Hunting scenes predominate. The hunting scenes depict people hunting in groups, armed with barbed spears, pointed sticks, arrows and bows. In some paintings these primitive men are shown with traps and snares probably to catch animals. The hunters are shown wearing simple clothes and ornaments. Sometimes, men have been adorned with elaborate head-dresses, and sometimes painted with masks also. Elephant, bison, tiger, boar, deer, antelope, leopard, panther, rhinoceros, fish, frog, lizard, squirrel and at times birds are also depicted. The Mesolithic artists loved to paint animals. In some pictures, animals are chasing men. In others they are being chased and hunted by men. Some of the animal paintings, especially in the hunting scenes, show a fear of animals, but many others show a feeling of tenderness and love for them. There are also a few engravings representing mainly animals.

Though animals were painted in a naturalistic style, humans were depicted only in a stylistic manner. Women are painted both in the nude and clothed. The young and the old equally find place in these paintings. Children are painted running, jumping and playing. Community dances provide a common theme. There are paintings of people gathering fruit or honey from trees, and of women grinding and preparing food. Some of the pictures of men, women and children seem to depict a sort of family life. In many

One of the few images showing only one animal, Bhimbetka



of the rock-shelters we find hand prints, fist prints, and dots made by the fingertips.

Chalcolithic Period

Period III covers the Chalcolithic period. The paintings of this period reveal the association, contact, and mutual exchange of requirements of the cave dwellers of this area with settled agricultural communities of the Malwa plains. Many a time Chalcolithic ceramics and rock paintings bear common motifs, e.g., cross-hatched squares, lattices.

Pottery and metal tools are also shown. But the vividness and vitality of the earlier periods disappear from these paintings.

The artists of Bhimbetka used many colours, including various shades of white, yellow, orange, red ochre, purple, brown, green and black. But white and red were their favourite colours. The paints were made by grinding various rocks and minerals. They got red from haematite (known as *geru* in India). The green came from a green variety of a stone called chalcedony. White might have been made out of limestone. The rock of mineral was first ground into a powder. This may then have been mixed with water and also with some thick or sticky substance such as animal fat or gum or resin from trees. Brushes were made of plant fibre. What is amazing is that these colours have survived thousands of years of adverse weather conditions. It is believed that the colours have remained intact because of the chemical reaction of the oxide present on the surface of the rocks.

The artists here made their paintings on the walls and ceilings of the rock shelters. Some of the paintings are reported from the shelters where people lived. But some others were made in places which do not seem to have been living spaces at all. Perhaps these places had some religious importance. Some of the most beautiful paintings are very high up on rock shelters or close to the ceilings of rock-shelters. One may wonder why early human beings chose to paint on a rock in such an uncomfortable position. The paintings made at these places were perhaps for people to be able to notice them from a distance.

The paintings, though from the remote past, do not lack pictorial quality. Despite various limitations such as acute working conditions, inadequate tools, materials, etc., there is a charm of simple rendering of scenes of the environment in which the artists lived. The men shown in them appear adventurous and rejoicing in their lives. The animals are shown more youthful and majestic than perhaps they actually were. The primitive artists seem to possess an intrinsic passion for storytelling. These pictures depict, in a dramatic way, both men and animals engaged in the struggle for survival. In one of the scenes, a group of people have been shown hunting a bison. In the process, some injured men are depicted lying scattered on the ground. In another scene, an animal is shown in the agony of death and the men are depicted dancing. These kinds



Painting showing a man being hunted by a beast, Bhimbetka

Why has the animal been shown so big and man so small?

HUNTING SCENE



Hunting scenes predominate in Mesolithic paintings. This is one such scene where a group of people are shown hunting a bison. Some injured men are depicted lying scattered on the ground. These paintings show mastery in the skill of drawing these forms.

DANCING SCENE



In this picture hand-linked figures in dancing mode are shown. In fact, this is a recurrent theme. It also recalls the dancing scene from the Lakhudiyar rock painting found in Uttarakhand.

of paintings might have given man a sense of power over the animals he would meet in the open.

This practice is common among primitive people of today also. They engrave or paint on rocks as part of the rituals they perform at birth, at death, at coming of age and at the time of marriage. They dance, masked, during hunting rites to help them kill animals difficult to find or kill.

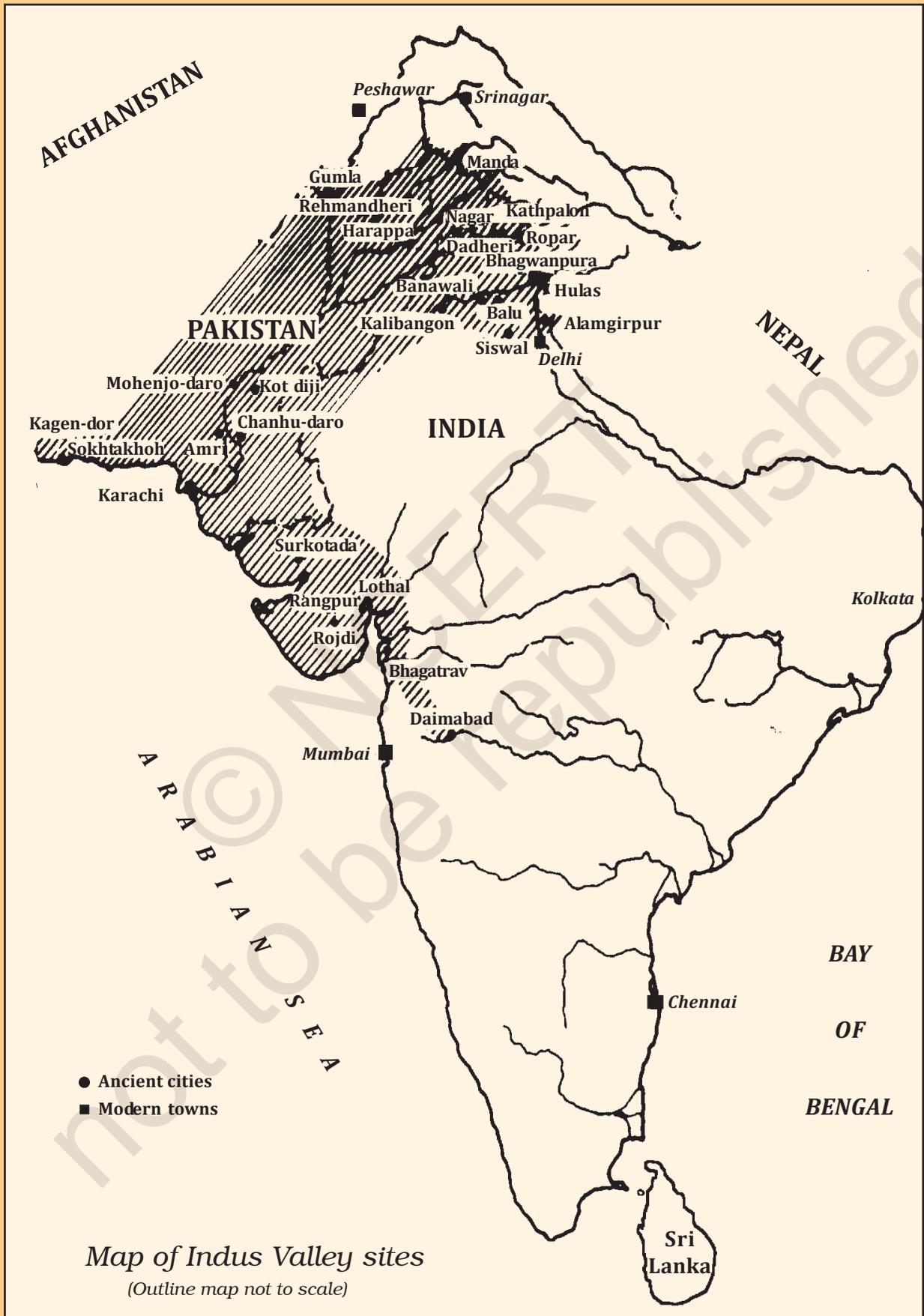
The paintings of individual animals show the mastery of skill of the primitive artist in drawing these forms. Both, proportion and tonal effect, have been realistically maintained in them.

It is interesting to note that at many rock-art sites often a new painting is painted on top of an older painting. At Bhimbetka, in some places, there are as many as 20 layers of paintings, one on top of another. Why did the artists paint in the same place again and again? Maybe, this was because the artist did not like his creation and painted another painting on the previous one, or some of the paintings and places were considered sacred or special or this was because the area may have been used by different generations of people at different times.

These prehistoric paintings help us to understand about early human beings, their lifestyle, their food habits, their daily activities and, above all, they help us understand their mind—the way they thought. Prehistoric period remains are a great witness to the evolution of human civilisation, through the numerous rock weapons, tools, ceramics and bones. More than anything else, the rock paintings are the greatest wealth the primitive human beings of this period left behind.

EXERCISE

1. According to your observation how did the people of prehistoric times select themes for their paintings?
2. What could have been the reasons for depicting more animal figures than human figures in cave paintings?
3. Many visuals of prehistoric cave paintings have been given in this chapter. Among these which one do you like the most and why? Give a critical appreciation of the visual.
4. Other than Bhimbetka, which are the other major sites where these prehistoric paintings have been found? Prepare a report on different aspects of these paintings with pictures or line drawings.
5. In modern times, how have walls been used as a surface to make paintings, graphics, etc?



AFGHANISTAN

Peshawar

Srinagar

Gumla

Manda

Rehmandheri

Nagar

Kathpalon

Harappa

Dadheri

Ropar

Bhagwanpura

Banawali

Hulas

PAKISTAN

Kalibangon

Balu

Alamgirpur

Siswal

Delhi

NEPAL

INDIA

Mohenjo-daro

Kot diji

Kagen-dor

Chanhu-daro

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