

Rock Art of Hazaribagh



By

Bulu Imam

2014

Copyright © Bulu Imam
2014

All rights are reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

Typeset and designed by
Gustav Imam
At Sanskriti Press
Hazaribagh 825301



CONTENTS

Dedication	5
Preface	6
Introduction	10
Maps	20
Chapters	
Chapter1 : Provenance and Early Sources	21
Chapter2 : Some Comparison between the Rockart and Village Art	41
Chapter3 : An Introduction to the rock-art sites	62
Chapter4 : Isco Rockart	74
Chapter5 : Thethangi Rockart	112
Chapter6 : Satpahar Rockart	130
Chapter7 : Khandar Rockart	143
Chapter8 : Saraiya Rockart	156
Chapter9 : Raham Rockart	168
Chapter10: Sidpa Rockart	176
Chapter11: Gonda Rockart	190
Chapter12: Nutangwa Rockart	200
Afterword	226
Conclusion	230
Appendix:	(233-305)
I. Ethno archaeological background of the region	
II. Rockart Sites Survey, INTACH-IGNCA, 2007	
III. Animals In The Rock Art of Hazaribagh (XXIV Valcamonica Symposium, 2011)	
IV. The Art of Contemporary and Pre-historic Societies, International Rock Art Conference, IGNCA, New Delhi, 2012	
V. The Intellectual and spiritual expressions of a Nomadic Tribe, Univ.of Burgos Conference, Spain, 2014	
VI. Comparative traditions in village painting and prehistoric rock art of Jharkhand, XXIV Valcamonica Symposium, 2011	
VII. The historical perspective of Prehistory through a study of Meso-chalcolithic rock art and contemporary tribal mural paintings in Jarkhand, Eastern North India, XXV Valcamonica Symposium, 2013	

Dedicated
by an old rock-art enthusiast
to all young rock-art enthusiasts



Preface

The Hazaribagh region (23° 25' and 24° 48' North Latitude, and 84° 29' and 86° 38' East Longitude) has always been noted for forests and scattered tribal groups including the nomadic trapper-gatherer Birhor tribe who live in leaf houses and do not use bows or throwing weapons of any kind, and reflect a very early form of man. The people have a tradition that their ancestors painted the rock art in the panted sandstone shelters (Khovara) of Hazaribagh district (now including Chatra district) Forty kilometers south of Hazaribagh town is an ancient rift formation, an upper trap or closed basin, through which the Damodar river flows. This is the North Karanpura Valley, now threatened by opencast coal mining due to its rich carboniferous beds. The width of the valley is nearly thirty kilometers and through the middle of it are two series of hill ranges, Mahudi Range in Hazaribagh district, and Satpahar Range in Chatra district, along the Damodar. To the south is the plateau of Ranchi about five hundred feet high and to the north the Hazaribagh range at a similar elevation above the valley. The valley is watered by thirtyseven streams and several major tributaries of the Damodar, which river has been subjected to a series of dams and effluents from coal mines and washeries, so it is a wasted and polluted shadow of its old self, or its pure stream upriver to its source sixty kilometers away.

This valley has seen the birth of Early Man and continues the pattern of prehistoric occupation and development of an upper cataract Pleistocene and Holocene cultures. The first record of palaeolithic tools was by Valentine Ball in 1865 from the region of Tamar in the Ranchi district. Subsequently similar antiquities were recorded from districts of Singhbhum, Ranchi, Hazaribagh of (then) Bihar, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts of Orissa, and some parts of Bengal (1865, 1867, 1874, 1875, 1876, 1878, and 1879). S.C.Roy also recorded prehistoric sites belonging to the Asurs of the Chalcolithic period (1915, 1916, 1920). He was supported by Edward Gait, then Governor of Bihar. The Department of Anthropology undertook a systematic survey of this region under the leadership of N.K.Bose (1958, 1960), D.Sen (1950, 1955, 1957, 1962, 1963), A.K.Ghosh (1962, 1963) and Department of Delhi under leadership of D.K.Chakravarty (1985, 1986, 1987, 1988), and some years back a study

for PhD Thesis on the pre-historic context of the region was undertaken by Manoj Singh under Prof.D.K.Bhattacharya, Dept. of Anthropology.¹

The cluster of rock paintings in over one dozen shelters in the Upper Damodar brought to light by me since 1991 has established a continuation of the Vindhyan series of rockart into the Chota Nagpur hills along with evidence of continuity from lower Palaeolithic into Pleistocene-Holocene cultures. It is significant that a hundred and fifty kilometers to the north another cluster of painted caves had been discovered some years ago by Col.D.R.Prasad of Eastern Command. These shelters are also rich in stone tools. In order to establish a geo-stratigraphy of the Palaeolithic finds trial trenches will have to be dug at rich sites and also establish the alluvial deposits from the banks of river Damodar and its tributaries. Further finds will help to clear the view of the cultural transformation from Palaeolithic to Mesolithic Cultures. This will give an insight into the anthro-archaeological status of the present living tribal culture which seems to be in some ways a remnant of very early human life-ways.

One of the interesting findings of researches is the little attention paid by archaeologists to the archaeological significance of rock-art, which seems to be a quite comparatively recent phenomenon and its significance is musing in the ethnographic studies on tribal cultures for which Chota Nagpur is famous during the early twentieth century. The findings brought to light by me in northern Jharkhand come at a crucial time when large scale opencast coal mining is threatening the tribal homelands, and the new state of Jharkhand is trying to affirm its cultural contribution to the nation. At the same time the newly discovered rock-art sites and their attendant palaeo-archaeological deposits, were soon to become proof of indigenous occupation of these lands by the tribals, one even recognized by the UNO. The further result of these discoveries was a growing pride in regional cultures and along with the re-discovery of mythology, it would give a good exposure to the tribal art and cultures to the archaeologists and urbanities and even draw attention from the international community.

The Hazaribagh and Chatra rock-paintings are stylistically related to the rock-art in the Hemgiri Reserve Forest and Osakothi rock-art site of the Sundargarh district of Orissa

¹ Manoj K.Singh, Prehistoric Context of Chotanagpur with reference to the Hazaribagh Plateau, synopsis PhD Thesis, Dept. of Anthropology, Delhi University

(E. Neumayer, 1993).² Further stylistic analogies can be shown with the Mesolithic rock paintings of the Vindhya Hills, particularly the animal form and some intricate design patterns. The prominent depiction of geometric designs may be taken to be a continuation of the earlier primitive geometric form found in the earlier art of the high hills (i.e. Nautangwa Pahar-Salgah) evolved contemporaneously over time with a formulaic river-valley Mandala using culture. Thus we find the abstract and early geometric forms that appear in the rock art of the Mesolithic hunters has been “developed” into the complex geometric motifs which cover the walls of Isco. There are no figures of men or animals found in the later rock paintings as are commonly found in the Vindhyas or Mirzapur rock-art, and the only explanation can be that this is a form of “contact” expression such as was never occasioned in the Hazaribagh hills due to isolation. There are no paintings of cattle or other domestic animals as one would have expected which are invaluabley found in other rock-art sites. All this points to a cultural “freeze” in the evolution of the rock paintings. It is important to note that Khovar or Koh is the term used for painted rock caves in the northern Vindhyas as well as in Jharkhand, and the same term is used to designate the painted village nuptial rooms painted in these areas during the marriage season, and that a relation between the two, and their enigmatic decorations, though inevitable, was first pointed out in 1995 in my book *Bridal Caves: A Search for the Adivasi Khovar Tradition*. The term Kho or Koh is Mundaric means “cave” and Var in Sanskritized form denoting “bridal couple”.

I have drawn attention in this work to an important difference between the rock art of Hazaribagh and that of Central Indian series such as Bhimbetka. This is that, although the art is a continuation in the villages, it shows no “contact” elements of Buddhist period insinuations, even though being so close to the seat of Buddhism (i.e. Bodhgaya). Neumayer observed on the village paintings and rock art of Bhopal, “Since about 1000 years there is nothing between the youngest rock paintings and modern house wall paintings in Central India.”³ There fore there was a distinct change after 1000 years ago due to the introduction of a monetary economy. But in the art of Hazaribagh we witness a slightly different phenomenon. In Hazaribagh and Chatra the rock art did not continue into a contact phase with horse and riders and themes of warfare which would continue into horse wall paintings of horses with riders. The rock art of Hazaribagh does not evidence this contact phase. The

² Erwin Neumayer, Note on the Pre-Historic Rock-Art of Hazaribagh, 1993

³ Erwin Neumayer, Note on Folk Paintings at Swardha, near Sanchi, M.P.

spotted horses of Sohrai wall paintings refer to an ancient tradition when the spotted stag was the vehicle (Vimana) of the goddess, and relates to a matriarchal cult which was prevalent all over India from the Eiyars of South India to the Adivasis of Jharkhand. The spotted, wheeled, animals of the votive vimana of the goddess appears in the Panel-3 of the Isco rockart, and refers to this ancient prehistoric cult, which lingers still in the region's tribal culture.

The *figure of the rider on the horse* is not found in the rockart of Hazaribagh and Chatra. This was a common contact motif in Central India as I have painted out. It then went into various forms, such as "*Sahibosum*" which Verrier Elwin drew attention to in the Ittalan of the Saoras of Orissa, which I shall discuss later, or the "Rao" of the Bastar tribals which may echo a Mahratha contact. The figure of the bull, also referred to as *ghoda* (horse) among the Kurmis and other tribes of Hazaribagh, is a pre-contact matriarchal tradition from the oldest levels of rockart.

Bulu Imam

"Sanskriti"
Hazaribagh

25th October, 2014

Introduction

The rockart of Hazaribagh represents the pre-historic art of the hunters in the Late Stone Age, and thereafter the proto-historic pre-contact development of the magico-religious symbols which were the foundations of later Vedic texts. There are no paintings of horses and humans nor of the contact with the outside world typical of the rockart of Central India and other parts. The enigmatic symbols reach their crescendo in the rock-art of Isco, and reflects the indigenous genius of Jharkhand, a civilization which had not yet contact with the outside world except for the wanderings of the Brahmi speaking Oraons who reflect a proto-Indus culture. These people had a primitive culture with a genius in the decorative acts which led to the inception of writing, which these many thousands of years has retained its primitive simplicity of the village mural paintings of Hazaribagh, called *likhna* (writing) by the women artists and whose roots may be found in the amazing rock-art of Hazaribagh.

The rockart of Hazaribagh is both old and new. Its oldest manifestation are over ten thousand years old perhaps and its most recent images may be as recent as five thousand years old. Chipped flake stone tools in the vicinity have been dated between 100,000-3000 B.P. with re-flaking indicating reworking. Similar stone tools in Europe are dated between 80,000-30,000 B.P., showing an earlier termination of the technology.⁴ A Neolithic celt has been found with microliths have been found in all the sites. The rockart in caves in Europe is atleast twenty thousand years older and does not manifest similar continuity into the Mesolithic. Conversely the rockart of India though of open painted shelters prone to weathering in the hot dry climate is of a more recent date, yet continues into more recent periods even upto settled agriculture, Thus the painted rockart sites continuously appear in the upper river valley stratas amidst Palaeolithic deposits. The local culture has long dwelt in almost complete isolation. The modern dates of microliths goes back thirty thousand years in South Asia, and microlith sites such as painted rock shelters evidence hunter-gatherer occupation similar to the present nomadic Birhors who claim their ancestors painted the rock-art. On the other hand there are the settled farming communities, forming a link between the sedentarized and nomadic tribes.⁵

⁴ Dating of chipped stone flake tool by Volkmar Geupel, Palaeolithic expert, Dresden, Archaeology Department, Völkerkunde Museum 2002.

⁵ Raymond and Bridget Allcher, *The Birth of Indian Civilization*, Penguin Books 1968, p.15

In hilly country of Hazaribagh occupied by tribal people Neolithic stone axes of rectangular formation from the Late Stone Age similar to those excavated in Mayurbhanj by late Dr.B.K.Thapar have been found.⁶ There seems to be a similarity between the stone axes and grey burnished pottery with south India. Coarse red pottery has been found in the painted shelters. Ochre coloured pottery (OCP) has also been found at some distances. The absence of hand axes in the painted shelters and their provenance in closeby subterranean caves or exposed eroded scarps tell us that the Early Stone Age man may not have painted the rockart existing today, or if he did its traces vanished. Excavation in the floors of the shelters will yield more information. On the other hand in some instances Middle stone age flake tools have been found in some shelters, telling us of the presence of these early societies. It is important that self-sufficient villages with their own economy have sustained village society along with primitive tribal and hunter-gatherer societies, and so the art of the earliest times has survived down to the present times. But with the new modern developments such as industrial development, big mines and dams, deforestation, and the destruction of agricultural lands and villages, has led to the displacement of village society and loss of its sources of livelihood. This spells the end of the old art and culture that has upto now remained in the traditional wall paintings done on the mud walls of the village houses during the marriage season (Khover) and harvest season (Sohrai).

The shelters are situated at the base of gorges formed by water channels in fault lines in the sandstone massif. The sandstone suffers from exfoliation caused by humidity reacting on the exposed rock surface and the formation of mineral salts, fungal growth leading to organism growth, an insect attack and flaking.

The painted shelters are natural formations, on the hilly sites flanking the river valley, and about two hundred feet above the valley floor. They have been formed by the erosion of wind and water over long periods of time. For a strange reason, now altogether explainable, the painted rock shelters in India frequently face a south or south-western direction, and on the top is a flat projecting stone in the form of a pointer. This is such a marked occurrence it has

⁶ (a) Ibid, p.174: (b) Ref: Congress o Asian Archaeology, New Delhi 1961, Definition for then major groups of stone industries in India, (i) Early Stone Age: the hand-axe-industries; (ii) Middle Stone Age: the flake industries; (iii) Late Stone Age: microlith using hunting cultures.

been noted before. Some authorities claimed it was done to allow the low winter sun to enter.⁷ Originally the river valleys were glacial deposits of ice which melted leaving large lakes, thus creating a pebbled shore-line, which corresponds to the present location of painted shelters which were the earliest sedentarized fishing settlements. The presence in the rock-art of animals painted with “bandaged” feet, that is stumps not showing the hooves, is a sign of the ice-age period 10,000 BC (Erwin Neumayer, 1993).

It is pertinent in dating the rockart of Hazaribagh (and Chatra) that though hunting scenes and game animals are shown in various styles, no armed or horse mounted figures, fighting elephants, or horse-drawn chariots found in the rockart of Central India or Mirzapur (Likhania, etc) appear. This shows the wave of Aryan pressure which came down to Narmada and Ganges valleys, Vindhyan and Kaimur ranges, never reached this hilly plateau region. It is further clear that Late Stone Age cave dwellers of Central India flourished along side Neolithic and Chalcolithic river valley cultures (Allchin, p.88). It is the opinion of experts (Allchin, Ibid 95) that the Late Stone Age or Mesolithic industries of India are associated with people like the modern tribals who live by hunting and gathering.

In the upper Damodar Valley or North Karanpura alley we may find evidence of such a pebbled shoreline and the oldest pebble chopper tools, both uniface (one face) and bi-face (two face). These shelters were inhabited by early societies since they provided overhanging stone roof-like protuberances which protected them from heat and rain. The floors of these rock shelters have provided us a glimpse of early man. If one searches closely in the rock face of some of the painted caves (I.e. Isco) one will find holes, which were probably made to support scaffolding used during the painting. On the floor of the shelter is the evidence of the activity of those early artists, and it is sad that by error the entire frontal floor beneath the rockart in Isco the authorities have cemented it concealing the archaeological record. Here we have found stone tools as well as the pieces of haematite and kaolin and other oxides rubbings which are stone pieces that have been rubbed with water and yield the colours with which the rockart was painted. It is the opinion of some experts that these coloured stones of haematite, oxides, or kaolin were wet in water and then directly rubbed on the sandstone wall of the cave very much like crayons, yielding a line which was impregnated in the stone.

⁷ V.S.Wakankar and R.R.Brooks, Stone Age Painting in India, D.B.Taraporevala Sons & Co Private Ltd, Bombay, 1976, p.2

These small pieces are evidence of how early man made his colours. The liquid obtained was put into leaf cups and then painted on the sandstone wall with *Kuchi* or stems of the sakhua or *saal* tree (*Shorea robusta*) after chewing. This is the familiar village toothbrush called *datwan*. On the shelter floor in Isco were pieces of the painted rock surface that had collapsed.

There is evidence of palaeolithic human habitation in the deep cave of Marwateri near Isco, and this is explained in its very name. The painted shelter is called by the villagers Khovar or marriage room. The local tradition says the cave was painted for the marriage of a certain king. The marriage ceremony according to the tribal tradition is performed beneath a canopy of *sakhua* or *saal* leaves. The various sacred motifs still used, such as the *shadi chouk* (rectangle with crossed diagonals, in Australia called “dilly-bag” by the Aborigines) is where the bride and groom sit. Then near to this *Marwa*, the place where the guests from far invited to the marriage will stay, and which is called the *Marwa-teri* or “place close-by to the marriage *marwa*”. Thus we find at a distance less than a kilometer from the Isco Khovar a deep subterranean cave called by local tradition Marwateri. I have explored quite far into its interior but now one cannot find the inner depths as many parts of the roof have collapsed . The cave is over a hundred yards across, and the Isco river flows through it. In the pool at the centre of the cave many hand axes of the Early Stone Age have been found.



Marwateri Cave



On the wall of the cave there is the large figure of a person running, perhaps a woman, with a smaller figure to the right, perhaps of a child, holding a round object atop in its right hand.

According to folklore two Birhor brothers were one day chasing a hare and got lost in the depths of the cave and could not find their way out. Finally, they reached a crevice in the rock near the Khovar, nearly half a kilometer away, and from there contacted their companions and told them to go away and forget them. This poignant story has become a part of local folklore. Then there is the local story of how the new queen came one day to bathe in the Isco river, and how she drowned in a deep pool, which is still named Rani Pokhar after her. The king after this left his fort at Badam and went away. The villagers still claim to find pieces of wood from the queen's palanquin! Perhaps this is a more recent tradition in the view of the fact the Raja of Ramgarh had his fort at Badam which at the end of the 17th Century he shifted to Ramgarh. To corroborate it is the fact, a small stone-cut temple nearly called Marwa-Dwar (door to the Marwa) was closed up with sand, and in front of it about sixty yards away a *papal* tree was planted now three hundred years old. It is the only such tree in the entire region. Such is the mystery and enchantment of the jungle village.

The rock paintings in Hazaribagh are unique in that some shelters are filled with geometrical motifs of the agriculturists, while others are purely the art of the hunters, depicting only wild animals. Here we find the now vanished Jharkhand Rhinoceros, wild buffalo which are no longer available, Gaur or the Indian Bison, tiger, boar, langur, Nilgai, wild cattle, deer, and other animals. The geometrical figures are crammed and seem to be in a horizontal order, while the animal forms belonging to an earlier period, are spaced quite widely apart, and of large size. Many dozens of the geometrical motifs may be found in the village Khovar and Sohrai mural painting. These motifs are quite a small size in the rockart as compared with the

mural painting. For example a wheeled and spotted animal figure in Isco about nine inches in height is depicted in the Sohrai mural several feet across, when it is called the sacred “*ghoda*”. The rock paintings of Hazaribagh are unique in that nowhere do they actively illustrate a story. However at one place in the rock painting of Satpahar II we may find a hunting episode.

The paintings are on the sandstone wall of the cave shelter and on the ceilings, and while those on the ceilings are haphazardly arranged those on the wall are arranged in an orderly fashion indicating perhaps some systematic arrangement used to convey contextual messages. Some of the arrangements are horizontal, others are compound symbols, expressive in their own arrangement. The forms range in size from a few inches to several feet across. There are remains of older paintings of larger size over which the more recent pictures have been painted. Generally the condition of the painting is quite good and are in a stable state of preservation, but there is evidence of attack on the stone by a particular kind of beetle and conservation work is necessary. Also overhead water seepage over the rock surface has caused erosion and silicone drip lines and overhead drainage conservation measures are necessary.

The art of the hunters is dating from the Mesolithic and subject matter is mainly animals like bison, buffalo, tiger, nilgai, cheetal, elephants, hyena, rhinoceros, wild boar and deer of various kinds. Smaller animals are seen, frog, jackal, lizard, tortoise, scorpion, bee and hive, fish, butterfly, centipede, and water beetle. Bird forms are few. Geometrical motifs include square, circle, rectangle, cross, concentric circle, triangle, diamond, temple in human-form, traps, snares, and fence motifs. The absence of the bow in the rock-art is important as we find the use of bow absent among the nomadic Birhor trappers and food-gatherers who still inhabit the region and claim that their ancestors painted the rock-art. The axe is also absent in the rock-art of Hazaribagh and Chatra, but the stone, sticks, and Trident are present. The painting is done entirely with liquid oxides of haematite and magnesium producing dark-purplish-red colour, and with white kaolin or limestone pigments. No copper compounds producing green colour have been so far found in the rockart of Hazaribagh (and Chatra). Many kinds of oxides of iron have been used producing red, yellow, orange, and brown colours. These colours have been obtained from nearly deposits. The pigments had been ground on a stone mortar with stone pestle using some liquid, probably water, although wine

may have been used also. The mixture was mixed with water and applied with a *kuchi* or chewed stem; which is the same “brush” used by the village women even today for painting their village paintings.

The rockart has also to be seen in relation to the megalithic culture that existed at a similar period. The dates for these sites is still open to debate but on analysis of flake chipped stone tools it seems the megalith builders were active over five thousand years ago (3500 B.C) and further, that their origin could be placed in the earlier periods going back perhaps another couple of thousand years. These megaliths themselves tell of a sophisticated people conversant with sacred geometry and parallelism who had discovered the value of Pi as far back as three thousand years ago and had developed calendrical observations from where seasonal solar occurrences like the equinoxes and solstice, and perhaps even eclipses could be observed and given meaning. Claim has been made for their alignment to stellar formations. These megalithic sites were built according to a large latitudinal plan along specific lines, and corresponded in their inter-relationships and other man-formed semi-natural phenomena. The megalithic man may be divided into two types, the pre-iron and post iron. We have ample evidence of megaliths being a pre-iron phenomenon from several places around the world from British Isles to Easter Island in the South Pacific. In these places also the megalith-builders were associated with rock-art. It may not be out of place to here mention that the megalith-builders of Easter Island two millenia back were using a type of picture-writing similar to the Indus, and also some of the rock-art motifs of Hazaribagh. We know that the megalith-builders were connected with South-East Asia and came by way of the Northeast (i.e. Assam and the Chin Hills). The megaliths of Hazaribagh have been found in association with iron-age remains (slag) and those people were probably Asurs. Several large fortifications in large sized brick and stone are scattered through the jungles of Hazaribagh and Chatra and I know many that have not as yet been brought to archaeological attention. That these people were connected with the later rock paintings is quite certain, but their identity remains clouded, since they have since moved on and left no record of their migration. The local people only retain some myths about these sites such as are common to megalithic sites all over India- such as, the megaliths are the figures of a Raja and his party on their way to a wedding.

Jharkhand, parts of West Bengal and Orissa, are linked with Chhatisgarh and throughout these regions we find a similar culture upto the Narmada, Vindhya, Sone, and Satpuras. The village agriculture lies on sites like Tripuri, a Chalcolithic settlement near Jabalpur, while the Malwa hills lie between the Aravallis and Central India to the edges of Rajasthan. Throughout this entire wide area Chalcolithic settlements have been found which must have been related with the Harappan and other ancient cultures to south and west. The Chattisgarh region had its own forest belt and tribal cultures connected with the upper Mahanadi Basin. The Dravidian tribes like the early Oraons and other Kol and Gond tribes had access to the river valleys, and ancient movements across India had been taking place either through culture contact or expansion, even as more agricultural lands were brought under the plough with the spread of plough agriculture instead of hoe agriculture, or slash-and-burn (podar or jhoom) cultivation, which was more convenient in the hill tracts of Orissa. These tribes would be responsible for the Chalcolithic markings of the rock paintings in Sundergarh, Jharsuguda, Bargarh area of Orissa and Raigarh, Sarguja, Jashpur, in Chhatisgarh, which links with the rock art of Jharkhand in Gumla, West Singhbhum, Hazaribagh and Chatra, and *Japla in the west*. These tracts were connected with the Chalcolithic culture of Jharkhand. This large area would have been the cultural sources of which the Indus was a more urbanized outpost by virtue of its culture contacts with the Karakorum on one side and Iran on the other. Thus the African, Central Asian, and Mediterranean influences would have reached the Indus, while to Central and East India the more primitive culture prevailed, which though having older roots in Southeast Asian civilization had attained a cultural watershed in which further “modern” developments were infructuous and redundant.

As the tribal Indo-Aryan culture moved east toward Magadh it came to a break-up and developed great mud and brick structures for defending cities such as Rajgir and Kausambi. To the south in the Jharkhand hills, however, the presence of red ware ochre coloured pottery, black and red ware, and grey or buff ware appears along with iron and plentiful deposits of slag. Also northern black polished ware appears. All these have been found in Hazaribagh. It is further put forward that the origin of iron manufacture could have been earlier than the current 1100-700 B.C. calendar, and that in the context to Asur culture and mention in the Rig Veda, the iron making may well have been a local indigenous development and not an Assyrian importation as generally made out. This is said because the

evidence of Asura civilization in Jharkhand has been shown to be several millennia old (i.e. excavations of S.C.Roy 1915-18, Etc.)

Ponds would be a Neolithic-Chalcolithic period development coinciding with settled societies in river valleys or flat uplands.⁸ According to the recent archaeological researches in Southeast Asia (Hoabinhian culture) the oldest dates for edge-ground stone tools is pushed back to 20,000 B.C., and corded pottery is older than 10,000 B.C.. Rice was recorded in Non Nok-Tha in Thailand in pottery dated at 3500 BC (and polished stone tools at Spirit Cave, 7000 BC). Bronze was being cast in Thailand before 3000 B.C. and Hazaribagh is connected to this Chalcolithic rice-growing culture.⁹ It is the people of this early rice-growing culture who I believe were connected with the last phase of rock-painting, the most sophisticated example of which is found in Isco. In the other rock-art sites of Hazaribagh and the upper Damodar Valley hill ranges we find examples of the earlier evolving periods leading up to this profuse artistic outburst. These people were obviously the ancestors of the present societies who at that time may not have been so evolved into artisan castes. Which is a later development of the process of sanskritization, through which the tribal societies were slowly formed into two sections, the newer being the artisan sub castes which formed themselves into guilds, and Lydia Icke-Schwalbe who did her PhD on the Oraons (Dresden-Ranchi, L.P.Vidyarthi, 1984) held the Kumhars or potters were once Oraons.¹⁰ But I believe the present village societies of the region are descended from those early rock-painters.

Jharkhand and Chhatisgarh form that part of Central India which was a place of refuge for the indigenous culture driven out of the north, and would become a repository of aboriginal culture, and a relic also of much of the earliest cultural tracts of northern India in what came to be called Champa.¹¹

⁸ R&B Allchin, *The Birth of Indian Civilization*, Penguin Books, 1468, p.297

⁹ W.G.Solheim, *New Light on a Forgotten Past*, National Geographic, March 1971, p.330-339

¹⁰ Lydia Icke-Schwalbe, "Topferzeugnisse aus Chot Nagpur", in: *Abhandlungen und Berichte des Staatlichen Museums für Volkerkunde, Dresden*, 25, 1966, p.173-186)

¹¹ Hemz Mode, Subodh Chandra, *Indian Folk Art*, Taraporevala, Bombay, 1985-Edition Leipzig, p.247

The process of sanskritization is continuing. It is in this light that a sympathetic view is required of the importance to be given to the last remaining bastions of the earlier cultural heritage traditions of Central India still lingering in some places like Jharkhand and Chhatisgarh.

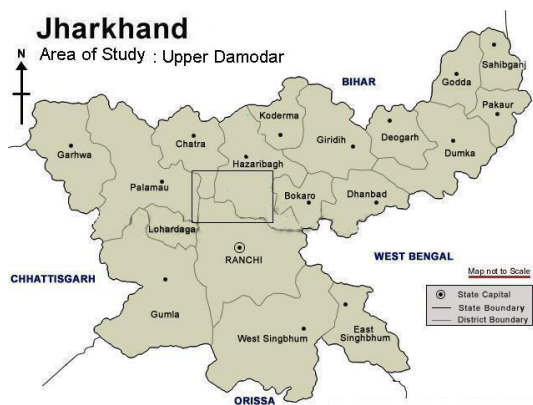


A view of the Isco river flowing between rocky banks down the hill slope above the rock-art



Eroded scarps of the surrounding area

Maps



Area of Study: Upper Damodar (North Karanpura Valley)



Sites:

1. Isco Rockart
2. Thethangi Rockart
3. Satpahar Rockart
4. Khandhar Rockart
5. Saraiya Rockart
6. Raham Rockart
7. Sidpa Rockart
8. Gonda Rockart
9. Nautangwa Rockart

CHAPTER-1

Provenance and Early Sources

The rockart is primarily the handi-work of the ancestors of the tribals, and it is in the tribal areas that the rock paintings of Central India are found. These tribes include the proto-australoid as well as Dravidian tribes of the region. Their lifestyles are distinctive, and they live outside the village economies based on artisan activity and settled agriculture. Their economy is still partly agricultural and partly gathering of forest produce. They practice collective ownership of the land for agriculture, grazing, commons, and forest produce gathering. They also still practice the art which is directly connected with the rock-art. As I have pointed out elsewhere the settled artistan- agriculture villagers who are semi-hinduized had perhaps earlier traced back their ancestry to the tribal groups and for which reason they too have a similar painting tradition based on marriage and harvest festival celebration, which can be traced to the rock-art.

Neanderthal (*Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*) man lived from over 250,000 years ago upto 35,000 years ago, and left evidence of making the tools, using fire, fashioning clothes, and even practicing ceremonies like ritual burial of the dead (evidenced in the Zagros mountains, Iraq). But the Neanderthals, who evolved in Europe, Near East, and Central Asia, died about 35,000 years ago. About 30,000 years ago a land bridge during the ice age connected Siberia with Alaska and the Asian mainland with Java. Large parts of America and Australasia were colonized by the evolved Neanderthals, that is our own subspecies *Homo sapiens sapiens*. This creature had the ability of using symbols to represent things. They carved female figures out of bone and decorated cave walls with paintings of animals. Over twenty thousand years ago they began to paint the walls of caves and created the great wall paintings of Lascaux in southern France (15,000 B.C) and Altamira in Spain (15,000 B.C). We find similar expressions in Africa and South Asia, which in rock-art is great Ice Age which lasted from 18,000 to 10,000 years ago saw the transference of man from a cave dwelling hunter to a crop-growing and sedentization. His communication skills developed at a great deal, and the basis was laid for the emergence of the modern human we know today. This was the greatest leap in man's evolution.

Stone tools were the tools and weapons of early humans and they began as very crude pebbled tools and slowly became more and more refined until by the beginning of the Middle Palaeolithic nearly a hundred thousand years ago early man had developed the ability to flake stone in the manner he desired, or he had understood the lines along which stones could be broken. This was akin to understanding the principles of nuclear fission. These tools took on a variety of shapes, sizes, and forms, some idea of which may be had by the illustrations in this chapter which are all stone tools found in or nearby to the rockart shelters of Hazaribagh and Chatra. Microliths are the commonest stone tools found in association with rock paintings and they are in the floors of all the painted shelters.

The microlith is anywhere between twenty-four thousand years old and the beginning of the Neolithic eight thousand years ago. This period of time is commensurate with rock painting activity not only in India but in Europe as well. The Mesolithic is the period between the upper late Palaeolithic and the Neolithic, a period when men had begun to use bow and arrow. The Microliths were used inverted as the arrowhead This put the point of the microlith into the arrowshaft and placed the cutting edge forward. These microliths were manufactured by the thousands out of quartz, and a “factory” where such microliths were made may be seen today at *Laranga*, overlooking the bend of the Garhi river, midway between Tandwa and Mandair, just to the east of the Satpahar range in the western North Karanpura Valley. The long span of human pre-history between the start of the Mesolithic and the men who painted the rockart and the evidence of early man over a million years ago in the Upper Damodar Valley (North Karanpura Valley) is a staggering thought and will make us wish to protect this irreplaceable heritage. Unfortunately, this entire region is the target of opencast coal mining which threatens to destroy the entire Upper Damodar Valley. INTACH has ever since 1987 been fighting to save this region.

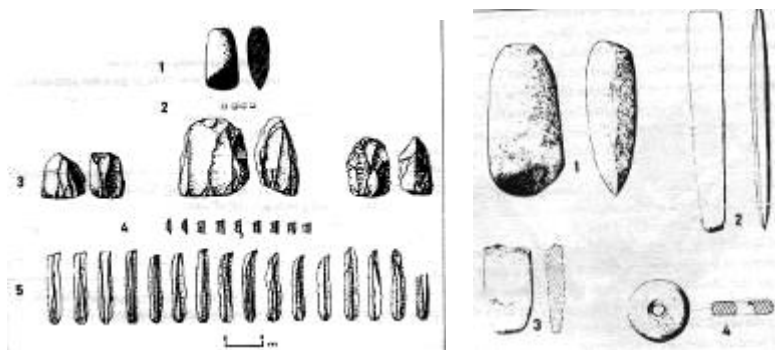
As regards dating, according to the findings of V.S.Wakankar, the Meso-Chalcolithic rock-art in Bhembetka is between 8000-5000 B.C.¹² The evidence from stone tools retrieved from the rock-art sites, especially Isco, helps in not only understanding the provenance and chronology of the paintings, but also their place in the evolution of man in the region since

¹² V.S.Wakankar and R.R.Brooks, *Stone Age Painting in India*, D.P.Taraporewala and sons pvt Ltd., Bombay, 1976, p.31

earliest times. The evidence of Oldowan- type pebbled stone tools going back over two million years have been found in plentiful numbers in the hilly scarps above Isco. This is a period not generally ascribed to early man in Central India. It is attested to by pebbled flake tools similar to those found in the Pabbi hills in the Soan basin (Imybp) and slightly later Acheulian handaxe-period from north west India (7,00,000-4,00,000) and some Middle Pleistocene tools of the “Madras” type (3,90,000-3,50,000 B.P.)¹³ Nevasan-type chopper tools including flake blades evidence the later middle-Palaeolithic (1,50,000-57,000) and Levallois core prepared flake tools.¹⁴

At Isco we find the presence of microliths in conjunction with Neolithic ground stone tools, which occurrence has been noted at other rockart sites in Central India. The transitional phase from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic cultures is thus marked. The earliest dates for Microliths in India goes back to 24,000 B.P. but is witnessed throughout the transition from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic around 9000 B.P.¹⁵ Backed blades have been found in the North Karanpura Valley which are of the Karnataka variety (Shorapur Doab 90,000 B.P).¹⁶ The general picture is of a typically pan-Indian pre-history with indigenous origins covering the entire evolutionary period of Modern Man.

Typical ground stone axe, stone ring, blade, flint cores, geometric flint microliths, and flint blades types from Mehargarh (Baluchistan) have been picked up from the floor of the Isco rock-art shelter . These objects from Mehargarh in S.W. Sindh-Baluchistan are dated at 9000-7000 B.P.¹⁷



Irfan Habib, p.53, fig.3.4; and p.49, fig.3.1

¹³ Irfan Habib, *Prehistory*, Aligarh Historian Society, 2001, p.23, 24, 26

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.28, 37

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.39

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.32

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.53, 49

The reason for these objects being at the surface is that there is a constant water flow through the *nulla* below the shelter which has prevented accumulations of soil. It is a shame that the authorities have cemented a five feet width section of the entire length of the shelter floor thus destroying the surface remains which would be invaluable in future research. The connection with Mehargarh is extremely interesting since recent research has shown that the nomadic goat herding people of Mehargarh were Dravidian, Brahui (Kurrukh) speaking ancestors of the Oraons, who had an ancient pre-historic contact with Jharkhand by way of the Narmada Valley, Gujarat and Sindh to Kalat in Baluchistan. Experts like Asko Parpola believe that the Brahui-speaking Oraons were the Kurrukh speaking pre-Harrapans. They form a large part of the population of the Jharkhand area today and their history in Jharkhand goes back twenty-six centuries. Thus the evidence of the stone artifacts from Isco and their striking similarity to similar objects from Mehargarh becomes important to our study.

At Laranga, on the right bank of the Garhi river before Mandair we find remains of a very substantial quartz agricultural microlith industry. These microliths would have been fixed with bitumen in wood or bone sickles. These are identical to similar microliths used in harvesting sickles in Mehargarh made during the fifth millennium B.C (5000-4000 B.C),¹⁸ when cotton plants were first domesticated by these people. Zebu cattle were also domesticated, and the cotton fibres were spun into yarn and woven into cloth. The first fired, wheel-turned pottery was made and decorated. Violin-shaped mother goddess figurines were moulded of clay, which were the progenitors of the Indus figurines.¹⁹

These developments are of importance in understanding the later evolution in the Mesolithic rock-art of ancient hunting communities of Hazaribagh into the new agricultural phase. As the Neolithic or polished stone tool age had followed the Mesolithic or flake tool age (8000-4000) so too the Neolithic in course of time gave way to the age of bronze, or the Chalcolithic (4000-1500 B.C) But here a tremendous new change was impending since by the cultivation of plants and domestication of Zebu cattle descended from the wild *Bos nomadicus*, and the appearance of the ground stone tools in the Neolithic, a break occurred from the old technology of chipping stones which had lasted for two million years. It came

¹⁸ Asko Parpola, *Deciphering the Indus Script*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, Chapter9. Dravidian languages and The Harappan Culture. P.167; J.H.Elfen Bein, 1987

¹⁹ Irfan Habib, *Ibid*, p.52-54

on the eve of domestication of plants and animals, the birth of agriculture, sedentarization and the beginning of a new era in human affairs and the decline of pastoralism. This era of sedentarization saw the first river valley villages and the birth of Iron Age (11,000 B.C.).

One more step would now be required to take the mind further, and this was the development of the decorative arts, along with crafts. The strange thing about Mehargarh is that it did not have a Mesolithic culture to precede its Neolithic phase starting 7000 B.C. So how could its Neolithic revolution have come about? The source of its Mesolithic stage lay in the valleys and forested hilly regions of Central India from Jharkhand to the Narmada valley and Satpuras, all areas rich in the tradition of rock painting by the Mesolithic hunters. Copper and bronze of themselves could make but little impacts upon the stone using cultures.

The first comb decorated pottery (Khovar) appears at Mehargarh in the Neo-Ceramic phase (5000-4000 B.C.) and painted pottery appears from Mehargarh and Togan which bear comb designs and are the earliest marks of the still-to-be-born Pre-Harrapan culture. These enigmatic motifs are found in the rock-art of Hazaribagh, also retained in its Khovar and Sohrai village paintings down till today. They are depictions of human and animal figures and geometric designs which for the first time create “suspended animation”, the essence of folk art. These motifs clearly owe the sources of their inspiration to the rock-art of Central India, the eastern portion of which may be said to be in Hazaribagh and Chatra, and other sites in Jharkhand like Lekhlahi Pahar (Palamau), Gumla, Singhbhum, Sakri, Etc. which are connected stylistically with the rock-art of Sambalpur and Sundergarh districts of Orissa, and the rockart of Singhanpur, Chhenga-Pahar, Osakothi, Vikramkhole, Raigarh, and Surguja. These rockart sites show a distinctive style separate from that of the Satpuras, Vindhya, or Mirzapur Hills. We are confronted with what Neumayer calls “pictorial codes”, and “The narrative progress of picture compositions is here replaced by abstract and zoomorph figures.”²⁰

The engravings of Sambalpur, Sundergarh, and Vikramkhole were considered by some scholars as letters of a proto-Brahmi script.²¹ The Hazaribagh rock paintings fall into this category. The art forms are abstract, like in the Sundergarh and Sambalpur sites.²²

²⁰ E.Neumayer, *Lines on Stone*, Manshar, New Delhi, 1993, p.116

²¹ C.L.Fabri, 1930:- 34:230, Pl. CXIX; K.P.Jayaswal 1933: 58-60; N.P.Chakravarty, 1936:229.

This series of rockart is where the rockart of Hazaribagh may be placed in relevance to such sites as Chhengapahar, Lakhamara, Phuldungri, Chichuriakhol, etc. The painted figures show abstract geometrical forms with compound notations, filled in with parallel lines, wavy or criss-cross lines, and in the spaces figures of frogs. There has been much discussion whether these represent a kind of writing or not as in the Sambalpur, Sundergarh, and Vikramkhol shelters.²³ The pigments used are red haematite, kaolin white, and yellow. The visual motifs include frogs, humped bulls, deer, and stylized decorative elements. The important feature is intricate design patterns. This period shows development of a form of expression from the animal painters of the Mesolithic to the more developed artisan cultures of the Chalcolithic expressing itself in this rock-art, which is a wonderful example of the transitional stage of the art from the art of the Mesolithic hunters and gatherers to the art of the Chalcolithic farming and artisan societies.

Form a study of the rock-art and the tribal populations of the region today we can see a similarity in the motifs in their arts and crafts. We also find a continuity all the way across Central India, Chhatisgarh and Jharkhand having a unique identity, along with Orissa, as distinct from the rockart of Mirzapur, Satpurus, Mahadeo Hills and Bhimbetka. This is a cultural manifestation more apparent from the Mesolithic. Throughout the region we find a consonance in the stone tool strata which shows a marked continuity.

There is also a continuity and contiguity between the rockart of Chhatisgarh and Orissa with that of Hazaribagh, which forms a quique eastern block of the rockart districts distinct from the rockart of Mirzapur Hills, the Mahadeo Hills, Satpura Hills, and Bhimbetka.

Continuity of the motifs from the rock paintings to the continuing popular traditions in village art of the region may be seen in a number of expressions, such as painting on pottery, metal casting, house wall mural painting, embroidery and weaving, wood carving, matting, modeling in clay, and terracotta figurines. From the ancient archaeological remains we have only three forms generally throughout India, and these are rockart, painted pottery, and clay and terracotta votive figurines. I am of the view that the Central Indian rock-art motifs

²² E.Neumayer, 1988; I.A.R., 1969 / 70: 61; G.C. Mohapatra, 1982: 1997-2000. D.Pathy, 1984: 11-151.

²³ N.P.Chakravarty, 1936: 224; K.P.Jayaswal 1933: 58-60; C.L.Fabri, 1936: 230; P.I.CXIX 1933: 51-60

influenced pre-Harappan motifs (plant, birds, bull, *pipal*, graceful animal forms, and even linear and geometric forms). We may remember the *pipal* (*Ficus religiosa*) is indigenous to India and not to Sindh or Iran. No doubt the ancient rock-art motifs underwent many changes and adaptations, but their origins may be traced not to Iran but to the painted caves of Central India. Further, we can find the continuing village wall mural traditions linked with the cave art (i.e. Warli marriage paintings in Thane district of Maharashtra, with rockart of Raisen, M.P.; village harvest murals in Smardha, with Bhimbetka, M.P, and in Hazaribagh, Jharkhand). These ancient designs require to be artistically developed into the contemporary ceramics of the regions where they occur as signature styles of those regions. Places like Chhatisgarh and Jharkhand have become aware of their tribal identity. Let them celebrate this identity with their indigenous tribal artists, and keep up the ageold traditions. Certainly, it cannot be a bad thing.

The difference between the Tribal and Folk artistic expressions is that when the particular motif enters the popular consciousness as a form to be repeated endlessly by the craftsman, then the motif gets *stylized*, i.e. takes on its basic shape and characteristics only. But when it is painted by the non artisan, for example the Tribal, then it has an intangible quality which is highly original. This is the uniqueness of Tribal art and rock-art.

As we have noted, the wild animals are the subject of the Mesolithic hunters (10,000-4,000 B.C.) and the linear and geometric motifs are the ritual expressions of Chalcolithic rockart (4000-2000 B.C.). Once the art begins to appear on pottery in painted form it becomes stylized, and the animal and plant forms hearken back to the original vivacity of the rock paintings which they try hard to emulate, while the geometric motifs lose their ritual quality and degenerate into simple design elements.

In certain parts of India the ancient village art of painting ritual wall murals at certain times of the year, such as during marriages, or in the harvest festival, appear. In Bhopal and Hazaribagh the villages which have painted walls similar to the rockart of the region are still to be found. Since there was no rockart in the Sindh it is of interest whether the houses of the Indus Valley were painted, since they followed a Central Indian rockart and village painting tradition as may be seen from the motifs of their beautiful painted pottery. Of course, the Warlis of Thane in Maharashtra still practice a mural form of painting during marriages, the

forms of which may be compared with Central Indian rockart such as Raisen. It is interesting to ponder on the continuity in our midst of traditions which grew out of the imagination of our early forebears, the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers of Central India! We are of course putting forward a new thesis, that of Central Indian rock-art and not Iranian sources for the painted pottery of the Indus Valley. In the hands of the metal casters the fine artistic designs of rockart still survive in Jharkhand and Chhatisgarh along with wrought iron sculpture. These forms still retain the vitality which one finds in genuine tribal art, unlike the crafts productions of folkware. India has an ancient heritage of pottery and its decoration from the earliest archaeological levels in Baluchistan (Mehegarh 7000-5000 B.C.). Nobody has pointed to the similarity between the contemporary terracotta mother goddess figurines of Bankura in West Bengal and the ancient Indus Valley mother goddess figurines which are based on the clay modeling of Eastern and Central India. If one looks at the mother goddess figurines in the Indian sub-continent, including Afghanistan and Pakistan we find a common unity of style since very earliest times²⁴ especially the large head covering still seen in tribal Bastar among Gond women.

In India art has ever remained an adjunct of daily life and artistic productions have rarely been brought to the level of applied arts as was the case in West Asia. Wall painting as an art also remained extremely limited. It seems that the Indian remained so engrossed in the art of life that he neglected the life of art!

Seasonal festivals when wall painting is practiced in the villages of Jharkhand, such as the Sohrai festival (Oct.-Nov.) is an important reminder of the connection between the people of today and their not-so-distant ancestors who painted the pre-historic rock-paintings in the *Khovars*. We can still find the ancient traditions associated with these seasonal rituals of worship and art at their ancient place in the villages of Hazaribagh.

With the settlement of villages and herding of cattle a wide range of spiritual observance started and tribal deities and spirits abounded, many of these linked with ancestor-worship, many more developing under sanskritization, and there is in the village worship today traits linked with the ancient Neo-Chalcolithic society which must have been responsible for the

²⁴ Shanti Lal Nagar, 1989, *The Universal Mother*, Atma Ram and Sons, p.115-159

last part of the rock-painting. Naturally, many of the motifs found in the rock paintings transferred themselves into the village ritual mural paintings.

I have tried to give meanings to some of the motifs found in the rockart and my sources have included the information which I could glean at the village level, that is, among the artisan and agricultural sub-castes. This will be seen as folk society. Here one can find some meanings and significance. But among the tribals, whichever art form is found, generally wild birds and animals, plants or flowers, they are of a purely decorative nature and hold no complex meanings. This would, I believe, have been also the case with the animal paintings left to us in the rockart of the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers. The dog is a sacred animal among these societies, as it was in the Indus, and here we may find the origins of the Bhavirav cult (*Chandela*, 11-13 Cent. A.D., M.P.) which is also in keeping with Shiva being the principal deity of the Hazaribagh region, shown in the Sohrai wall paintings *as a horned deity*, the original Pashupati, lord of the wild animals and in this form the ancestor of the Kol tribes. The Tree of Life on the back of the dog is painted in the Ghatwal Sohrai Shiva with his two dogs is depicted in a temple stone relief in nearby Bishungarh. Shiva is also called Maha Deo, Lord Shiva is called Bhoram Deo by the Gond Tribals of Bastar. The rice flour diagrams made by the village women during the Sohrai festival resemble the Indus valley motifs of the same kind, and also the pre-historic rockart motifs the chief deity being Shiva. Which Central Indian tribe was the proto-type of the horned figure of An found in the Mohenjodaro seal we may guess! Sr.John Marshall had opined it was an ithyphallic representation of Lord Shiva.²⁵

In the village paintings of Hazaribagh appear the original proto-type of the peacocks with flowing tresses, the tiger catching deer, and pairs of animals; the animals and birds glancing backwards; the familiar forms of the Indus painted pottery. Here the forms are less stylized and more filled with the flesh of the natural wild creatures, but they no less point to the provenance and early sources of the forms! Excavations by Wakankar at Bhimbetka (1971-75) have given the date for red haematite, yellow ochre and black manganese in rock-paintings at 8,000-5000 B.C. ²⁶ Green pigment was dated to a pre 8000 B.C. level. I am giving a timescale chart to make the subject clearer for the ordinary reader.

²⁵ John Marshall, 1925

²⁶ V.Wakankar, & R.R.Brooks, Ibid, p.30

There is a vast range of time to be viewed between the present and the past. The early pebble tools illustrated which have been found at Isco hill side are similar to these joint at Bhimbetka which have been dated in East Africa (Olduvai) to 1,500,000 B.C. !!²⁷

A final word on provenance of the rock paintings in relation to the painted pottery of North and Central India will not be out of place. Although the motifs are similar the older by far is the rockart therefore the rock paintings have to be taken as the model for the painted pottery.²⁸ This being so, then the authors of our civilizational genius in the visual arts came from Tribal India.

The Palaeolithic flake: Stone tools from Barwadi Punkhri, Megaliths

The tools were worked by man with a technology by hitting from the top of the tool to make the flake. The pieces are not finally worked out. So their function remains unknown. These pieces show that they could be alternative tools made from the flake or arrowhead, or knives that have been chopped out. On one piece shown it has been used a more recent period. At one of the edges a new flaking is visible, where the remaining edges show a separate patina. There are definitely Palaeolithic tools worked on by human with technology of the old stone age. All of these items- stone flakes show a special patina over the slicing marks.

There are no approved archaeological evidence of the Palaeolithic era. in India of these tools, so it has to be carfered between 3000 B.C-100000 B.C. The margent of such technology in Europe 30,000-80,000 B.P. In India the Palaeolithic is reaching to recent times!

²⁷ V.S.Wakankar and R.R.Brooks, Stone age Painting in India, D.B.Taraporewala Sons & Company, Pvt.Ltd, Bombay, 1976, p.29

²⁸ Ibid, p.31



Analysis: Volkmar Geupel, Archaeology Department, Volkerkunde Museum, Dresden

Collected by: Nils-Gregor Icke; **Date:** November 2002

Further microliths collected from the same site



Collected by: Justin Imam; **Date:**
May 2005

The Barwadi Punkri megaliths are located on a circular mound of about 75 yards x 75yards in which upright stone megaliths believed by experts to have equinoxial and geographic alignments were erected as far as 50000 years before present. There are large quantities of iron slag and worked stone tools on this site. According to the dating of the German expert quoted above, these workings could have continued to 3000 years B.C. This is important in helping to understand the dating of the rock-art of this very region, since the people who made the megaliths, and their continuing stone tool culture, are of a similar time frame as the people who painted the Rock-art.



Barwadi Punkhri

The location of this site, which is soon to be destroyed by an opencast coal mine, is 12 km due west of the Isco rock-art and 20 km east of Nautangwa Pahar rock-art.

I have drawn attention to the possible cultural connections in the remote past as far back as the Chalcolithic period between the plateaux of Chotanagpur and Sind in Northwest India. The rockart covers that particular span of time when a funerary or sepulchral tradition of raising megaliths over the remains of the deceased was beginning in Northeast, East, and South India. Some scholars think the megalith builders were Austronesian or Protoastraloids coming from the Northeast, or a Mundaric people. Indeed, the Mundas have a long megalithic tradition and still raise them, but in a memorial tradition perhaps rather than a funerary one. The Mundas are similar linguistically and physically to the peoples of the Northeast, and strains of Turainian are found in their tongue. The problem becomes more difficult when many other tribes of their linguistic group (i.e. Santal, Birhor, etc.) do not exhibit the same traditions. However, others would see the megalith age as an indigenous Indian development.

Certain connections between Chotanagpur and Northeast India have proved a contact between the two widely separated regions existed as far back as the Neolithic period, and perhaps earlier. The thesis I have held is that an indigenous people painted the rock pictures of Hazaribagh and Chatra, and they may have had culture contacts with the Northwest, indeed this would seem so. I have also shown a certain bias perhaps for east to west flow of cultural traditions from Jharkhand to Sind, rather than vice-versa. The legends recorded in

Rajasthan and Sind concerning megaliths have shown a marked similarity with traditions recorded in North Jharkhand. At Benti, in the western North Karanpura Valley there is a large group of over fifty megaliths, one upright stone of around five feet in height having a round “head” (which had come off, and which we repaired) which is called the *raja*, or king. The local Bhuiya villagers, the khuntkattidars (first clearers of the land) tell a story handed down to them by their ancestors, that a *raja* and his marriage party were going this way one day when they were attacked by robbers and turned into stone.

Now, A.C.L. Carlleyle records a similar legend in the Sind at a megalithic site ! At a place where megalithic cairns were found, the local villagers told the old story handed down from the ages that these stone cairns mark the place where a king’s marriage party was attacked by robbers and killed, and so these places are called “*chors*”.²⁹ Now, a *chor* as those familiar with common Hindustani will know, means a robber ! We may note that the stone cairns raised by the faithful Buddhists in the Himalayas are called *chor-ten*. There seems to be a clear linguistic similarity. A similar tradition had also been recorded about the stone cairns of Sind by James Tod in his book *Travels in Western India* as well as in his work *Annals and Antiquities in Rajasthan*.³⁰ Another English writer, Frere, notes that these *chors* “were erected, when found single, to commemorate the site of some private murder, and when found in clusters, to mark the battle-fields, and the numbers slain in engagements which had taken place in former years between the several nomadic tribes inhabiting the hills.”³¹ The hills he refers to are the Baluchistan hills of southwest Sind, from where the Brahui-speaking Oraons, then a goat-herding pastoral people, had trade routes via Rajasthan with Chotanagpur via the central Indian river valleys (Narmada, Sone, Damodar). Even today songs mentioning places like the Satpuras abound in Oraon song. These people raised memorial megaliths, and the tradition is a living one still in South Jharkhand.

But before the megalith period, when man was still in the Holocene period of moving away from the late Pleistocene into *Homo sapiens sapiens*, we find the sites of emergence also in Jharkhand and its boundaries, forming those “*cataract cultures*” found also in Ethiopia (Blue Nile, White Nile, etc.), in which Palaeolithic man in the rugged mountainous

²⁹ A.C.L. Carlleyle, in Rep. Archaeological Survey of India, IV, p.21; and *Ibid*, VI, pp. 33-39

³⁰ James Tod, *Travels in Western India*, p.30; also, *Annals and Antiquities in Rajasthan*, p.648

³¹ Frere, *JBBRAS*, V, (1857), p.351

country changes into the semi- agricultural hunter-gatherer in the plains and hilly outcrops of river valleys. We have in Jharkhand and its environs still the traces of such Palaeolithic societies seen in primitive tribes like the Birhor, Juang, Korwa, and more developed ones like Asur, Agaria, Munda, Oraon, etc. Some are Austronesian and Protoaustraloid, others of Kolarian and Dravidian origin. The Lower Palaeolithic has thus continued upto our own times in these regions due to the remote and isolated, hilly and forested tracts like Jharkhand, a phenomenon of the hilly ranges like the Vindhyan ranges, the Kaimur hills, the Mahadeo hills, the Eastern Ghats, and the high plateau areas like Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh and Koraput, and their high forested hilly ranges with river valleys dividing the plateaux. These were the ideal place for human emergence from the Pleistocene into the Holocene, and traces of these places and their early human societies are still with us now. The reason is simple, for these areas were the “contact” point between a hunting-gathering forest society of human and a river-valley agricultural society, and this has been studied by anthropologists like my friend Manoj Kumar Singh in the Kharagpur Hills.³² It is in these hilly river valleys, or, as in the case of Kharagpur Hills in the northernmost part of Jharkhand plateaux, studied by Singh, that we find the Early Man coming down to a recent archaeological calendar and overlapping of Palaeolithic with Mesolithic and the signs of a “sudden” crossover from a hoary millions of years-old human evolving past into the new “modern” industrial tool-making age or Microlithic industry. Man has changed from a tool-maker into an industrialist!

Throughout this kind of terrain we shall observe common features such as common stone-tool kit of overlapping Palaeolithic and Microlithic-Neolithic man, similar place-names such as Satbehya, Satpahar, Piparyadih, etc. The old place names were rather terms denoting stream, spring, hill, etc. rather than a particular place, hence their multiplicity throughout a very wide area covering rather *the lateritic half of the Indian subcontinent*. These societies were the earliest stock of modern Indian man, the tribal cultures still to be found in these very same regions today, some surprisingly little changed, and the victims of modern Indian industrial development projects such as mines, dams, etc. The wildlife of these regions have traditionally held the large animals like elephants and tigers and the biotic food chain which supports them, and these regions are unlike any other part of India except

³² Manoj Kumar Singh, *A New Approach to Explain Culture in Prehistory*, Man in India, , vol. 82 (1 & 2), pp.55-69, January-June 2002

for Kerala and the Himalayan foothills of North India where elephants and tigers were once found in large numbers. The wildlife of the lateritic half of the Indian subcontinent referred to has survived with its tribal peoples and wildlife down to the present day. Conventional archaeological methods of measuring the age of human society changes in these parts. Suddenly we find before our startled eyes (especially if we are from dry and wasted North-Northwest India !), the earliest signs of human flowering, the tribal society in its undisturbed nudity and colourful celebration of life in its exotic exuberance. This is called the “rise of civilization” ! Culture is the check on industrial evolution outstripping its natural resources, and wherever cultures have deteriorated and environments been raped there we witness the rapid rate of industrialization and the dying of culture.

In places such as Hazaribagh and Chatra in the still placid upper Damodar valley or North Karanpura Valley (despite mine-ravaged places where huge opencast mines have come, and where big dams and thermal power stations are going to be built) we witness the site of the Rise of Man. Here we have wonderful evidence of prehistoric Neolithic rock-art set amidst pristine forested hilly ranges, the rock-painting tradition being carried on by the village women (Khowar and Sohrai) in their mudden homes at the feet of the hills. The setting is Palaeolithic, the sweep of scenery unchanged by the passage of time. The landscape and the peopescap may be compared to the Kowa-Khol rockart of Nevada on the scarps of the northernmost edge of Jharkhand quite closeby to the Kharagpur Hills earlier referred to.

Compared with Jharkhand , as professor Basudev Narayan has observed,

“the North Bihar plain represents a complete blank as far as Palaeolithic and Mesolithic tool types are concerned.”³³

We return to the hilly forested plateaux, the winding hill streams and the floating feathers of the Indian Silk Cotton tree mixed with the sickly white *mohua* and *saal* flowers flowering unseen in the forests alongside a little girl grazing her goats in the jungle, a child who may be the last example of her Oraon tribe, a speaker of *Kurrukh* , the dialect of the great Brahui family which was spoken in pre-Harappan Indus...

³³ Basudev Narayan, *Prehistoric Archaeology of Bihar*, K.P.Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna, 1996, p.548

Timescale Chart:

Chart of Stylistic Periods of Rock-art

I. Saraiya, Gonda, Khandar Rockart		Athropomorpha	
II. Satpahar Rockart I, II, III		Animals	
III. Nautangwa, Thethangi, Raham, Sidpa Rockart		Early Geometrical figures	
IV. Isco Rockart		Complex Compound figures	
Anthropomorphic forms		Pre 8000 B.C.	
Wild animal forms	Hunting period	8000-5000 B.C.	Mesolithic
Domestic animal forms	Agricultural period	5000-2500 B.C.	Meso-Chalcolithic
Geometric forms		2500-1100 B.C.	Chalcolithic

Cultural Sequence

Lower Palaeolithic	200,000 B.C.E.	Pebble tools, Flake tools, Choppers, large hand axes (forest based lifestyle)
Middle Palaeolithic	100,000 B.C.E.	Smaller hand axes, scrapers, cleavers, points, borers, (forest based lifestyle)
Upper Palaeolithic	50,000-24,000 B.C.E.	Blades, burrs, rock petroglyph (nomadic lifestyle)
Mesolithic	24,000-8000 B.C.E	Microliths, lunates, points, blades, <i>awls</i> , scrapers, crude pottery, <i>rock paintings</i> (semi-sedentarized lifestyle)
Neolithic	8000-5000 B.C.E.	Rock-paintings, Ground or polished stone axes, ring-stones, stone blades, decorated pottery, (river valley settlements, i.e.Mehergarh)
Chalcolithic	5000- 2300 B.C.E.	Copper artifacts, bronze ornaments, painted pottery, cultivation with harrow in north-west, plough in east, spinning and weaving, arts and crafts, beads, brick houses, <i>terracotta figurines</i> , stone blades, (pre-Harrappan to Indus valley cities and Aryan influence)
Early Iron	2500-1000 B.C.E	Iron weapons (except Indus Valley), copper and silver punch-marked coins (Vedic period)

Stone Tools found in rock shelters or adjacent caves in Hazaribagh and Chatra

Lower Palaeolithic (200,000 B.C.E.)



Middle Palaeolithic (100,000 B.C.E.)



Upper Palaeolithic (50,000-24,000 B.C.E.)



Mesolithic (24,000-8000 B.C.E)



Neolithic (8000-5000 B.C.E.)



Chalcolithic (5000- 2300 B.C.E.)



Early Iron (2500-1000 B.C.E)





The Marwateri cave where many palaeolithic stone tools have been found



A view showing how erosion as far back as the ice-age formed the rock shelters by moving bodies of melting ice

CHAPTER- 2

Some Comparison between the Rockart and Village Art

In 1991 after receiving information from my friend Tony Herbert about a rockart site in Isco I went there and brought it to light. It was this, and another chance discovering that led to my discovery of the connection between the rockart and the Khovar and Sohrai tribal village painting which was a continuation of the same tradition. I was driving from Isco up the steep forested hill trail to the little village of Saheda overlooking the valley. When I reached the top I got out of the four-wheel-drive vehicle driven by my friend Suresh to find the way, as we seemed lost. In the car were Suresh's daughter Pampi, and my daughters Cherry and Juliet. Suddenly I saw in front of me through the trees what looked like a line of running animals and huge birds, including the Rhinoceros and the Bengal Florican, both now extinct in this area and only found in the pre-historic rock and the living village paintings! Thoroughly dumbstruck I stood for a moment completely taken a back. I was confronting for the first time the very powerful comb-cut visual images of the Ganju Khovar art in its natural setting. I must have seen it so many times before, but not noted it. The mud of the small mudden house was being painted by a small, lithe young artist named Putli Ganju who was creating these wonder-filled comb-cut paintings on the walls of her home in celebration of her forthcoming marriage. I called my daughters and together we went and met Putli, who had painted not only the outside, but also the inner rooms and courtyard of her home with huge fishes and snakes, and the inimitable "Putli Cow"! She had not left an inch unadorned. It was from this chance discovery that we explored further afield, finding not only house after house, but village after village full of these Khovar paintings, as it was the summer marriage season (January-May). I found that the houses would be repainted again after the marriage season (after the monsoon) for the harvest festival called Sohrai (Oct.-Nov.). The Ganjus and the Kurmis of Eastern Hazaribagh commonly paint their houses with earth ochres and manganese oxides, while the Kurmis of South Hazaribagh, and other artisanal sub-castes of the North Karanpura Valley decorate their houses at this time with comb-cut images, when red and white colour stamping is done over the pictures to depict their ritual nature (i.e. White for rice, red for sacrifice). Thus I gave the comb painting the name Khovar art and the painted art the name Sohrai painting, both names having stuck for purposes of convenience to differentiate between the two techniques of painting.

The symbols painted by the village woman are a form of written expression, albeit on the mud walls of their houses. Lydia-Icke Schwalbe has observed “The graphics and symbols in pictograms painted mostly by woman in the Munda and Ho settlements, as well as by the Dravidian Oraons in Hazaribagh villages on walls of houses or natural rocks for festive season in their customs, have to be taken into consideration as a kind of “written” historical records. Even the stone settings *bid-diri*, spread all over Mundaric countries, carry historic informations. The *diri* are like records or landmarks of the tribes... regulating the indigenous land-rights, property-rights, and the social and political responsibility of the individual according to their Khunti Katti system. (Ref: J.Hoffman, Encyclopedia Mundarica, Op.cet.vol.8, p.2382-2387)”³⁴

Among the native American since early times drawn or painted symbols were referred to as “writing”. This is the same expression given by our villagers when they refer to the wall paintings as writing (*Likhna*). Writing with reference to the Blackfeet Indian of North Dakota on the Missouri River in America in his field diary (15th August, 1833). Prince Maximilian Zu Weid observed the Indians referred to sketches by the artists Karl Bodmer, that he could “write” well.³⁵ Rockart shelters are commonly named after “writing” such as Lekhlahi Pahar (Palamau), Likhaniya (Mirzapur), Etc.

The Khovar is the bridal chamber and relates to the ancient term used throughout Central India for painted rockart caves, the villages believing these are originally sacred nuptial chambers and for which reason the tradition had continued in the villages. Khovar may be translated into the Mundaric root word *Kho* meaning a wild cave and *Var* meaning bridegroom. I have also pointed out that the name Isco may come from the root *Ays*, meaning copper in ancient India, and the same Mundaric root word *Kho*, indicating a copper mine. There are ancient mine working in these hills.

³⁴ (i) Lydia Icke-Schwalbe, The Ho World-view, State Museum for Ethnography, 1984; (ii) J.Hoffman, Encyclopedia Mundarica, op.cit.vol.8, p.2382-2387

³⁵ Prince Maximilian zu Weid, People of the First Man, Life among the Plains Indians in their Final Days of Glory, First-hand account of the Expedition up the Missouri River, 1833-34; E.P.Dutton, New York, 1976, p.104 (*Verrier Elwin, The Tribal Art of Middle India- A Personal Record, Geoffrey Cumberloge, Oxford University Press, 1950.* (ii) *The Religion of an Indian Tribe-the Art of the Ikon, 1955*)

The art of Khovar and Sohrai is an art of using the natural oxides as the stone artists had done in the painting of the rockshelters, and due to the continuing matriarchal tradition of the village women painting the art on the walls of their houses I have often mooted the idea that the pre-historic rock paintings themselves *might have been the work of women!*

In the house paintings natural yellow ochres of different kinds are used. When the comb-cut designs are to be obtained then a layer of black manganese oxide is spread on the wall over which a coat of either yellow ochre (*pila matti*), or white *charak matti* obtained from deep underground mines containing a mixture of Kaolin, and limestone is spread over the black wall, then before it dries the designs are cut into it. In Isco various kinds of oxides may be found including a delicate lavender coloured earth giving the Munda houses an attractive aspect! It was from the very first apparent that the Khovar and Sohrai murals of the villages and the rockart were linked and these tribals and the semi-hinduized artisan castes were carrying on an ancient pre-historic tradition un-noticed. The fact that the entire region was threatened by a huge open cast coal mining project named the North Karanpura Coalfields Project was even more urgent a reason for the artistic heritage to be highlighted in an effort to save both the villages and the rockart sites. The envisaged displacement due to the coal mine project was to destroy over two hundred villages and displace their communities. Opencast coalmining brings no economic benefit to the tribal and hinduized folk communities but merely ensures the destruction of the cultural and environmental heritage and natural environment including thousands of square kilometers of rich agricultural lands and forests which support these communities. In these forests are wonderful wild animals painted in the rockart and village paintings. Animals like tigers (national animal) and elephants (state animal), Indian Bison or Gaur, deer, and other significant wildlife, including the peacock, the national bird.

I found the amazing similarity between the Kurmi painting of Eastern Hazaribagh (Bhelwara cluster, Bishungarh block) and the Ghatwal painting (Potmo block) that had not only similar stylistic images and linear quality as the rockart, but also featured the same wheeled wild animals used in ritual paintings. This Sohrai art was brought to my notice in December 1993 by my son Jason who while returning from Calcutta saw these painted houses at Bhelwara. At that time I was already deeply involved in the documentation of the Khovar comb

paintings in the project of the Australian Embassy. Subsequently, I applied for and obtained a project to document the Kurmi-Sohrai, and this gave me a chance to study the art closely and write a book of six hundred pages on it.

The findings of my researches are that the Hazaribagh and Chatra region have a very old and unspoiled artistic heritage which has not been any way adulterated by the contact of North Indian artistic convention as happened in the case of Mithila painting in Madhubani or the *Pata* paintings of Bengal and Orissa. The art of Khovar and Sohrai remained a wall painting mural tradition until I brought it to paper from 1992 onwards. Thus it is a very recent tradition to bring the art to paper unlike the *pata* paintings of Bengal and Orissa which had been developed long back, subjected to Sanskritization, and brought into the domain of the male artist. By contrast the Hazaribagh village paintings on paper are a novelty painted only by non-professional women artists. However, in this form, they have drawn international attention and reached the major art galleries and museums in the international sphere, both in the view of their artistic excellence and ethnological importance, and they have enjoyed the attention of some of the world's best curators. I will deal with these developments at the end.

The anthropologists had not taken sufficiently into account the importance of the art of the Indian tribes until Verrier Elwin brought this into focus in a series of studies. It is strange that S.C Roy, W.G. Archer, and Verrier Elwin, all of whom visited Hazaribagh, the latter two in 1940-42 (the year I was born) should have omitted any reference to the painted houses of Hazaribagh! Archer attended my parents wedding in 1942.

The art of the villages apart from the wall paintings best expresses the the tradition and strength of the rockart in the embroidered quilt or ledra which the older women make for their baby grand-children. The ledra is made up in six-feets lengths of folded cotton saris which are embroidered with the same motifs as are found in the rock paintings, and village house paintings, and which are believed to have protective powers, similar powers no doubt protecting the child. It is also a "memory quilt" apart from being a "crib quilt" because it perpetuates the memory of the grandmother in the family. Birds, trees, animals, and plant forms can appear, all being very auspicious. All natural forms in a very wide sense may be seen as totemic because these people trace their origins to nature and worship nature in all her forms being Animists. It is the old forest religion.

The people who claim that their ancestors painted the rockart are the Birhors, a clan of the Bhuiya, and by that inference related to the Baiga of the Central Provinces. Elwin was of the opinion that the Bhuiya and Baiga are related in Chhattisgarh and Chotanagpur.³⁶ The Baiga is a sorcer or medicine-man, and the Bhuiya make many magical drawings, and the images are within the domain of the Bhuiya women when they decorate their houses with finger painting. Since the Bhuiya is a clan of the Birhor, and intermarriage takes place, the art of the Bhuiya comes into prominence. From my study, the wall art of the Bhuiya today is identical with the prehistoric rock-art, and we may find a people not far removed from their ancestors who painted the rock caves with similar forms, for similar magico-religious purposes. It is important that they have a living tradition of painting their mud houses. I have also given the Birhor paper to paint on and their paintings depict wild animals and birds, snares, and traps, bee honey gathering, and hunting scenes.

The Bhuiya wall paintings are made very much at a low level since the person making it is standing on the ground when the house is painted. In the Isco, Thethangi, and Raham rockart, even perhaps in Nutangwa Pahar, the paintings are quite high up and make one consider the artist being held up by some type of support. There is no such continuing tradition today, i.e. ladders, or framework when painting. So it would seem that this was a feature in some of the more ornate rockart panels. The Bhuiyas meanwhile use their fingers to “paint” in the liquid coating of mud on their simple dwellings, the curved *Basera* pattern being very common. The circle with cross in it found in the rockart is also found among the Bhuiyas and Birhor as *Soso-Bonga*, *Bana Sana*, *Tak chanlri* motifs etc.

These motifs are also found among the ritual art of the Oraon in the *Danda-Katta* symbol. The Oraons also used to paint the walls of their houses with circular motifs, lotus, elephant, etc.³⁷ The Tattoo marks of the Oraon are found in the Hazaribagh rockart (i.e. Sidpa) and one consists of a river with line of trees.³⁸ The Oraons have changed in Chotanagpur beyond recognition. The old Nagmetia Oraons who wear the necklaces of snake bones still perhaps found in Khunti-Tamar range, are so similar to the Muria and Maria Gond one could hardly

³⁶ Verrier Elwin, *The Baiga*, 1939, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1986, p.3-4

³⁷ S.C.Roy, *The Orans of the Chotanagpur*, 1915, facing p.88

³⁸ *Ibid*, plate (see p.63)

tell the differences. The reason for the change has been due to missionization and sanskritization which has done away with old bodily decorations, hairstyles, style of dress, etc. This also affected their house wall painting. The Oraons also had the Muria-type Ghotul by way of the Dhumkuria³⁹ similar to the Koddada of their cousins the Maler of Rajmahal.⁴⁰ The unique with the Bhuiya art-forms is their closeness to the rockart. I have found among the Koeri woman-folk a tradition of making similar sacred designs in the sand, and on their arms you will find tattoo marking identical with the rockart. They do not seem to know the connections.



Example of Bhuiya motifs



Example of Tattoo Motifs

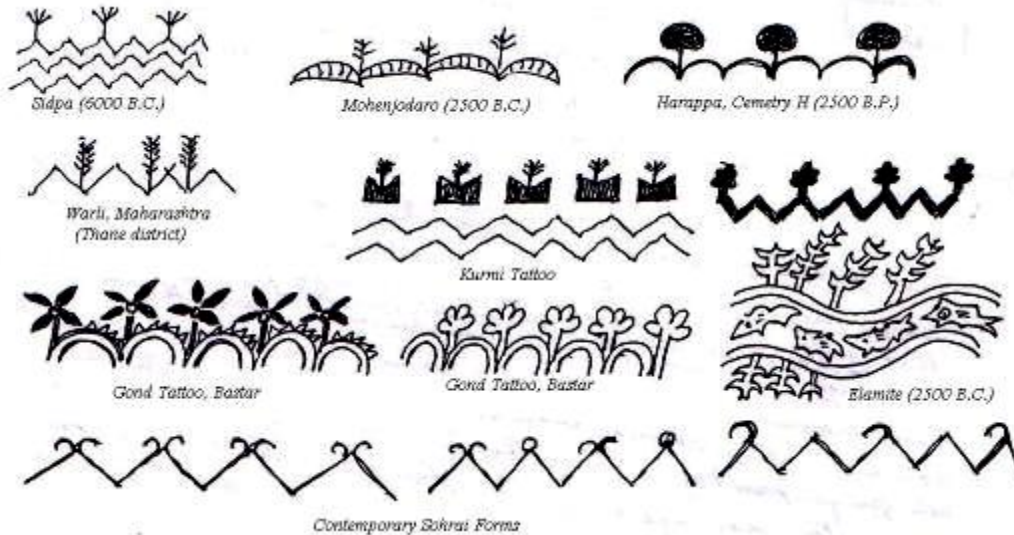
I have found the painted markings in many rockart sites repeated in various tattoo designs with many other village castes. Of particular interest is the motif of the river shown as flowing water, which is a zigzag motif, common to the Indus and many other places as well, which is significant by the placing of trees on the points of alternate zigzags. This motif has been found in the rockart of Sidpa (6000 B.C), Mohenjodaro (2500 B.C.), Harappa, Cemetery H (2500 B.P.) in the contemporary Oraon tattoo (on the forehead, temple) in Kurmi tattoo (arms and neck) in Gond tattoo, etc. It is painted in the contemporary Sohrai

³⁹ Ibid, p.143-144

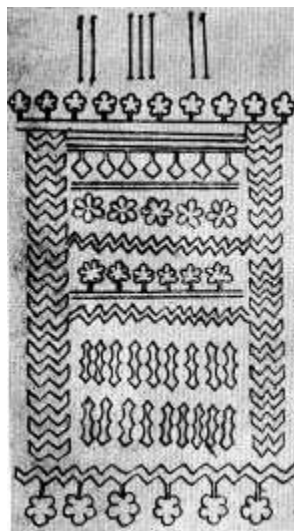
⁴⁰ L.P.Vidyarthi, The Maler, 1963, p.90-98

painting. It is also found in Warli wall painting in Maharashtra. It is also an ancient Elamite motif. This wide distribution of this motif will mean that it is not only very old, but that its significance spread over a wide body of people.

Diagram



The zigzag in ancient Egypt was the pictograph for a river or flowing water, and in this form it was recognized by the rock painting Native North American Pueblo Indian as associated with the mountain (as in Warli mural art from Thane, Maharashtra). Rivers have anciently in India represented the mother goddess (ie.Ganga), and forests have represented the father god (Shiva). This may be seen as a gift of prehistoric Tribal India. It will be noted in the Oraon motif that every other zigzag point is left without a tree and that in the Warli the trees are in the valley between the zigzags. Both these indicate mountains. The Oraon tattoo motif has a line under the zig-zag which represents the river.



(S.C. Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur, 1915, Reprint Edn. 1984- plate*)

(ii) *Ibid*, p.63-64

The Kurmis of Bhelwara paint a wheeled spotted “Ghoda” during the harvest festival of Sohrai, which may be found in the rockart.



Isco Ghoda



Kurmi Ghoda

The square or rectangle with crossed diagonals is a common marriage motif. Its original provenance in the rockart shows a continuity with the village ritual art tradition. All these motifs discussed are in some way related with the intimate relation between man and woman at the pre-marital and marital stage. It is an expression of the unity of man and woman from youth to old-age, even death because it is believed the tattoo marks follows the spirit after death and is the mask of its identity in the spirit world after death. It is based on a deep belief system.

The Munda finger painting is found at its best in the village of Isco itself. Here one may study the village wall art, the tattoos which the Munda and Ganju women adorn themselves with, and nearby is the heavy Rana and Teli comb-art in the village of Barhmaniya. From here as one goes along the main road to Barkagaon one will find the comb paintings of the many other sub-castes such as the Prajapatis, Thakurs and others. I have studied the artforms of these villages through the valley and found that *even as the castes group may change the art does not change, nor does its direct connection with the rock paintings*. Wherever the

tribes and the hunduized sub-castes are, there some semblance of the rockart will be found preserved in their ritual or decorative arts. This is a testimony to the strong bond between the past and the present *and the need of the tradition*. Upon the hilly tops above Isco in the Sati range in Saheda, Chapri, and Jorakath villages we shall find the art of Santal, Bhuiya, Ganju and Kurmi, all telling us of their close connection with the rockart a stone's throw down the mountain side.



Oraon ancestor totem

The Oraon are a North Dravidian tribe similar to the Maler of Rajmahal hills in Santal Parganas, and with the monkey worshipping Gond tribals of Bastar with whom both share a bachelor dormitory custom (i.e. Oraon *Dhumkuria*, Muria *Ghotul*, Maler *Koddada*).⁴¹ Maler have prevalence of a harvest festival (*Sohrai Bandana*) in the winter and at which time the cattle are felicitated,⁴² which is similar to the same festival in *Ashwin*, in August which the Oraons celebrate in Hazaribagh with wall paintings, and which the Oraons, Mundas, and Santals of Singhbhum observe with the *Bandhana* paintings.⁴³ Much damage has been done to the old art of this great people by missionization and sanskritization. But inspite of it there is a large lexicon of signs preserved and despite the hand of change the motifs are still linked to the rockart of these respective regions. The Singhbhum *Bandhana* paintings are noted for their "Tree of Life" and *Panda-baba* motifs. The Oraons of Hazaribagh paint their houses with floral, plant, bird and animal form, and ancestors (*Purkha*) painted in vertical and

⁴¹ Sarat Chandra Ray, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur*, 1915 (1984 Edn. Man in India, Ranchi, p.142-143); V.Elwin, *The Muria and Their Ghotul*, 1947; L.P.Vidyarthi, *The Maler*, 1963, p.91

⁴² L.P.Vidyarthi, *The Maler*, Bookland Pvt.Ltd, 1963, p.63

⁴³ D.J.Rycroft, *Born from the Soil: The Indigenous Mural Aesthetic of Keroals in Jharkhand, Eastern India*, South Asian Studies, Volume 12, 1996, p.69.

horizontal bands of earth (Kaolin, Oxide) colours in red, yellow, white, black, etc. I have noted this tradition among the Kurmis also, which shows a connection in the past.

As I have pointed out earlier the Oraons are an old tribe believed to have been the pre-Harappans of the Indus Valley.⁴⁴ In 1915 S.C.Roy had noted their wall paintings and mistakenly attributed Hindu influence.⁴⁵ The Oraons constitute a master tribe around whom local artisanal groups formed themselves. If we consider the Oraon as a sister tribe of the Gonds and Mundas and Maler Pahariyas, even the Santals, then we get a great cultural unity. All these are Animist tribes who worship the goddess of the sacred grove whom the Oraons called Sarna Burhi or Chhalo Pacheho. The Kisans of Sambalpur are Oraons.⁴⁶ The Oraons are held to be autochthonous to India.⁴⁷ Risley found no difference between Oraons and Mundas.⁴⁸ The art of this people covers the canvas of Central India. Their genesis legend is shared with Munda and Asur, and their great artistic traditions will be found to some extent in both tribes.



Oraon wall painting

From S.C.Roy, the Oraon 1915, p.88

⁴⁴ Asko Parpola, *Deciphering the Indus Script*, Cambridge University Press, (Edn.2000), p.160-168.

⁴⁵ S.C.Roy, *Ibid*, (i) opp. p.88, (ii) *Ibid*, p.103-104

⁴⁶ S.C.Roy, *Ibid*, p.11

⁴⁷ S.C.Roy, *Ibid*, p.17

⁴⁸ S.C.Roy, *Ibid*, 53

I have spoken of the connection between the Oraons, a Dravidian tribe, and the rock-art of Hazaribagh. This tribe practices forms that are only to be found in the rock-art and the painted pottery of the Indus. They are famous for a totem art in wide vertical coloured bands also found among the Kurmi. The Turis are a small hill tribe given to making bamboo baskets and mats for a living. Their art is floral and painted in natural earth ochres on the mudden walls of their houses. The most spectacular Kurmi Khovar I have found is in the village of Jorakath in south Hazaribagh, a few kilometers above Isco on the Hazaribagh plateau. The art of this people is replete with fable and tradition. Here appears the four-legged bird, Chibba, also said to resemble a man, which is flightless and runs along the branches of trees. The same tradition may be found a hundred kilometers away in the jungles to the west in Chatra. The belief in the fabulous is an isoteric manifestation, transcending logic and science, and the source of man's earliest gods.

The Sohrai painting by the Kurmis and Ghatwals of eastern Hazaribagh, in the Blocks of Bishungarh and Potmo, are an example of the continuous living traditions of painting since Buddhist times. Even as we have traced the sources of these village paintings from the pre-historic rockart of Hazaribagh, so too we have to trace their artistic expressions even today as the inspiration for the Buddhist sacred iconography, which historically grew out of this region. Thus we come to the Buddhist traditions arising out of Khovar and Sohrai village art. The plant forms were the basis of the floral imagery, and the evolution of the *bhangas* (stances) of Buddhist relief carving and painting, traceable to their plant forms in the village art, in which certain central forms are still referred to as forms expressing Mahadeva or Shiva. The use of birds and animals in the Buddhist art also traces its early sources to these village roots. The first forms in Indian painting emerge with Buddhism, and their first subjects were tribal societies in the Deccan (i.e. Ajanta, 200 B.C.) But Buddhism had its birth in the shadows of Jharkhand, and it is over here we have to look for the earliest significances of forms. Thus we still find not only the idea of the human in the plant form, but the idea of the *bhangas* which find their origins among the art of the tribals living in close proximity with rockart painted by their ancestors, not only in Jharkhand, but in Orissa and Chhatisgarh as well. The Buddhist sites are quite close to rockart. The sacred symbols of Buddhist offering are the signs found in the village painting (i.e. the eight auspicious signs- i.) golden wheel, ii.) victory banner, iii.) jeweled umbrella, iv.) Shri-vasta, v.) lotus, vi.) vase, vii.) golden fish, and viii.) right-whorled conch shell. The seven royal signs- i.) wheel, ii.) jewel,

iii.) queen, iv.) minister, v.) labyrinth, vi.) elephant, and vii.) horse. The eight auspicious substances offered during consecration, i.) mirror, ii.) gorocana, iii.) bowl of curd, iv.) durva grass, v.) Bhelwa or Wood Apple (*Semecarpus anacardium*, associated with Shiva), vi.) saffron mark, vii.) mustard seed, viii.) right-whorled conch-shell. These are all symbols found even today in the village painting. Who can say these symbols are without meaning? Perhaps a volume could be written on each symbol. But the symbols are older than Buddhism.⁴⁹

The following exhibitions were held in Australia between 1995-2000.

Hogarth Gallery,	Paddington, Sydney	1995
National Gallery Of Australia Vision of Kings(shoppe)	Canberra ,Jan.	1996
Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre	Casula, Sydney , May-June,	1996
Footscray Community Centre	Melbourne, Novem-Decem.	1996
Morree Plains Gallery	Morree, NSW , February	1997
Freemantle Arts Centre	Perth, Western Australia, March	1997
Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre	Casula, Sydney,July-Aug,	1997
Bathurst Art Gallery	Bathurst, NSW, Mar-May,	1998
Tamworth Art Centre	Tamworth, NSW, Dec-Feb	1998
Gallery 482	Brisbane, Qld., Feb-April	1998
Nexus Gallery	Adelaide, SA, Jun-July,	1998
Hogarth Gallery	Paddington, Sydney Aug-Sept.	1998
Djambu Gallery, Customs House (Australian Museum)	Circular Quay, Sydney, March-June	2000

After this the art found acceptance elsewhere in the world and exhibitions were held at the following prestigious venues,

Rebecca Hossack Gallery	London, May-June,	2000
Victoria Crafts Council	Melbourne, April May	2001
Bellevue Gallery	Berlin, August	2001
Therese Dion Gallery of Contemp. Art	Montreal, Canada, Sept.	2001
Eppelheim Gallery	Germany, March-April	2002
Kassel Gallery	Germany, July-August	2002
Stuttgart Gallery	Germany, October	2002
Boras Kunst Museum	Boras, Sweden, September	2003
Heinrich Böll Foundation	Berlin, September	2003
Volkerkunde Museum	Heidelberg, Sept.-Oct	2003
Catholic Information Centre	Ludwigsberg, Feb.-March	2004
State Museum of Ethnography (Volkerkunde)	Dresden, May-Sept.	2004
Mandat International	Geneva, July	2004
Indian Embassy	Berlin, December	2005
Tarshito Studio	Rome, July	2006
Bari Studio	Milan, October	2006
Wirtschaftswetter (Online Exhibition)	Germany, 1 st April- 30 th June	2007
(www.wirtschaftswetter.de/hg/twac.html)		
Eppelheim	Germany, June	2007
Bonn	Germany, March	2008
Girasole Galley	Udine, May	2008

⁴⁹ B.Imam, *Harvest Icons: A Search for the Sacred Sohrai Tradition*, 1999, Chapter XII, The Buddhistic Traditions of Painting arising out of Khovar and Sohrai Art.

Museum Pigorini	Rome, May-Sept.	2008
Norden	Northern Germany, July	2008
Emden	Northern Germany, Aug.	2008
Tarshito Exhibition	Milan, March	2009
Nehru Centre	London, April	2009
Aachen, MISEREOR Centre	Germany, April	2009
Two Exhibition in Hanover,	Germany, May-June,	2010
Exhibition in Friebourg,	Germany, April-May,	2010
Catholic Youth Organization, Linz	Austria, March,	2011
FIAN Office, Bad Honeff (Bonn)	Germani, March,	2011
Brunei Gallery, SOAS	London, 13 th March- 25 th June	2011
Italian Institute for Africa and the Orient (ISIAO)	Rome, Italy 19 th April- 28 th April	2011
Milan Exhibition	Milan, Italy, April,	2011
Espace ENCAN, Arts Atlantic Festival	La Rochelle, France, Nov.,	2011
Rietberg Museum,	Zurich, Switzerland, Aug.-Sept.	2012

Exhibitions in India

Gallery Chemould	Bombay, July	1995
Sakshi Gallery	Bangalore, Sept-Oct,	1996
India International Centre	New Delhi, Aug.	1998
Gallery Chemould	Calcutta, April,	1999
Gallery Chemould	Bombay, July-Aug,	1999
Paramparik Karigar (National Gallery of Modern Art)	Bombay, December	1999
Cymroza Gallery	Bombay, March,	2000
Cymroza Gallery	Bombay, August	2002
Max Muller Bhavan	Delhi, August	2002
Madras Crafts Council	Madras	2003
Merkha Lutyens	New Delhi, March	2007
Artisana, Crafts Council of West Bengal	Calcutta, February	2009

After the bringing of the village wall paintings to paper in 1992 a special series of projects to document the art were started in my Sanskriti Centre with sponsorship of the Australian Embassy in New Delhi. It began under the banner of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) and the newly formed Tribal Women Artists Cooperative (TWAC). I wrote the book *Bridal Caves: A Search for the Adivasi Khovar Tradition* published by INTACH in 1995. The first exhibition of the newly made Khovar and Sohrai paintings was held in 1995 in Chemould Gallery, Bombay, and later in the same year at the Hogarth Gallery, Sydney. The former was organized by Khorshed and Kekoo Gandhi, and the latter by Anthony Bourke. Thereafter a series of twelve exhibitions was held in Australia at prestigious venues organized by John Kirkman, Director, Casula Arts Centre, Sydney (1996-1998). Other exhibitions were held in India including Gallery Chemould, Cymroza Gallery (Bombay), Max Muller Bhavan (New Delhi), India International Centre (New Delhi), and other prestigious Venues. In 1999, Films Division, Govt.of India, made a 35mm Kodacolour documentary on the artists and their work which won the President's Rajat Kamal award in 2000. The art appeared in 2004 as film no.10-11 of the series *Paintings of*

India produced by Benoy Behl and shown on Doordarshan I in 2004 which also showed the rockart. In 2000 five TWAC artists participated in a one month working exhibition organized by the Djamu Gallery of the Australian Museum in which fourteen murals of 6'x12' feet were painted by women artists from Hazaribagh and placed in prestigious collections like the Art Gallery of New South Wales (Sydney), Queensland Art Gallery (Brisbane), Casula Arts Centre (Casula), Australian Museum (Sydney), etc. The project Back to the Walls featured Pacific and Indian artists of TWAC working together for and my son Jason produced a series of wood sculptures of the Sohrai *ghoda* which were to establish this artform. Our artists have personally given demonstrations of painting at the United Nations, Geneva; Bellevue Gallery, Berlin; Volkerkunde Museum, Heidelberg; and Australian Museum, Sydney. In 1996 a major exhibition of the embroidered quilts, or "ledra" was held at Casula Arts Centre, Sydney, after which the quilts went on an exhibition tour in Australia. Embroidered quilts made by our women artists entered the prestigious collections of the Queensland Art Gallery (Brisbane), and Powerhouse Museum (Sydney). In August 2003 Philomina Tirkey and Putli Ganju, women artists of TWAC took part in *Asia Pacific Weeks* in Berlin, followed by exhibitions at the Volkerkunde Museum, Heidelberg and gave working demonstrations at both places. Many exhibitions of the art have been held in leading museums around the world, including the Museum of Man, Montreal, Rebecca Hossack Gallery (London), Boras Kunstmuseum (Sweden), Volkerkunde Museum (Dresden), National Gallery of Modern Art (Bombay). Recently a film on Khovar and Sohrai art and rockart and the threats by coal mining in the Damodar Valley was produced by INTACH, with funding from HIVOS (Netherlands) and directed by Susanne Gupta of Berlin. It was entered in the Leipzig Film Festival. The case for protecting the art and rockart was taken to the United Nations (UNWGIP) by my wife Philomina Tirkey, and our daughter Juliet in 2001-2002, and in 2004 by my son Justin. Reports on the rockart and village art and threats to it have appeared in the Heritage at Risk, World Report of ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites, Paris), 2001/2002 and 2002/2003.



A Ganju house in Saheda above Isco painted by the owner Putli, now a famous Sohrai artist



Painted Munda house at Isco few hundred meters from the painted shelter, Photo: Daniela Bezzi



Putli, an internationally famous artist with a friend of the Ganju tribe in front of a wall painted in the zig-zag style found in the nearby Isco rock paintings



A spotted and wheeled animal (ghoda) ritually painted on the house walls during the harvest festival of Sohrai with the onset of winter (November)



Motifs found in the village finger painting (Khover) which are derived from the rock-art



Note the red and white stamping done with corn cobs to celebrate the rice harvest and sacrifice



Khovar finger-painting motif on the wall of a house similar to rockart motifs



Designs in a “dokra” cast metal bowl made by local Malhar metal casters by lost wax process similar to rock-art motifs



Tattoo motifs found in painted rock-art



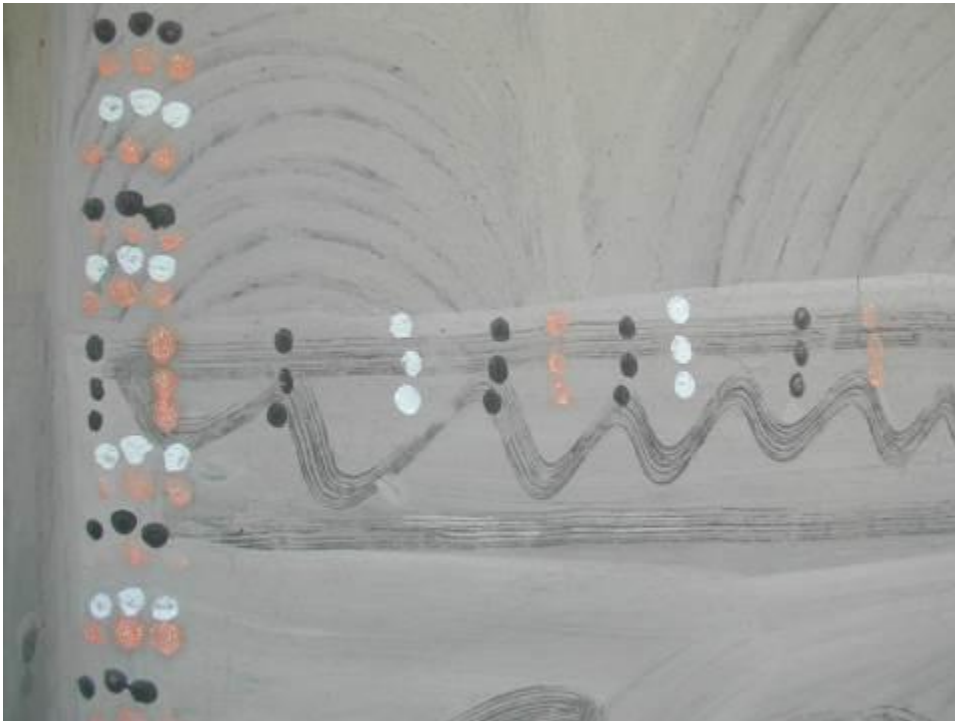
Tattoo motifs on inner forearm of a tribal woman with similar forms to those found in the rock-art



Rock-art motifs in tattoos on the back of the hands. Note fish at extreme left and fig leaf at extreme right



A “dokra” cast metal bull in the form of the painted bull in the rock-art of Sidpa (See Chapter 10, Fig.7.6)



Note motifs found in the rock-art, also found in the village Khovar painting

CHAPTER- 3

An Introduction to the rock-art sites

The Rock-Art

The rock-art of Hazaribagh and Chatra is similar to the rockart of Hemgri and Osakothi of the Sundergarh district of Orissa and Vikramkhole in Sambalpur district. It is also comparable to the rockart of Chhatisgarh. Perhaps it might also be said that the Hazaribagh Rock-art is in a better preserved state. In this rockart there are two groups or periods of pictures, indicating a level of transience of art from the Pleistocene to the Holocene, or that is to say from before the art of the pastoralists i.e. the art of the hunters; to the art of the pastoralists, who would eventually use the domestic cattle (*Bos primogenus*) for plough agriculture, although there are few examples of cattle (*Bos primogenus* and *Bos indicus*) in the rockart of Hazaribagh (and Chatra) wild *Bos primogenus* cattle Gaur or Indian Bison (*Bos gaurus*) are found. The animal rock-art of Hazaribagh stylistically similar to the rockart of the Vindhya, and it is pertinent that the floors and surrounds of the painted shelters have yielded the same stone tools, blades, celts, and microliths as in the Vindhya (i.e. *Vindhyan*, or surgical microliths), and this forms the early level of rock-art all over India. The rectangular patterns (mandala) emerge in this level, and indicate the presence of the consciousness of “centres of energy” or magico-religious significance connected with the animals depicted in the rock paintings, a very primitive association found in a more developed way in the later art of the Harappan seal animal figures. The connection between the *mandala* and the animal form may trace its genesis to this early stage of Indian cultural evolution. These many rectangular motifs are connected with “Mesolithic” art in its transition to the Chalcolithic or agricultural period. Such motifs are found in all the rockart sites of Hazaribagh and Chatra and refer to a Mesolithic strata. This evolves into the later geometric forms continuously of right angles, squares, trapezoids, etc., and the pigment being in different shades of red, yellow, white. There is a prevalence of zoomorphic forms of frogs and insects, and other anthropomorphic forms in some rockart sites (i.e. Thethangi), but special note may be made of one site, Saraiya on the south scarp of the Satpahar Range, in which only such forms abound, including human figures with horns and tails, which is obviously shamanistic. This lovely site, set upon a high and lonely eyrie, surveys the upper or western North Karanpura Valley looking out over the Piperwar and Ashoka coal mines to

the small settlement of McCluskiegunj and over it to the distant blue outline of the Netarhat Range in the distance in the south-west. The absence of humped cattle (*Bos indicus*) and horse-riders indicates an early foraging people *before the advent of domesticated cattle*, and much later, the horse. The absence of “contact” rock paintings of a later period, such as almost inevitable in the rockart of other regions, indicates non-interference by outside cultures with a purely Mesolithic culture in the rock-art of Jharkkhand.

This is borne out by the evidence of good microlithic assemblages in every one of the shelters at the site of Laranga on the bend of the Garhi river near Satpahars between Tandwa and Mandair, we find a quartz microlith industry site with thousands of quartz microliths strewn about the ground. The evidence of a Neolithic celt, blade, and ring-stone in the Isco rock shelter indicates Neo-Chalcolithic proto-Dravidian occupancy and traditions which is further borne out by the unique rockart. This requires archaeological excavation under the rock painting, a problem for which has been the cemented flooring laid below this shelter by the tourism department recently in violation of all norms. The evidence of Middle Palaeolithic stone tools in the vicinity of the region indicates the thousands of years of continuous primitive human habitation this area has witnessed. It is surprising how little importance has been given to the rock-art by the archaeologists so far.

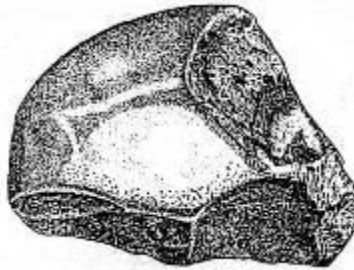
Over the years of my researches at Isco and in the surrounding countryside, I have established a pebbled shoreline around the closed basin of the Damodar valley at a time when the entire upper trap of the river was a lake, definitely also at one time frozen ice. The pebble culture as I have shown is similar to the Soan pebble culture in Pakistan. This places the earliest ancestry of this site at 1,500,000 years back! There is a continuous evidence of all stages of stone tool culture from that level to the present awaiting the researches in Isco and its surrounds. The rock-art itself has many stories to tell. Its earliest rock-art level has been made about ten thousand years ago. There is a nearby cave in which stone tools dating back to 100,000 years have been found. In the surrounding area also similar stone tools have been found, all of which are kept for study in my Sanskriti Museum in Hazaribagh, along with other research finds and documentation. In the Isco painted rock-shelter plenty of microliths were found, and polished stone celt, ring-stone, stone blade etc. These are important finds for the archaeologist to piece together the very earliest history of the artists and the exact provenance of the rock-art. All the stone tools are in my museum.

This brief introduction before we begin a comprehensive analysis of each rock-art site is being made to acquaint the reader with the situation on the ground. Isco is about 20 kilometers east of the Block headquarters of Barkagaon, and some 30 kilometer crow-fly miles due south of Hazaribagh town. The upper valley of river Damodar, or North Karanpura Valley (taking its name from the small village of Karanpura on the north bank of the river) is a very precious heritage site of world importance because it is the repository of the oldest known archaeological remains, and continuing cultural heritage of early man in India. There is another strong parallel. Wherever major early human habitation sites have been found in a rift valley or other geological exposure, regularly there has been an old human habitation site which has developed into a town or city within a hundred kilometer to its north. This situation presents itself in Isco, and the other rock-art sites in the upper Damodar. Nearby to the rock-art sites throughout the region we find the traces of prehistoric man going back fifty thousand years and more. Now the real challenge that faces us is the discovery of coal in this area. The coal mining has already started at the western end of the valley (Piperwar, Ashoka, etc.) and over seventy-five mines, all open cast mining, are expected. These mines are several square kilometer across and over three hundred feet deep. They will destroy over two hundred villages and archaeological heritage in the region.

Long back the entire valley sank between the two opposing land masses of Ranchi to the south and Hazaribagh to the north. This hundred kilometer stretch from Chulahi at the Damodar river's source in Latehar, to Ramgarh and Rajrappa in the east, became a collapsed carboniferous bed of the old forests of the carboniferous era which sank with the existing flora and fauna, including dinosaurs. The carboniferous fossil record still preserves these remains, and those burning this fuel today are burning this fossil record stored in these carboniferous deposits. The trees of this people were large conifers like the monkey-puzzle. About two million years ago the human ancestor of the mammal order made its appearance. In the mammals is the ancestry of the reptiles, and the connection goes back to a line which began during this age when dinosaurs became extinct.

When a geologist looks at this landscape today with the eye of a palaeontologist he sees the moving of earth plates under the ground, and the resultant formations which change on the surface. The pre-historian has to be both. And it is only when millions of years pass that we

begin to find evidence of the handiwork of man. Behind this handiwork lies the creator *Homo habilis*, the maker of stone tools, who walks into the landscape between 2.6 and 1.7 million years ago. He made stone tools by striking one stone against another, breaking flakes off pebbles and so obtaining cutting *edges in the cores*.



(1.4 mybp-700,000 mybp)

Irfan Habib, p.23, fig.2.2

This remarkable stone tool, the world's first, has so far been only recorded in the site Rivat, Soan basin (Pakistan), of an Olduwan type (from Olduwan in the rift valley, E. Africa) and dated at two million years ago.⁵⁰ This stone tool, the pebble tool, is found in the hills overlooking the Damodar Valley in Hazaribagh. It is the produce of *Homo habilis*, and his remains will be found here one day making this one of the world's most important palaeoarchaeological regions.

Now, as we wander around the hills surrounding this basin of beautiful villages and rich agricultural lands forming one of the world's greatest cultural heritage regions (already recognized by UNESCO and ICOMOS)⁵¹ We are literally walking in the tracks of prehistory of an amazingly high and rare order. I am taking the reader in a clockwise direction around this landscape and I am aware that many more painted rock-shelters must exist than I am presenting, and these will later fall into place as they are brought to light. The names of the shelters have been given by me in reference to their site location.

About thirty five kilometers west of Isco in the densely forested heart of the Mahabodhi Range across the Salgah river, a tributary of the Garhi, we come to a high hill called

⁵⁰ Irfan Habib, *Pre-History*, People's History of India, Aligarh Historian Society, Tuleka, New Delhi 2001, p.23, Fig.2.2 and Fig.2.3

⁵¹ Heritage at Risk, ICOMOS World Report on Monuments and Sites in Danger, ICOMOS, Paris, 2001/2002; 2002/2003.

Nutangwa Pahar, where one of the most beautiful of Hazaribagh's rock-art sites points facing south-west. It may be noted that south-west facing shelters were a favourite of the prehistoric artist because it afforded the warm afternoon light of the sun which at this time is far to the south.⁵²

From Nutangwa Pahar if we follow the course of the river we will go past the village of Salga toward Laranga, an inlet in the Garhi River, famous as the place where the migrating herds of elephants from Latehar and Palamau cross into the Mahabodi range from Satpahar range on their way to Hazaribagh and Angara. Here, above the high bank of the river (which is soon to be dammed) we are at the site of a prehistoric quartz microlith industry brought to light by Erwin Naumayer when he was with me there in 1993. Situated on the side of the tarmac road between Tandwa and Mandair in the shadow of the Satpahar Range to the west, we find a great quartz microlith industry site with thousands of white quartz microliths strewn on the laterite gravel bed. The sight is breath-taking and transports us backward overtime six thousand to eight thousand years ago when men were using such microliths for use in harvesting sickles. This would be at a period commensurate with Mehrgarh-II (5000-4000 B.C.) in the Sind. Houses were then being built of bricks, and the microliths set in bitumen handles were the earliest specific tools found in the subcontinent.⁵³

We are now walking southwest toward the new mining area where the whole landscape of the valley will suddenly change. The Piperwar and Ashoka mines have gouged out about twenty square kilometers of the landscape to a depth of three hundred and fifty feet. This is a taste of what the entire North Karanpur Valley is going to become, even as hundreds of villages and thousands of square kilometers of lands continue to be mined for coal through huge, deep, opencast mines. There seems no way to stop it even though for the past two decades I have been highlighting it at all levels through my research into the prehistory of the Hazaribagh region (and now Chatra) and their environs. It is simply a great shame, but what can be done as long as our nation stresses paleotechnic instead of neotechnic industrial development now industrial development being used in the west. These simple rural habitats

⁵² V.S.Wakankar, R.R.Brooks, Stone Age Painting in India, D.B.Taraporevala Sons & Co. Pvt.Ltd, Bombay, 1976, p.2

⁵³ (Irfan Habib) Ibid, p.52

and their people would be more amenable to neotechnic development linking the pre-modern to the post-modern.⁵⁴

Now we have reached the south face of the Satpahar range which is that high and forested retreat since the earliest times of the tribal people, who looking from here amid the airy heights upon the village landscape below painted on the grey and pink sandstone walls of caves their murals of animals, and later, the emergent symbols and motifs of a new Chalcolithic consciousness as man began using copper, and then bronze, which were a challenge to a way life developed on stone. Then would come iron, and it would usher in a new order. But now, as we approach the little *Adivasi* village of Thethangi, we are transported back into a world where time has stopped despite the coal mines pressing closer and the new railway being built through the village. Here above us in the side of a gorge overlooking the small village of Oraon tribals is the Thethangi rock shelter, so similar to the painted shelters along the Wainganga far to the west, and we realize the unity of the tribal world and its uniformly similar environment “Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls”,⁵⁵ In Thethangi you can still hear the cry of the wild peacock, and if you are lucky the trumpeting of the wild elephant, or the sawing of a leopard. This forest was home to wild tigers also uptill recently. But owing to the pressure put by coal mining on the fragile forested migratory corridors the animals have been enclosed and hounded to death. What a treasure we have before us! Paintings by the pre-historic artists of the very wild animals which are still with us in these forests. And down below in the valley, the village women still paint the elephant and the tiger and the peafowl in mud on the mud walls of their houses the way they did many millennia ago.

Closeby to Bandey Bhagat’s house in Thethangi is a magnificent megalith, almost eighteen feet in length. Around it are about twenty others. Who made them none knows. Across the valley, now the Piperwar opencast mine, on the hillock of Benti, stands another fine cluster of megaliths believed by the local villagers to be stone frozen forms of a Raja and his wedding-party! Such is the tremulous beauty of the coal-sodden environment slowly choking out the last strains of our cultural heritage!

⁵⁴ Dr. Indra Deva, Development and the Future of Tribal Culture, *Pratyaya: Dialogue on Tribal and Folk Culture*, E.D. Kapil Tiwari, Adivasi Lok Kala Parishad, Bhopal, November 1993 p.54

⁵⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*, Macmillan and Co. Ltd, London 1961, Quatrain 35, p.27

Below Thethangi rockshelter were the remains of a Kushan fort (2nd century A.D) but this has now been destroyed by the railway line being built to the coal washery at Mangardaha (Where another group of megaliths at Bhagwantala lies covered in coal dust in a small walled enclosure I managed to get Central Coalfields Limited to build around it)⁵⁶ The changes to the landscape through urbanization is bad enough, but the change brought by mining is unbelievable.

Well, we can still walk along where the railway cut and huge overburden have not buried everything and still find slag from iron smelted three thousand years ago. As we go up the hillside we begin to find stone tools.

The real pity is that the miners are ruthless about the heritage. In 1993 I brought a team from the Bihar archaeology department to Thethangi and in the presence of Erwin Neumayer a survey was carried out. The report of the survey was given to the CCL and they were advised of the remains of a Kushan fort an Asur iron site. But the company did not care and allowed the railway being built to the coal washery to go straight through it. In 1994 Dr.S.B.Ota of the Prehistory Department, Archaeological Survey of India, Nagpur, also visited Thethangi and recommended excavation and protection of this Kushan site but the mining company did not care and destroyed it.

Above the railway bifurcation at Thethangi is the high, painted shelter of Saraiya, named after the little *Adivasi* village that nestles among the trees in the landscape below it. A few kilometers ahead lies the Khandar rock-art on the side of a rivulet coming out of the range. The Satpahar range will have many more rock-art sites to offer other than the ones so far brought to light. On the north side are two small shelters, Gonda and Sidpa. Gonda was first reported to me by photojournalist Neeraj Vagholkar of Kalpa Vriksh. It has the only elephant in our rock-art discovered so far. Not far away is Sidpa, interesting for the Sohrai and tattoo motifs still being used in the villages, and a striding cow whose form appears in some stone blocks presumably of the Mauryan period lying in a field closeby. We have come almost full circle around the range (having jumped across it *midway*!) and a kilometer to the south of Sidpa is the high and lonely rocky outcrop on which the Raham rock-art has been painted. As

⁵⁶ Bulu Imam, *Bridal Caves, A Search for the Adivasi Khovar Tradition*, INTACH, New Delhi, 1995, p.53

we wind our way back towards the Mandair village through some of the most picturesque scenery north Jharkhand has to offer we tread among fields strewn with iron slag, that memorial to the Asura! Slightly to our right rise the steep sides of Satpahar, and we move into a shallow valley to the source of the Satbohia (seven springs) river, a meadow of water filled with wild rushes, from where a trail goes straight up the steep side of the mountain, past a burial port-hole cist lying under a tree, through the stone walls of an Asur hill fort, layer on layer, until we are one with the tops of the hills, and then we walk along the back of the range, still save for the drone of the bees or the whistling of the hill wind. Then we stop at the three wonderful painted rock shelters, all filled with large and wonderful animal forms- Satpahar I, Satpahar II, Satpahar III. We have completed our pilgrimage to the art shrines.



Satpahar range on which at least six major painted rock shelters are found. The foreground area now threatened by submergence in a planned dam on the Garhi river (Tandwa)



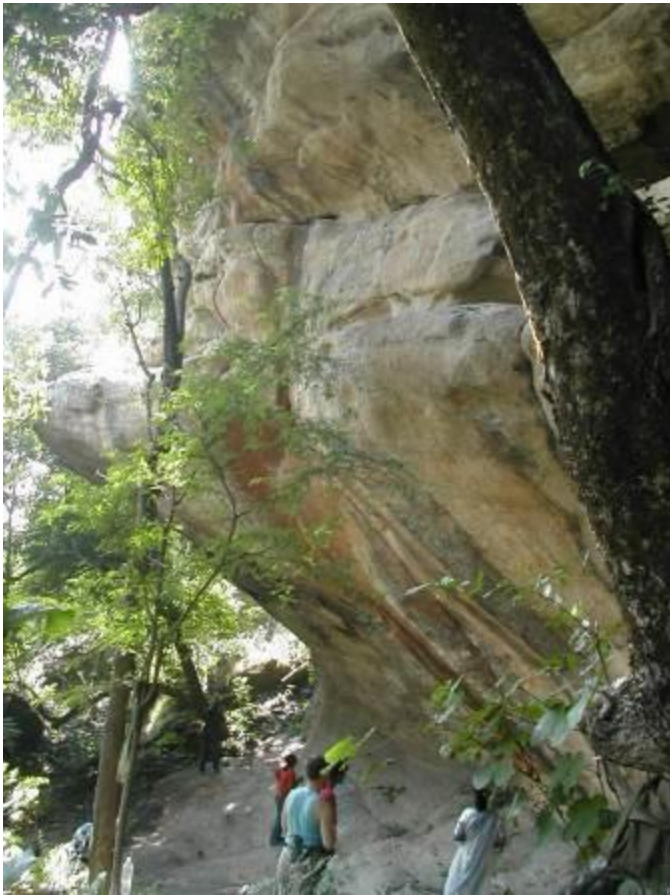
The closed circle of hills of Satpahar range being slowly encircled by opencast coal mines (Piperwar, Ashoka 1 & 2, Magadh and Amrapalli)



Bulu Imam with the Isco rock-art



Isco rock-art Central panel



Thethangi rock-shelter (lower)



Thethangi rock-shelter (upper)



The North Karanpura Valley with Mohudi Range in background



Sati Range

CHAPTER- 4

Rockart Site: ISCO

District: Hazaribagh

Measurements:

Panel No.1: Length- 18'7" feet x Height 20' feet

Panel No.2: Length- 14'10" x Height 20' feet

Panel No.3: Length- 16'10" x Height 20' feet

Panel No.4: Length- 8'10" x Height 20' feet



The Isco Rock-art Shelter

The information on the existence of a painted cave shelter in Isco was given to me in early 1991 by my friend Tony Herbert, SJ who ran a school in the village. Although he had not himself seen the art although it was within a kilometer of the school, apparently another Jesuit had been to the site and perhaps even photographed it. I immediately made the visit to the site and informed the press and Bihar Archaeological Department at Patna. Several Lower Palaeolithic stone tools were found in the surrounding region confirming its situation as an area of great antiquity. I will give below a note made by the rock-art expert Erwin Neumayer who several times visited Isco with me in 1993-1994.

The paintings of Isco are under a shelter formed in a narrow fault-gorge hardly more than five meters from top to bottom and hardly ten meters wide. This miniature gorge channels the runoff water from one part of a several kilometer long sandstone monolith which slopes gently to a height of no more than hundred meters above the surrounding landscape. The lower part of the monolith is shaven clean of from top soil and vegetation therefore is only found in the higher reaches of the hill. The gorge channels the surface water as well as the sub soil water towards a small swamp, which hold perennially water, although in summer the water is fit only for animals. Ultimately bordering the rocky hill lays the beautiful park-like country of agricultural fields and pasture land, interceded by clumps of Mohua trees under which the houses of tribal population are set. Indeed, several houses from the wide spread hamlet of Isco use parts of the flat bare rock as their back yard where they spread their paddy to dry. Higher up the hill is covered with vegetation, although the more valuable timber trees are butchered to mere brushwood, and no new shoots of the trees are allowed to grow higher than three meters. It is almost unbelievable, that only a few years back these regions were

under some of the best forest of India, where tigers, bears, elephants, and all the large bovids and cervids abounded. Now-a-days the forests are destroyed to the point of no return, turning into large stretches of *lantana* bush-jungles. The paintings at Isco virtually cover a long stretch of the rock face. The main panel is one of the most impressive painted rock surface known in India. The most eye-striking features of the paintings are the overwhelming geometric patterns with intricate designs of many variations. Most of the paintings are done in red and white, the red pigment is used in several shades from a deep purple to an almost yellowish brick-red. Within the mass of geometric patterns only a very few figures of an anthropomorph or zoomorph character can be made out. Depictions of man indeed are virtually absent, same four or five figures showing the basic features of an anthropomorph, upraised arms and rudimentary legs. Zoomorphs, although not much more frequent, are in several instances well executed, and the best examples can be compared to the animal depictions known from the Mesolithic pictures in the Vindhyan Hills. Anthropomorphs as well as zoomorphs are found invariably in the lower strata of paintings only. The upper later layer of paint is invariably taken by geometric figures. These patterns are in most cases squares or trapezoids, rarely triangles, circles, or ovals. The geometric designs in the earlier paintings, where they appear side by side with animals, are often decorated with concentric repetitions of the outline. Sometimes the square designs are partitioned diagonally, so that the triangular segments appear, (*crossed diagonals forming the Chouk or marriage mandala called Shadi-Chouk: Author*) which are filled in with concentric triangles, very much like body decorations of Mesolithic animals from the Vindhyas.

Although there are several patterns which can be compared to the Mesolithic design patterns from the Vindhyas, the intricate labyrinth spiral or honey-comb-patterns are rare although not absent in the paintings from the Hazaribagh district (*including Chatra: Author*). Most of the designs are done in two colours, red and white. As mentioned, the earlier paintings contain almost all animal figures, the geometric designs are rather small and scarce, if compared to the wall filling mass of geometric designs of the later layer of paintings which virtually fill the whole shelter wall, particularly so in Isco and Raham. Surprisingly there are no figures of animals or men to be found in the later paintings.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Erwin Neumayer, Note on the Pre-historic Rock-art of Hazaribagh (1993)

It is probable that Isco was a site where geometric designs evolved into the many complex forms we find here from the early geometrical forms found occasionally in the art of the Mesolithic hunters where mainly animals are depicted. We will note similar but less complex geometric forms in the rock-art of Nautangwa Pahar and the animal rock-art of Satpahar. The Isco rock-art cave is hardly seventy-five feet above the village fields which begin at the base of the sloping sandstone sheet. It may have been the earliest site of Chalcolithic rock-art connected with agriculture.

The village of Isco is in the north eastern corner of the upper basin of the Damodar; to its north is the Hazaribagh plateau, to the south the Sati Hills. It is about two hundred feet above the valley, and in the village one finds remains of Asur occupation and a copper blow pipe was found in the village and given to the Bihar Archaeology Department. Now a road has been made to this picturesque and isolated village surrounded by *Saal* forests. The inhabitants of the village are mainly Mundas. The greatest threat to Isco is from the Rautpara Opencast Project when an opencast coal mine will eat up the earth upto the rockart, and although such a thing today seems unimaginable, the future is bound to see such tragic developments unless coal exploitation is somehow halted. Isco contains Lower Palaeolithic deposits and deep underground caves inhabited by human during the ice ages, leaving one of the richest remains of Palaeolithic tool industry in South Asia. It has been recommended for listing as a World Heritage site both with UNESCO and Sacred Sites International Foundation, USA..

Acheulian hand axes have been picked up from the bed of the Isco river which flows through the Marwateri cave. Borers, scrapers, strippers and hammer stones have been collected in large numbers in the cave and its surrounds. The deposits were certified by the visit in 1995 of Dr.S.B.Ota of the Prehistory Department of the Archaeological Survey of India. Located deep in a cleft at the edge of a sandstone strata on the west slope of the hill, and to the east of the Isco village, the *Khovara* or painted cave stands a few hundred yards from the Munda tribal houses dividing the jungle from the village. The rock-art has been placed in the Meso-Chalcolithic period by noted rock-art expert Dr.Erwin Neumayer (1993). This would be between 7000-4000 B.C. There is evidence of an earlier level of painting which would be older. In Isco, microliths of the Vindhyan “surgical” type have been found in large numbers. Copper objects have also been found in the village during house construction or ploughing. A

layer of iron slag underlies the buildings in the village and iron-working slag pipes made of clay have been found. Among the sides of the hill a kilometer from the rockart are evidence of mines for extracting the iron-ore. Copper was called Ays in the ancient language of Prakrit from which Sanskrit evolved, and *Ayskho* literally means “copper-mine” since in Mundaric “Kho” is a cave or mine. From this root also *Khovar* is derived, *Var* denoting the bridegroom. That man had been mining copper since the most ancient times is well attested to in Jharkhand, which not only has the oldest copper mines, but also the oldest tin mines in India, tin constituting the essential element for the production of bronze (4 parts of copper to 1 of tin). Hazaribagh river sands bear tin especially in gently sloping rivers and surface tin has been recorded on the Giridih-Dumria road and copper was available at nearby Bargunda. The nearest tin mines are at Giridih near which copper mines also existed. S.C.Roys excavations of 1914-1920 in Ranchi plateau established an Asur Chalcolithic civilization and J.Coggen Brown of the Archaeological Survey of India was of the opinion they belonged to the period of transition from the Neolithic to the Chalcolithic.^{58, 59} The presence of copious quantities of iron slag also attest to an advanced iron producing culture, and we must remember that apart from an advanced copper mining and smelting tradition, Jharkhand had an advanced iron ore extracting and processing technology, and it was Andrew McWilliam’s opinion that the iron used in the famous Qutb Pillar near Delhi was made according to a process used in similar iron processing by Asurs in Jamshedpur in 1918. It may be noted that India’s oldest copper mines at Bargunda (in Giridih district) were only sixty-five kilometers to the east, and that the name Isco refers to copper mines in Sanskrit (*Ays*-copper, *Kho*= cave, or mine). Today a rich copper-bronze smelting tradition and production of cast bronze figurines continues in the unique casting work of the Malhar tribe, whose women are responsible for tattooing the bodies of the village women. It is pertinent to note that these tattoo motifs are identical to the rock-art and indicate a continuing tradition. The rock paintings of the Chalcolithic level were partly the work of iron working societies who had created the bronze age in Jharkhand and connected with the metal-casting Godawa of Bastar.⁶⁰ Different kinds of pottery have been found. A bright red wheel-turned pottery of coarse texture and thick size has been found along with evidence of hand coiling.

⁵⁸ B.Imam, Tribal Civilization in Jharkhand, Man-In-India, 82 (1&2), p.214

⁵⁹ D.K.Chakrabarti, Archaeology of Eastern India (Chotanagpur Plateau and West Bengal), Munshiram Manoharlal publisher Pvt.Ltd, New Delhi, 1993, pp.217, 87, 83, 31-32

⁶⁰ Ibid (B.Imam), p.214

5 Erwin Neumayer, Note on the Prehistoric Rockart of Hazaribagh

In the hills surrounding the rockart at the same elevation a pebbled shoreline has been found and in this same region single-face and bi-face pebble chopper stone tools abound. On the Hazaribagh plateau at Chapri, two hundred and fifty feet above Isco we again find ample deposits of such stone tools of Early Man. Above Isco is the source of the Isco river which flows west, and the Dudhi Nala, which flows east, and in these ravines large deposits of stone tools have been found. That there is a continuous cultural and artistic tradition before us is evident from the similarity between the village paintings by the women of the Tribal and Folk society of the nearby villages with the rock paintings. The connexion was being lost in the popular imagination, until I drew attention to it in 1992, and since then there has been a conscious interest by the ritual paintings on the walls of their homes. I have continuously been stressing the importance of drawing inspiration from the motifs of the rock paintings because they are the heritage of the older culture of India long before any outside influence was brought to bear on it. A country needs to sometimes return to its roots for strength and inspiration, and this can be found in the connection between the rock-paintings and the ritual village mural painting tradition. Moreover, in my study of nearly one and a half decades in the art I have endeavoured to find the meanings in the motifs both from the local beliefs and from a wider study of their significance. It is my belief the rockart is a matriarchal manifestation perhaps taken over later by the male. Today this region has become famed for the painted houses of the Mundas, Ganjus, Telis and Kurmis whose origin has been traced to the rock paintings.

In the bottom part of the last panel is a glypt of a woman with fly-swish (Chouri-bearer) also sometimes called Yakshi, which has no counter part except in its famed parallel in the Patna Museum dating to Mauryan period. Since the glypt of a rhinoceros in the first panel (Fig.1.4) seems to be of the same period it is presumed those animals roamed the area in the 3rd Cent.B.C.

6 ICOMOS, Heritage at Risk, World Report 2001/2002 on Monuments and Sites in Danger, International Council on Monuments and Sites, Paris, 2001.

ISCO Rockart

Measurement of Isco Panels:

No.1 Length- 18'7"x height 20'

No.2 Length- 14'10"x height 20'

No.3 Length 16'10"x height 20'

No.4 Length 8'10"x height 20'



Isco Rock-art Shelter

Note to the painted Symbols

The concentric circle is the symbol of the mother goddess, and in the very first panel we find a series of zig zag lines which in ancient Egypt was a pictograph for flowing water, and since water symbolized life, of life. It is a common motif in the painted pottery and steatite seals of the Indus Valley. The motif appears in the tattoo (*godna*) made by the Malhar women, on the body of the village women of the surrounding area, particularly Kurmis. The zig zag is common in both Khovar and Sohrai painting.

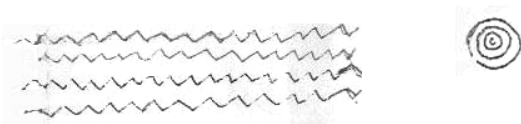
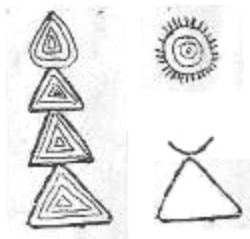


Fig.1.1: *Concentric Circle & Zig-zag lines*

Also in the first panel and in the third panel we find the concentric triangle, a motif in vertical arrangement which is found in the small mudden shrines of the Kurmis similar to triangular forms which have been found in the rockart of Osakothi in Orissa, though in more vernacular form. One particularly interesting triangle in the central panel, with a crescent on top is a Mesopotamian symbol of the mother goddess. The Triangle is a common sacred motif in Khovar and Sohrai village painting. The sun motif is another motif found in the second panel of Isco which is common to the village painting. I have given a detailed note on the concentric circle in my note to the Khandar rockart higher up.



(Fig.1.2: *Concentric Triangles*)

In the central panel we find the concentric diamond with shaft, in the Indus also common. The meaning in the concentric diamond is “pond” and it is called by the locals “Ghagra Mandala”, generally two diamonds, one atop the other, representing water pots. Although the diamond with handle has been ascribed the meaning “eye” by Heras (H.Heras, SJ, Proto Indo Mediterranean Civilization, Vol.1, 1953). If found with notch at top or bottom Elwin calls it the female organ, and which is a common fertility symbol carved in wood on the pillar of the Muria ghotul (V.Elwin, The Muria and their Ghotul, 1947). A similar motif has been found in the rockart of Saraiya.

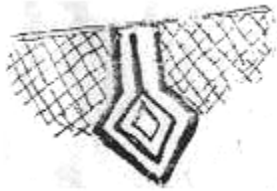


Fig.1.3: *Concentric Diamond*

In the first panel of Isco we find the pecked stone glypt of a rhinoceros, now extinct in Jharkhand. The motif appears again in the rockart of Satpahar range which I will deal with later.



Fig.1.4: *Rhinoceros*

To the right of the rhino and a little higher up we find the remains of two animal forms, probably of deer their raised posture indicating a stylistic feature of the rockart of Hazaribagh.

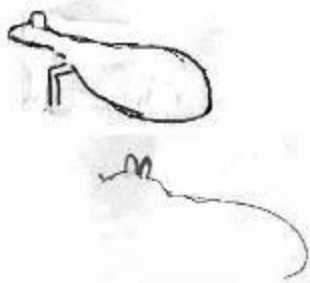


Fig.1.5: *Deer*

Ponds or *Gabarband/Pokhar* are in opinion of experts a Neolithic-Chalcolithic period development (Allchin, 1968) Among the other important motifs in the first panel are the concentric rectangles known as “ponds”, and common in the village Khovar painting. This motif is common in Aboriginal rockart in Australia also. In Native American art this symbol signifies “sites of emergence”. This motif has been carried sacred temple iconography in the Terracotta Temples of Bengal (Hetampur Dewangi).



Fig.1.6: *Ponds*

In the middle of the second panel in an enclosed frame we find a small figure with triangular head and body and upraised arms. This form is still commonly painted in the Khovar village murals and called *Purkha* or Ancestor or Mother. Next to it is a smaller figure.



Fig.1.7: *Purkha*

The leaf of the climbing root plant with aphroderical properties, Betel (*Piper betel*), called locally *paan-pata* which is chewed with the betel-nut, around which palm tree the plant climbs, and the juice of *Acacia arabica* (Katha) which is a plant with magical aphrodisical properties, painted in the marriage room or in Khovar painting. In ancient India a woman was considered married to a man as a climbing creeper plant to a tree. *Pata* is a medicinal climbing plant used in spells to overcome rivals. (Kuur.38, 18-21)



Fig.1.8: *Betel leaf*

An enigmatic symbol of an upright Fish in the central panel appears in the identical form in which it appears in the Indus seals. It is a typical archaic Sumerian form, which also appears in the Kurmi Khovar, and Oraon and Ganju Sohrai.



Fig.1.9: *Fish*

Other interesting forms are the house goddess, or marriage house similar to those found in Warli marriage paintings, complete with ladder, and the figure in the “House” is found in the Sidpa rockart which I will discuss later, and represents the Great Mother.



Fig.1.10: *Marriage House*

In Isco as in other sites of the region, such as Salga (Nautangwa Pahar) we find the earliest form of the temple, clearly discernible, and distinct from similar squares and rectangles filled with compound signs.

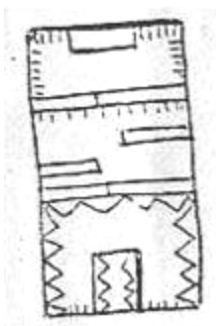


Fig.1.11: *Temple*

The humped wild (*Bos primogenus*) bull and a leaping wild bovine figure appear at the top of the central panel and are likely the parts of an earlier level of painting. Such forms of the wild cattle are to also be found in the rockart of Satpahar II and Thethangi.



Fig.1.12: *Wild Cattle*

In panel-2 (left) a standing figure with upraised arms is depicted giving birth to a child. In North American Indian rock-art a figure with upraised arms means “successful endeavour”. It seems to be an ancient human symbol. Upraised arms are also a sign of the “Ka” or life in the necrophyllial art of ancient Egypt, and in the Harappan motif the upraised hands signified “Thanks” (Heras, 1951). The figure with upraised arms also appears in the tattoo on Kurmi women. An identical figure giving birth to a child, made in terracotta, has come from Mohenjodaro.



Fig.1.13: *Great Mother*

In the second panel of Isco centre-right, and bottom right-hand corner appears a motif I have called the “Cell” because it appears in the form identical to a Cell. The motif appears in the rock-art of the Indians of North America (Huichol, Lower Pecos). It is a common motif in the Prajapati Khovar painting of Hazaribagh. It seems to be connected with human form.



Fig.1.14: *Cell*

The four-petaled lotus, or *Kamal-dhara*, appears at two places in the fourth panel of Isco. This motif is a common one in Khovar and Sohrai painting of Hazaribagh, as it is in Amri in the Indus, including the interlocking pattern.

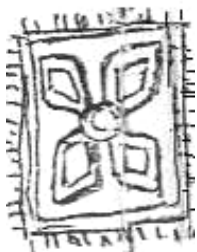


Fig.1.15: *Kamaldhara*

In panel number two we come across a prominent symbol twice just to the right of centre, which also occurs in the Indus seals, and for which Heras (1951) gives the meaning “Sindhu” or Indus. It also is supposed to mean “river”. The motif in a slightly variant form may be found at the top, left of centre, in the same panel. It is interesting to note that the motif is also found in the Kurmi Khovar mural painting.



Fig.1.16: *River*

At the top right-hand corner of panel-3 is the figure “H”, common also in the Prajapati Khovar. The figure is related with the human form, and also variously with “Two Rivers”. It is found in Mycaenian, Greece, and Persian Naqsbandhi iconography. Surprisingly, this symbol is found in the Asmat wood carvings of Irian Jaya, where it is also associated with the human body.



Fig.1.17: *Human form*

At the top of panel we find a human figure in a frame. This is a magical emblem of binding a particular person, as is still practiced by the tribal magician-priests (Bhagat). We find a similar figure in the third panel of Thethangi rock-art.



Fig.1.18: *Binding*

The arc is an enigmatic symbol found in both vertical and horizontal form. It is treated as a sacred sign in Khovar, and forms the basis of the four-finger series of arcs called *Basera* so commonly used in Khovar finger painting. The motif was commonly used in Crete (1500 BC) and Indus (pre-Harappan, 2300 BC). The arc appears in Salgah (Nautangwa Pahar) rock-art also. In Aboriginal rock-art in Australia it represents a wind-break, while in American Native Indian art it represents a Rainbow.



Fig.1.19: *Arc*

Reticulate concentric triangles are a feature of the rockart, found in the art of the animal painters in the Satpahars to the West. This is a common Mesolithic motif like the rectangle with crossed diagonals (*chouk*) which carried over into the *Chalcolithic*. It represents the four directions.



Fig.1.20: *Reticulated Triangles*

There are hundreds of motifs and obviously a detailed commentary of every motif here will be out of place and confuse our search for a view to these rock paintings and the meanings that may emerge from them as many of the motifs may have been painted centuries, if not millennia apart. I am here only selecting out a few of the more obvious motifs for discussion.

The first panel also gives us a common motif of the square with crossed diagonals with four reticulate triangles being thus formed within which are set four circles, the circle being the symbol of the mother goddess, and the triangle being the symbol of the goddess. Crossed diagonals in a square or rectangle are the marriage mandala on which the bride and groom sit and it means “beginning and end”.



Fig.1.21: *Square with crossed Diagonals*

Another enigmatic motif quite close to this is the upright triangle (*yni*) with left in middle representing the goddess. Obviously we are seeing the art of a society worshiping the mother goddess. This motif is found in its elemental form in Saraiya rock-art (top middle) and it is painted at the base of the Tree of Life in Sohrai art.



Fig.1.22: *Yoni*

There is in the beginning of the panel, to the left of the rhino a set of vertical characters which seem to be a prototype of the similar vertical character in a closed rectangular frame as found in the seals of the Indus. Perhaps it is an early form of writing. It does not necessarily mean anything. Even now village children “write” in scripts which they do not understand.



Fig.1.23: *Writing*

There is one motif which I will like to draw attention to. This is a human figure supported on four sides by arcs, within a closed space. In the rockart of Hazaribagh we repeatedly find *mandalas* or *ittalans* in the form of shamanistic painted shrines, used for ritual purposes, as in the art of the Saoras of Orissa for harnessing in a particular locale tutelary spirits or manes. These forms may represent later patriarchal manifestations. This form of a human drawn as a stick figure with outstretched arms and legs is a very common form found in the alcoves of villages houses used for the purpose of shrines, or near the household fireplace to ward off evil. The purpose of the figure is to present a deity, and the purpose of the boundary is to charm it to the particular place where it is drawn. Rarely the form also appears in tattoo (*Godna*). The motif is sacred to the life source, and has been found on necrophyllial clay dolls in prehistoric Beotia, Greece.



Fig.1.24: *Shaman Figure*

The rayed sun motif in panel-4 also called “high sun” by Heras (1951) appears in a seal from Mohenjodaro. It is significant that this sign is not found in Indian, Sumerian, or Elamite pottery. The motif is a prominent one in the Kurmi Khovar, and the motif also appears in the Thethangi rockart. It is a pre-Harappan motif. The similar form with circle in the middle is also found in panel-1.



Fig.1.25 *Rayed Sun*

In the second panel is the *Bicchu* or scorpion motif found commonly in the Kurmi tattoo (*Godna*) made by Malhar women which is also a common motif in the Kurmi Sohrai, and Prajapati Khovar painting.



Fig.1.26: *Scorpion*

The crab or beetle. In the Indus the crab signified Nandur “City of the Crab”. The beetle is a small motif found in the middle of the second panel of Isco, which appears commonly as a water insect among the fronds of water plants in the Khovar of the Prajapati of the North Karanpura Valley.



Fig.1.27: *Beetle*

Vertical strings of circles represent the cows hoofs, or the *aripan* made at the harvest festival (Sohrai) for the welcome of cattle (*bandana*), which motifs are still painted in rice flour at the entrance of village houses to welcome the cattle during this colourful festival when the Sohrai wall murals are painted in our villages. In fact, it is my belief that much of this art in Isco is connected with the harvest festival of Sohrai. Not only are so many of the forms and motifs found over here found in the village paintings, but the very painted village houses themselves are barely a few hundred meters away! These strings of circles with a dividing line have been also found in ceramics in Harappa, (Cemetery-H). They are also found in the rockart of Khandar, panel-2. Also found in centre, top and bottom, Isco panel-3, and in panel-2, bottom, right.



Fig.1.28: *Aripan*

I have noted that numerous *compound symbols* are seen in the rockart of Hazaribagh, arranged within square or rectangular frames like the Mayan characters from South America. In panel-3 (bottom-right) we find an interesting arrangement of triangles, star, sun, and what appears like a projectile. Obviously the ancient sign painters were trying to express some idea whose meaning it would be important for us to know, perhaps some event or idea. That the lotus at the bottom, being the head of a Lajja-Gauri figure, *is superimposed*, indicates that the message had by that time already lost its significance to the society that superimposed its motifs over it. (see Lajja Gauri)



Fig.1.29: *Compound Symbols*

This enigmatic six-pointed form appears in triplicate in the centre-bottom of panel-2, and I have found it again in the Kurmi Khovar, where it is represented in a complex arrangement of double diamonds and double triangles. This figure will give us a good idea how the rockart motifs and village Khovar and Sohrai motifs are intricately interconnected, and how these complex ideas and forms have been handed down from mother to daughter for countless generations. It also leads us to conjecture whether the rock-art might have been painted by women during a matriarchal cultic period.



Fif.1.30: *Enigmatic Symbol*

Slightly to the right of the above symbol, we find the palm-matting motif, which is still used in decorative borders in the Khovar and Sohrai painting. It will seem that over time and cultural continuity lapses the motifs which had some kind of meaning in themselves could no longer be used as such and were reduced to mere decorative elements. Planted rice sheaves placed between the horns of the cattle during the harvest festival (Sohrai-bandan) resemble these markings, and may have a sacred connection. Such sheaves between the horns of horned figures comes to us from the Indus Valley (Kalibangan).



Fig.1.31: *Sheaf*

An enigmatic figure within an arc appears in the top (middle) of panel-1. A similar form of a man surrounded by a loop of *papal* leaves has come from a Harappan seal.



Fig.1.32: *Enigmatic Figure*

Small anthropomorphs and zoomorphs are commonly met within the rock art as well as the sacred village paintings. Human stick figures are considered sacred in the village painting, and appears in more or less unchanged form from the rockart. At the top-left of panel-2 in Isco we see such anthropomorphs inserted in characters which seem to denote a primitive script, some of them decidedly of the Indus type.



(Fig.1.33: *Anthropomorphs*)

Below the anthropomorphs is a symbol denoting “life or *ankh*” in ancient Egypt; “spring” in American Indian; and “flag” in Indus.



(Fig.1.34: *Life*)

Directly below these we see a line of vertical hooded or helmeted human figures which some have opined look like extra-terrestrials. Next to them is a rectangle in which is an object some researches have called “space craft- engine”! But these are only observations for the record.



Fig.1.35: *Space Figures*

The method and technique of painting is also very similar triplicate lines of oxide colours and ochre in red and white are used just as still found in the house painting. Only the black line is not used and seems to be a latter innovation, and will be found to have its own independent cultural significance sine though it is an important feature of the village paintings it is absent from the rockart. The reason may be that no permanent oxide source of black was found.

In the beginning of the third panel of Isco we find what I consider to be the most important motif, which is a wheeled, spotted, and striped animal, the exact precursor of the ritual spotted animal figures, some *wheeled*, still painted on the village houses during the Sohrai festival in October-November. The animal refers to a deer or stag and has nothing whatsoever to do with the horse, which does not appear in the rock-art of Jharkhand and Chhatisgarh. The horse as a historical manifestation is not found in the rock-paintings of

Hazaribagh unlike the rest of central Indian rockart, yet it appears in the house walls. The reason for this I aver is that the image of the horse only reached Hazaribagh very recently when people were no more painting in caves. This to me seems to be the only plausible explanation. The horse is not an original adjunct of the *ghotul* tradition among the Murias, Bastar, nor is it naturally and adjunct of the marriage *Khovars*.

Verrier Elwin writes, “I have never seen the emblem of a god, lag, or horse in the Ghotul nor on any village symbol”.

(Verrier Elwin, The Muria and their Ghotul, 1947)

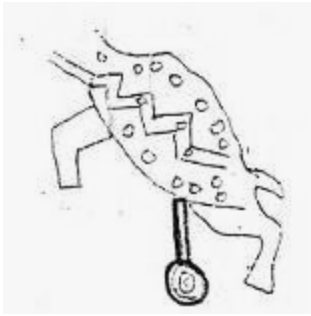


Fig.1.36: *Ghoda or Sacred Spotted Animal of Sohrai*

The *chouk* is a square frame. In its earliest form the frame was undefined lines made by the reticulated triangles. (see Satpahar rockart). The *chouk* is a sacred square house inside which certain sacred figures or symbols are placed by the *Shaman* or tribal priest and I have dealt with it in the notes on Raham, Thethangi, and Khandar rockart. It is comparable to the Warli marriage mandala in honour of the plant fertility goddess Palagahata at the time of marriage. These are painted in the marriage rooms, what is called in Bihar, Jharkhand and Central India “*Khovar*”, and which name has traditionally been given to the painted caves. These are omens of blessing. We find similar *chouks* among the Marias of Bastar which are called *Dhankul*, and among the Saora of Orissa (*Ittalan*), which are generally magic religious paintings made by *Shamans* to ward off evil called *Ittalan*. All these are painted on the walls. There is magic *chouk* which is made on the floor with the fingers using rice flour made during the Diwali festival in the courtyard by the tribal women. It consists of a square divided by two diagonal lines (i.e. forming four triangular compartments). This is in tribal/

prehistoric iconography considered the upper torso of the deity. In Isco we find throughout a galaxy of such enigmatic chouks or mandalas whose meanings are to be conjectured still, but first we have to realize their purpose, and that they are the protozoic form of the later mandalas and chouks with which tribal India is familiar. As I have painted out, the Chouk is an icon, filled with deep meaning and significance and for this reason it is respected even by those who may not be able to understand its full significance. Some decidedly Egyptian symbols.

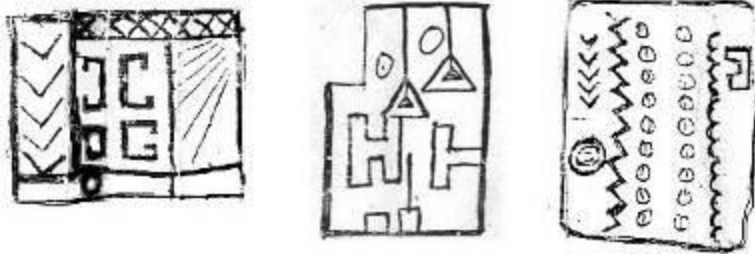


Fig.1.37: *Chouks*

Next in the third panel I come to so-called Panda Baba symbol. This is a seminal pre-historic symbol which depicts upraised arms similar to the *Ka* or necrophyllial *life essence* of ancient Egypt.



(Fig.1.38: *Panda Baba*)

Next to the enigmatic motif in the third panel o Isco we come to what I consider the second most interesting motif, the “Lajja-Gauri” or the lotus headed goddess. This entrancing symbol has long pre-occupied the ancient Indian imagination. I believe that there is evidence for the origin and evolution of this most ancient and important image in the rock-art of Hazaribagh, especially in the rockart of Isco. The developed forms of the image have been found in the Kurmi Khovar, and in images in Kolhapur, Budhra in Bastar, Vadgaon, Navasa, Siddan, Loto caves in Kelur, Nagpur, Ter, Mahakut, Alampur, and Nagarjuna Konda. It is

important to note that it is partly superimposed on an earlier composed figure at the top. (see Compound symbols)

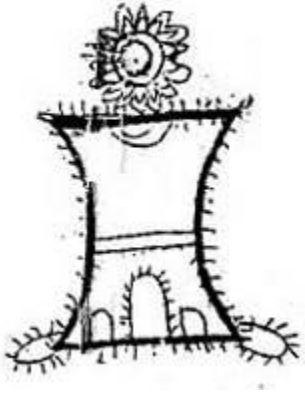


Fig.1.39: *Lajja Gauri*

When we are trying to understand the relation between human-form and temple form, it will be a good idea to look at the obvious images of the earliest shrines in India painted in rectangular form, depicting door ways, divisions of the shrine, the lunar form of the deity (as in Nautangwa Pahar rock-art, and the ultimate lotus-head seat of the deity in Lajja Gauri which became under much later patriarchal guidance the *Vastu-Purusha mandala* and the basis of the *Vastu-shastra*. Throughout the panels of Hazaribagh rockart in Isco and Salga we will find images of temple-form. These are shrines similar to the Marsh Arab shrines of the Tigris-Euphrates deltaic reed-beds (5000 BC) the so-far oldest known shrines erected for the Mother Goddess. These forms appear in the Kurmi and Bhuiya Khovar, and are found in the motifs of Kucch in Gujarat. Thus, in the rockart we see the anthropomorphic human temple-form's emergence into *Lajja-Gauri* (shy goddess). The original form of the door-way in the rock-art is an arc, only later becoming squared in a "*Choukat*" from which is derived the sacred *chouk*.

Panel-4 of Isco is in a small alcove, at the top left side of which we find a beautiful 4-petaled *Kamaldhara* lotus above which is a *chouk*. To its right is a rectangular frame containing two horizontal triangles and three vertical lozenges. The same designs appear in panel-3, and *on a sacred stone that by tradition is set in the steps of the ceremonial Khovar gateway at Padma of the Raja of Ramgarh* (who was the legendary Raja of Badam in the Isco Khovar legend). This stone seems to have been made in Badam in the 17th century and currently is to be found

in Padma. It is associated with the popular myth of Isco of the queen who drowned in the Isco river.



Fig.1.40: *Kamaldhara and Chouk*

The other images are to be found often repeated and their forms in many ways connected, indicating a common provenance. This will go to show the absence of outside intrusion. However, it is notable that a pecked glypt figure of a Yakshi with fly-whisk (similar to the famous figure in the Patna Museum) is to be found in the bottom of panel-4. This would indicate a Mauryan period provenance, and since we find a similar glypt pecking in the stone to form the rhino in Panel 1, it will be interesting to speculate its common provenance. It will be well to remember the incidence of a Kushan for at Thethangi south of Satpahar range, and at Sidpa, some sixty kilometers west of Isco in the western North Karanpura Valley, the remains of stone carved blocks with Mauryan provenance. Some of the images carved in relief in these huge stone blocks, once part of a building, bear images found in the rock-art found a short way up the hillside. This will tend to show that Mauryan stone masons were familiar with the rock-art. Painted Grey Ware has been found at the Sitagarha Buddhist site Sixty kilometers north of Isco indicating Mauryan presence. Thus we may contemplate a similar familiarity with Isco by some of the people who had visited the Mauryan court at Patliputra. However, there are definitely no other evidence of any outside contact at the Isco rock-art.

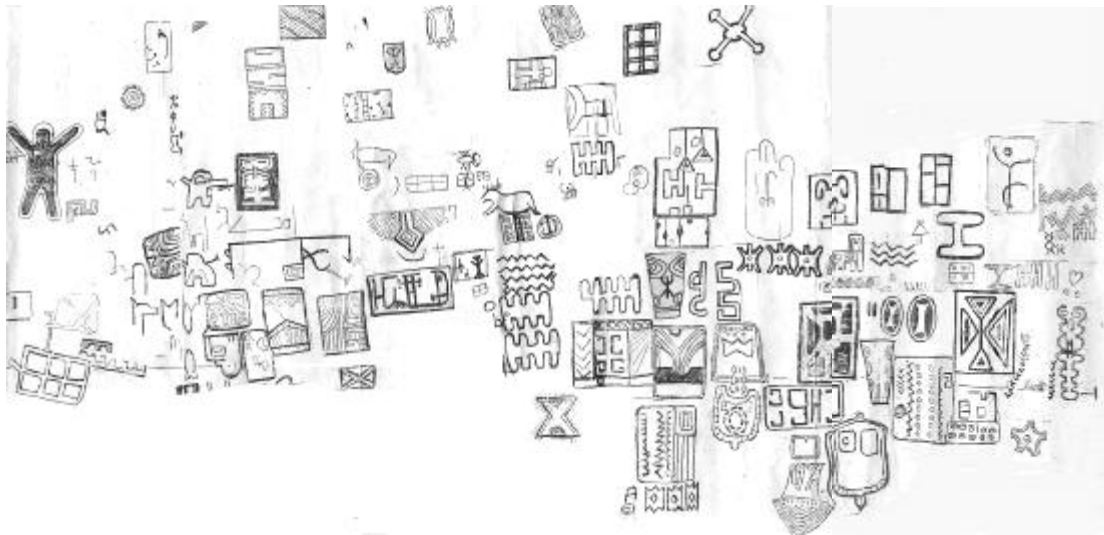


Fig.1.40: *Yakshi glypt*

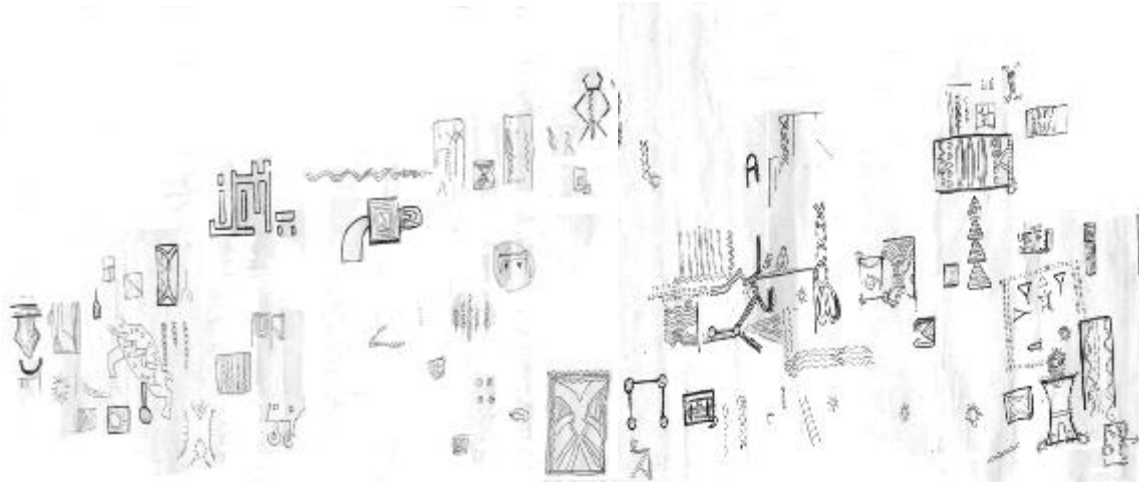
Isco Rockart Panels



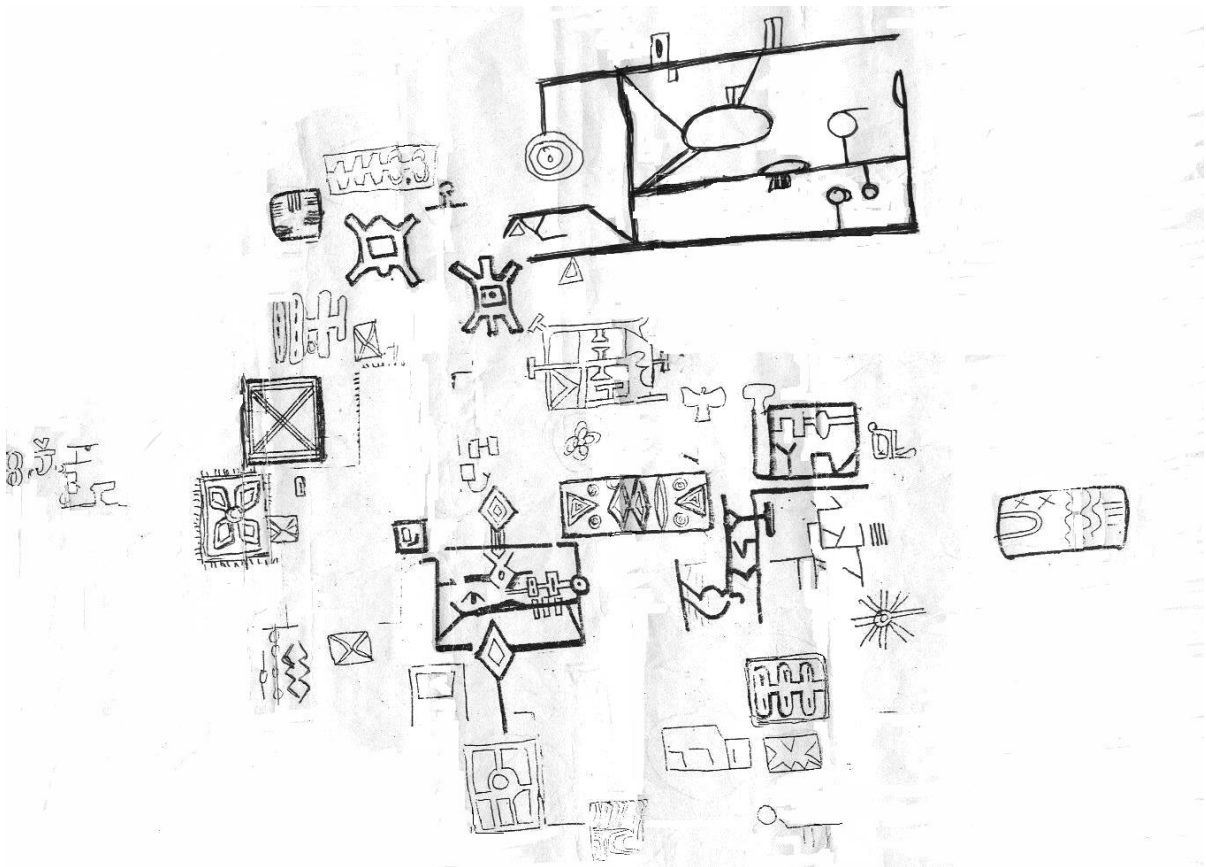
Panel-1 (Length- 18'7" x Height 20' feet)



Panel-2 (Length- 14'10" x Height 20' feet)



Panel-3 (Length- 16'10" x Height 20' feet)



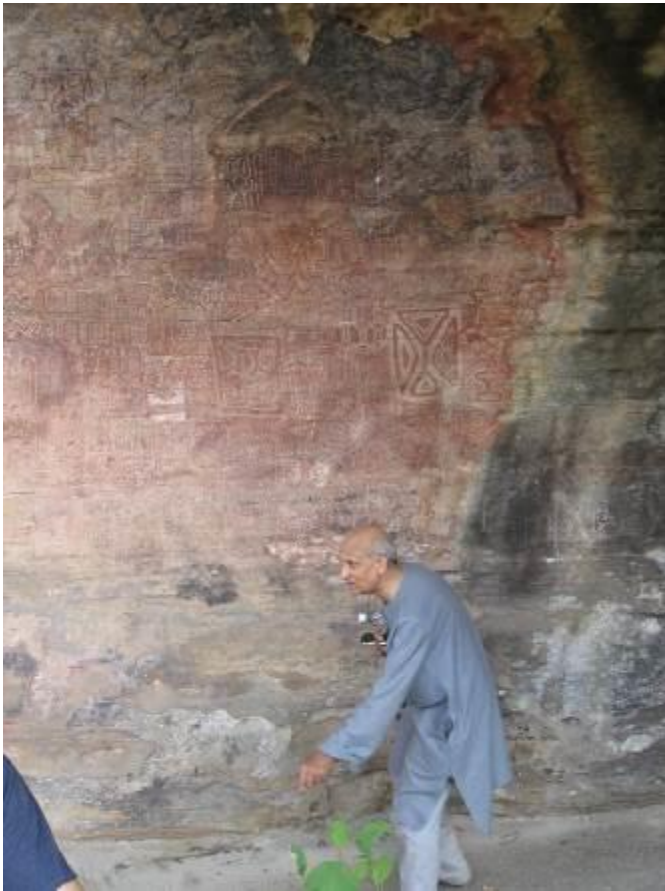
Panel-4 (Length- 8'10" x Height 20' feet)



Isco rock-shelter



View of the Isco village from the rock-art site. Note Hazaribagh plateau to the north in the background



Bulu Imam in the Isco rock-shelter



A composite view of the painted shelter



Glypt of rhinoceros (Fig.1.4) with pecked triangles below a painted mandala (Fig.1.21)



Deer (Fig.1.5) top; enigmatic figure (Fig.1.32) left; concentric circle (Fig.1.1) right and bottom (Note decoration of natural hollows)



Figure in square at left is ancestor (Purkha) Fig.1.7; zig-zag lines in middle (Fig.1.1)



Betel leaf (Fig.1.8); and concentric circle in natural circular hollow (Fig.1.1)



View of Central panel (top right). For detailed note see below



Temple figure (Fig.1.11) Centre (top); bound figure (Fig.1.18); marriage house (Fig.1.10)



Overall view of left portion of central panel with close up view below. See next illustrations for details of motifs



Close-up of the motifs



Left, Great Mother (Fig.1.13); sun (Fig.1.2) top right



Space Figures (Fig.1.13)



Wild cattle (Fig.1.2), and concentric circle (Fig.1.1)



Different mandalas including crossed diagonals (Fig.1.21), and concentric diamond (Fig.1.3)



Panel 2 showing wild cattle (Fig.1.12), enlarged below; ancestor figure or Purkha (Fig.1.7), and zig-zag lines (Fig.1.1)



Wild cattle (Fig.1.12)



Central panel showing from left to right (detail closeup below). Shaman figure in tapering rectangular frame (Fig.1.24); Cell figure in triplicate (Fig.1.14); River (Fig.1.16); Reticulated triangles (Fig.1.20)



Close-up of above



View of Central panel with close up of some enigmatic motifs (below)



Chouks (Fig.1.37)



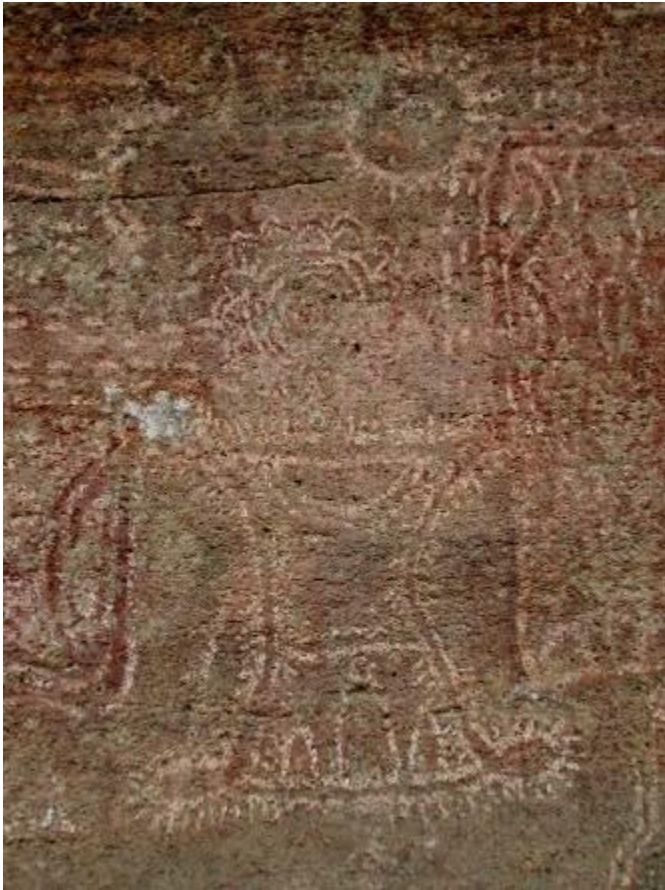
Close-up of spotted wheeled animal similar to ones found painted in the village during the harvest festival (Sohrai) and called Ghoda (Fig.1.36)



Enigmatic Symbols



Panel 3 (from left to right) sun, chook, pond (Fig.1.6), compound symbols (Fig.1.29); Panda Baba (Fig.1.38) centre; concentric triangles (Fig.1.2) top; bottom right *Lajja Gouri* (Fig.1.39). see enlargement below



Close-up of *Lajja Gouri* (Fig.1.39)



Yakshi glypt in bottom of last panel (Fig.1.41)



Chouk from panel 4 (Fig.1.40)

CHAPTER- 5

Rockart Site: THETHANGI

District: Chatra

Measurements:

Panel No.1: Length- 15'feet x Height 20'feet

Panel No.2: Length- 10' x Height 20' feet

Panel No.3: Length- 15' x Height 20' feet



Thethangi Rock-art Shelter

The rock-art shelter of Thethangi lies half-way up the south face of the Satpahar range in the Tandwa block of Chatra district. To the west and slightly above it is the small painted shelter of Saraiya on its high eagle's nest eyrie. Further to the west is Khandar. Below the rock-art shelter of Thethangi is the little village of Thethangi where the railway line to the Mangardaha washery has been held up by the Adivasi villagers who mainly comprise Oraons and Mundas. Here is the house of Bandey Bhagat, an Oraon of the Tana Bhagat sect which people have memories of their ancestors taking shelter in the caves during the tribal uprisings during the second half of the nine-tenth century. Above Bandey Bhagats house is the Thethangi rock-shelter with the painted art.

Below the Thethangi rock-art were the remains of an old 1st Cent. A.D. Kushan fort. I had conducted an investigation of the site with a team from the Bihar Archaeology Department in 1993 and received the assurance of Central Coalfields Ltd. that they would not destroy the site by building the railway to the coal washery through it *but they did not keep their word and today the site lies buried under the over burden from the railway line trench.* This site was very precious as we had found not only the large bricks and artifacts of the Kushan occupation, but also many stone tools from the middle and late stone age. This has been a terrible blow to the archaeology of this important region. Thethangi has yielded a wide variety of upper Palaeolithic stone tools including microliths and blades. At the foot of the hill are quantities of iron slag and old bricks.

Erwin Neumayer, who visited these painted rock shelters, including Thethangi, several times in 1993-94, noted that 'Since in all these pictures no depiction of humped cattle, horse riders,

etc., are found, I am convinced that both picture groups i.e Satpahar and Thethangi-Saraiya, belong to a culture of early foraging people”.^{61, 62}

‘Surprisingly in these shelters of the Hazaribagh district there are no later pictures, save a solitary sign at Satpahar (i.e Thethangi shelter, middle section) giving to my best of understanding the syllable which I understand as Ma (enclosed in a W-shaped figure). In my opinion the pictures (except this Ma of course) belong to the Mesolithic period. All the shelters having paintings also have good Mesolithic assemblages. The find of a polished celt in Isco might indicate Neolithic or even chalcolithic traditions at the place. This of course could be verified only by further archaeological investigation. Stray middle palaeolithic tools as well as lower palaeolithic tool-types indicate the tremendous time –span above which cultures were present in this region of Chota Nagpur plateau”.⁶³

The Thethangi shelter is a large overhanging of rock typical of Central Indian rock-art shelter. It faces naturally to the east, and overlooks a wide ravine. The paintings are along the inner sandstone wall of this shelter, in the rocky strata above it is another rocky formation or “gallery” in which some paintings of deer are found, though badly weathered and in poor condition. There is some existence of exfoliation on the left side of the large sandstone painted wall, and in the middle the rock-art has been affected by rain-water erosion, and silicon drip-lines as well as overhead drainage is urgently required. The cause for exfoliation is climatic destabilization particularly fluctuating humidity accelerating the formation of mineral salts in the rock, leading to structural weakening, fungal growth, and insect infection leading to flaking.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Erwin Neumayer, 1992, The rock pictures of Orissa, Purallatoa

⁶² Erwin Neumayer, 1993, Lines on stones, Munshiram Manoharlal Pub. P Ltd., p.116-118

⁶³ Erwin Neumayer, 27.9.1993, A short observation on the (rock) pictures in the general regions of Hazaribagh, During my visit to The Grove, Hazaribagh.

⁶⁴ Erwin Neumayer, 1993, Note in the Prehistoric Rock-art of Hazaribagh.

Note to the Painted Symbols

The rectangle with crossed diagonals has been explained in an earlier note, and it will suffice to say it is a chouk (crossed lines within a frame), sacred to marriage rites. Even today crossroads in the village are sacred to the female deity crossed lines mean “beginning and end”, and once placed within a frame are considered captive to a particular place or spot.

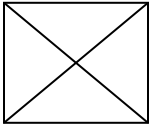


Fig.2.1: *Rectangle with crossed Diagonals*

The Great One or anthropomorphic tree of life an important motif of Thethangi, found in the third panel of this extraordinarily well preserved and copiously painted rock shelter, it is a form that is found repeatedly in Khovar and Sohrai painting, especially among the Kurmis, and is associated invariably with the god Shiva who is the forest god of Tribal India. The figure is commonly met with as far as in the Indonesian motifs and Asmat wood carvings of Irian Jaya. The form is of a seated figure in the shape of a tree, and is the exact shape in which it appears throughout the Kurmi Khovar in the village paintings even today.



Fig.2.2: *Tree of Life*

Slightly to the left of this Tree of Life is the trident, which is found only here in the rock-art of Hazaribagh. *It is a pre-Brahminical symbol.*



Fig.2.3: *Trident*

Immediately to the left of the tree of life is the honeycomb. The honeycomb is an ancient motif of the hunter-gatherers in rock-art (i.e. Australian Aboriginal, Bushman, etc.) In the contemporary rock-art of the Birhor honey bags are still a very cherished motif and a symbol of plenty and happiness.



Fig.2.4: *Honeycomb*

At the top of panel-3 is a common motif of sun worshippers the concentric oval with octagonal divisions, similar to an Indus motif. The hexagonal motif represents the immortal native which is bound in the oval, and is a magical motif. In Indus the sign appears and is given by Heras (1953) the meaning of the sun divided into eight zodiacal quarters, or “high sun”.



Fig.2.5: *Concentric oval with octagonal divisions*

Just to the right of the tree of life is an owl. I first drew attention to this figure in my book *Bridal Caves* (1995)A similar owl-like creature is found in the Aboriginal rock- art of Australia which is believed to represent the ancestor creator being Yuwunaggayai in Arnhem Land in Northern Australia. The owl was a sacred deity of wisdom also in ancient Greece. Throughout India owls are revered. This will be a very ancient belief tradition then. Next to it we find the motif of the sun over painted by a square mandala.



Fig.2.6: *Owl*

Above the owl are two deer (another is at top right) one of which superimposes an earlier mandala, and so this deer may have been painted later. This is interesting since the geometric figures are generally considered Chalcolithic and wild animals the art of the Mesolithic hunters.



Fig.2.7: *Deer*

Directly above the tree of life we find the square figure with a ladder in the centre. This is an ancient marriage motif.



Fig.2.8: *Square with ladder*

To the left of this is the design motif already discussed in Isco, the reticulated triangles, which is a network of triangles; the triangle itself being the symbol of the yoni, the chief attribute of the goddess.

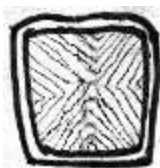


Fig.2.9: *Reticulated Triangles*

To the right side of the panel we find a human figure in a box similar to the one at the top of the central panel Isco. It is a sacred figure as seen by the ithyphallic extension between the legs.



Fig.2.10: *Human Figure in a box*

Perhaps the chief object of interest are the numerous images of frogs. Hazaribagh is famous for numerous stone frogs, some of large size, which have sacred cupule markings and point to the south. These images have been found throughout Hazaribagh and Chatra district in many places and their sacred significance is understood by the locals. Perhaps they are a totem of the *Bengs* (frog tribe). It is worthwhile to note that in the Dogon rock art of Mali in West Africa we see the connection between human and emergent aquatic life forms like frogs and tadpoles and similar frog forms abound in their rock-art.

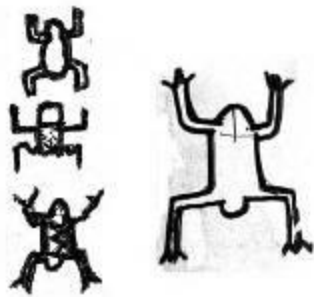


Fig.2.11: *Frogs*

Immediately to the top of the horns of the first of the pair deer in the third panel is the form deciphered by Erwin Neumayer as Ma or Om, set in a “W” shaped decorative form.



Fig.1.12: *Ma or Om*

In the central panel we observe many animal forms. The middle row depicts a stag and three does of spotted deer (*axis axis*). At the bottom is a tiger and at the top are a pair of wild cattle which is the small humped wild cattle (*Bos primagenus*) variety. In the top part of the left hand panel is the fading outline of a leaping bull similar to the panel of Isco rock-art. With what seems to be a pennant plume on neck, a feature of ancient Indus and contemporary Sohrai.



Fig.2.13: *Animals Forms*

Cupules in squares have also been found in in khandar and Salga (NP). There are many interesting forms comparable with rock-art of other places for example the rectangle with cupules that is also found in Dogon rock-art in Mali in Western Africa. Cupules have been dated to 70,000 B.P in the Chambal caves. It is a sacred motif found in the “spotting” of animals during the Sohrai harvest festival, and in the Kurmi wall paintings. It has been found among the Fulani in Western Africa, Caucosus Mountains, and Aboriginal rockart of Australia. Cupules are related with the mother goddess. But it is interesting to note that cupules arranged in rows in the stones below frog-shaped dolmens in Hazaribagh have been used by children for playing a game with stones. Cupules are a common body decoration both among the Gonds of Madhya Pradesh as well as among the aboriginals of Australia. This points to a common aboriginal culture in the past. The oldest cupules are in Djinmiun, Darwin, NT Australia, going back to 176,000 B.P. In Khandar rockart panel-2 we find similar boxes with rows of circles. It is found in the bottom right hand of Isco panel-2, and in Khandar panel-2.



Fig.2.14: *Cupules*

Also in the first panel is a *chouk* or *mandala* which is commonly found in the Khovar and Sohrai tribal art of Hazaribagh, and which occurs in the aboriginal art of Australia, where it is supposed to represent a carrying bag called a “dilly bag”, which is made by folding a square skin like an envelope. This is a common motif in the rockart of Bhimbetka. The “dilly bag” with the tassels at the top is found in Thethangi rockart and also in Prajapati Khovar paintings of Hazaribagh. The tassels are found in Indus and given the value “glitter” by Heras (1953).



Fig.2.15: *Chouk or Mandala*

The square with circle is found in panel-1 bottom and panel-2 middle. The square with a concentric circle is an interesting motif. The concentric square or rectangle has been interpreted as a village pond. This motif is found just above.



Fig.2.16: *Square with Circle*

The concentric square is made to represent the village pond and is known to the Kurmi and Bhuiya artists who paint it commonly in the Khovar village murals even today with this meaning. To the Native Americans the concentric square or rectangle signifies “Place of emergence”. The concentric square is found in the first panel of Isco rock-art. But the square and concentric circle may have a significance related to *the cupule* as the oldest symbol of the mother goddess. For the Birhor hunter-gatherers of Hazaribagh the concentric circle is the symbol of human continuity.



Fig.2.17: *Pond*

Vertical lines are found in panel-3 where we find them enclosed in a rectangle. It was first manifested when man splashed liquid ochre with reeds on sandstone walls to “mark” it with his presence, and such markings have been found in rock-art as in the Northern territory in Australia). But here what we have is a well developed symbol which has been placed within a rectangle and is a motif with a sacred significance associated with “striping”, which is respected as a sacred marking, and is practiced in the wall painting of Hazaribagh.



Fig.2.18: *Vertical Lines*

In panel-2 of Thethangi we find above the line of deer in the middle of a panel a square with a triangle at the bottom and vertical rows of triangles on either side. We know that the triangle is the most significant emblem of the mother goddess since Chalcolithic times.



Fig.2.19: *Square with Triangle*

The triangle with arms on either side is known locally as the “*Pandey Baba*” motif. It is an ancient sacred motif encountered in Egypt millennia after this rock-art was painted. There it was called Ka and was given the value of the “life essence”. It has variously been interpreted as upright hands(which is a sign of success in Native American Indian rock-art), and also associated with the bull’s horn, and therefore sacred to the bull, and in Egypt associated with the cow goddess Hathor. In the present context in the Khovar and Sohrai art it is given this significance. It is a common motif in the Kurmi Sohrai, where it is a symbol of the lord of animals, Pashupati, whose head is depicted in this manner. It also appears in the Prajapati Khovar in a slightly modified form appearing as the letter W.



Fig.2.20: *Triangle with Arms*

In panel-3 of Thethangi we find squares with enigmatic symbols inside which I consider to be the protozoic form of the Dhankul symbol of the Maria wall paintings. Similar symbols occur in Raham, Khandar, Isco and Nutangwa. I have compared these “houses” or rectangular sacred “boxes” to the Dhankul motif painted on their house-walls by the Maria of Bastar, and the sacred magico-relegious “Italan” of the Saora of Orissa, and the Warli marriage mandalas for the goddess Palaghata, the goddess of plant fertility because they are linked with fertility and to waid off evil, and are expressions of the agricultural age.

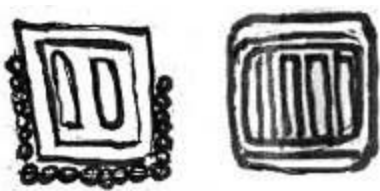


Fig.2.21: *Squares with Enigmatic Symbols*

A great similarity has been noted between our rock-art in Hazaribagh and the rock paintings of a commensurate period in Chattisgarh which I have drawn attention to. My investigation has shown a continuing living tradition of the art in both regions. I have put forward in this book the thesis that the rock-art of Chhatisgarh was most likely painted by the ancestors of the Gonds, a North Dravidian linguistic tribe similar to the Oraons who I believe were also the artists of the rockart of Isco and other painted caves in Hazaribagh and Chatra districts of Jharkhand. These motifs and symbols had evolved in the deep past out of the contacts with the natural world and faith in nature held by early man in contrast to our current technological and industrial intelligence which cannot come to terms with this earlier form of intelligence. Nowadays the technological and industrial mindset can only look on these symbols and motifs as meaningless designs to be used for decorative purposes. But this was not the reason why they were painted in the first place. I have attempted to find and explain some of their meanings and connections with similar ancient or aboriginal societies, even in the other parts of the world, in order to bring to the attention of the reader their real metaphysical significance. At the time when these motifs were painted in the Meso-Chalcolithic period organized national religions did not exist and man was following a universal evolving faith in nature which had to be nurtured with symbols, and which was the inception of the sacred. Unfortunately for technological man he is only able to understand or interpret the technological significance of form or appreciate a meaningless decorative

significance of form, and he is no longer able to understand, interpret, create, evaluate or recognize the esoteric significance of form, which is left to the priests or artists to interpret.

The vertical lines in square or rectangular boxes (or “houses”) may represent an human ancestor form (*Khuta*), even possibly preceding the megalith or vertical stone posts in memory of ancestor. The *Khuta* is a vertical wooden post installed in a Kumrathaan-baba (*Gachha/ Mannat*) or square or rectangular enclosure (still used by our villagers) with significance to cattle health and a good harvest erected on the birth of a calf.

In the upper galley we have a few interesting figures, one of which is a small running figure in outline and a running spotted deer (*Axis-axis*).



Fig.2.22: *Running human figure (Upper Gallery)*

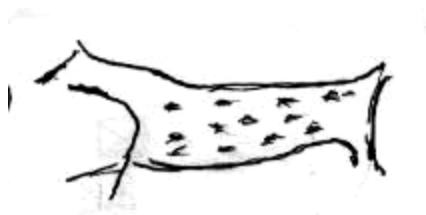


Fig.2.23: *Running spotted deer (Upper Gallery)*

In this way the new human society cannot evaluate rock-art. In destroying the tribal culture and replacing it with a technological industrial culture among Tribal societies we are further destroying the last connections with man’s past. Rock-art is one of these last connections, and so are the painted murals of the village houses of Central India descended from them, the last living connections with ancient Man In India.

Thethangi Rockart Panel



P.1 (l:15' feet x h:20' feet)

P.2 (l:10' feet x h:20' feet)

P.3 (l:15' feet x h:20' feet)



Thethangi rock-shelter visible in middle of the hill range (left)



View from Thethangi towards the Damodar river (south). Piperwar mine is to the right side behind tree



Composite view of the painted shelter



A bird's-eye view showing the upper gallery



Panel 2, Deer standing in a line (Fig.2.13)



Wild Cattle (Fig.2.13)



Panel 3, (left to right) Square with ladder (chouk) (Fig.2.8); tree of life (Fig.2.2); Owl (Fig.2.6)



Close-up of Owl (Fig.2.6)



Panel 3, the rectangular figures could represent ancestor poles (Fig.2.21) while the motif above them represents the Concentric oval with octagonal divisions (ig.2.5), and to the right are two reticulated triangles (Fig.2.9) and a frog (Fig.2.11)



Panel 3, Frog and reticulated triangles (as in previous photo) with deer from typical of Mesolithic style



(Upper Gallery), Running human form (Fig.2.22)



(Upper Gallery), Spotted deer (Fig.2.23)

CHAPTER-6

Rockart Site: SATPAHAR I, II, III

District: Chatra

Measurements:

Satpahar I - Length 12' feet x Height 8' feet

Satpahar II - Length 15' feet x Height 6' feet

Satpahar III - Length 10' feet x Height 7' feet



Satpahar Rock-art Shelter

These three rock-art sites, some three miles west of Mandair Village located on the top of the eastern most end of the Satpahar range in the western North Karanpura Valley, are perhaps the jewels of Hazaribagh (now Chatra district) rock-art. Belonging to the Mesolithic age, all three shelters comprise Mesolithic period animal paintings, which were painted in haematite in the deep purple crimson of the iron-stone. They were painted over ten thousand years ago. As the sizes of the shelters show, they are small shelters, each one having the distinction of standing *on* the back of the mountain range, and not on the mountain-side, like the other shelters. The ancient hunter-gatherers who made these paintings would have been living a nomadic life, and the shelters would have for them also been camping sites, and they would have looked up at these large murals as we look at paintings on the walls of our homes. The paintings are all belonging to the hunter's world. They are all identifiable wild animals, and I will explain the themes of the panels as I come to them. The Satpahar range is still a wild and isolated tract of *saal* (*Shorea robusta*) forest, surrounded on three sides by agriculture and scrub jungle, and the simple dwellings of the tribals, and villages of the artisan guilds who are partly occupied with crafts production, and partly agricultural.

Since the mid-nineteenth century the British were aware that large seams of coal lay under the river Damodar and its ancient valley. The region had harboured tribes ever since time immemorial. The relics of the valley have shown a very ancient culture going back to prehistoric times and evidence of the evolution of the local culture through the earliest hunting and farming societies. No wonder the tribal people, and the villagers who have adapted various crafts, have become self-contained societies which practice their own egalitarian form of economy through barter and trade in the weekly markets held in different places. This valley had seen the advent of Buddhism, and there is a strong local tradition the Buddha had even visited the region, and remains of many Buddhist shrines have been found.

All along at the same time there had been a continuous tribal culture (even as there is today) and the ancient time-tested values which had been practiced thousands of years ago could continue under the changing circumstances. Buddhism would become the state religion and the tribals would practice their Sarna animist religion side by side. Buddhism would draw strength also from this animist tribal worship which lived so closely and in such unison with nature. The tribal symbols became Buddhist symbols. From the fact that these painted shelters have not been retouched during the intervening thousands years we may deduce that they were distinct from the life and culture of the people of the plains who looked upon them as product of another time and place. And yet, the Adivasis of the region continued the prehistoric traditions of the painting, and are the descendents of the far off people who painted the rock-art! The tribals still go for their annual ritual hunts during Holi festival (*Phagun Sendra*) and in May during the summer the annual hunt (*Disom Sendra*). The north Karanpura Valley has evidenced a Buddhist heritage, and the lower Damodar valley east of Ramgarh to Dhanbad and Burdwan-Purulia in West Bengal has evidenced a distinctly Jain heritage (Manbhum). It is as if these two religion epochs were divided in the two portions of the river. While the lower Damodar archaeological remains of the Jains has been almost wiped out by the coal mining, the threat has now shifted to the upper section of this river where the people of the earlier Buddhist culture still survive, having reverted to their autochthonous traditions and lifestyles.

The valley was once forested, and the denudation of the forests may be placed on the Asur iron smelters who have left behind huge amount of slag from smeltings (Isco, Nayatand, Tandwa, etc.) Although one can find plenty of iron slag at megalith sites (Barwadi Punkri, Benti, Thethangi, etc.) But since agriculture must have been practiced in the valley since very early times, and to which the Chalcolithic rock-art sites point, it means the Asurs would have been a complement to the agricultural expansion. So we can see the significance of the valley as a sight of advanced human development for a very long time. In any event the modern iron smelters and coal miners are the Neo-Asurs who are destroying the valley of the Damodar river. As we had seen, the nomadic leaf-dwelling Uthlu Birhors of Hazaribagh had claimed that their ancestors painted the rock-art, and this will be quite reasonable, seeing that they are still hunter-gatherers. The difference in time framer between the prehistoric period (i.e megaliths, iron-working, plough agriculture) must be insignificant when we consider the hoary age and antiquity of the rock paintings.

Note to the Painted Symbols

Satpahar -I

In this rock-art, beginning from the left we see two small rectangles at the bottom which may have been added later, and two reticulated triangles. The reticulated triangles requires a comment as it appears in this painting. We are here dealing with an artistic product which may be over ten thousand years old. The rectangles appear to have within their frame cryptic sacred forms like upraised arms, which are still found in the village paintings.



Fig.3.1: *Rectangular motif*

The reticulated triangle may perhaps be the oldest manifestation of religio-cultural significance in the rock-art of Hazaribagh. As we find it in this panel in *Satpahar*, it is painted without linear outline, which is extremely important, since it is the first time we find a borderless symbol in a constrained format, i.e. a square.



Fig.3.2: *Reticulated triangles*

With outline it appears in the rock-art of Sidpa, Thethangi, and Isco. It also appears in the Kurmi Khovar, it is found as a body decoration of animals in the Mesolithic rock-art of Central India (Kerwa-Ghat, Mirzapur). Importantly perhaps, it appears in Hopi rock-art of North America where its living meaning is given as four directions or “four birds flying north” The motif has been found in the Lower Danube in Bulgaria at a dated level of 6500B.P, and it also appears in a baked clay seal from Turkey, dated at 4500B.P. It appears in the Bandana Kantha Tribal paintings of Singhbhum in South Jharkhand, where it has been developed into a six pointed star.

If I am right in my conjecture, then the unbordered reticulated triangles on Satpahar I rock-art are the turning point from the Mesolithic to the Chalcolithic consciousness some time over ten thousand years ago in these forested ranges overlooking the Damodar river which are now foredoomed to becoming the largest open mine coal pit in Asia in the pursuit of India's "Development", and the shabby descendants of our proud tribal ancestors are forced to give up their traditional lands and forests and work as coolly labour or sex-slaves in a socially, culturally, environmentally, and morally degraded environment.

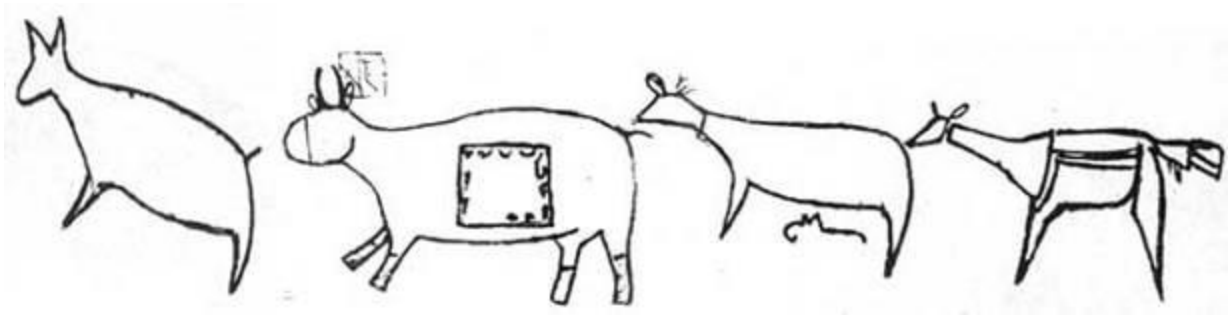


Fig.3.3: *Line of running animals (Note: X-Ray)*

The art appears to be from the earliest part of the Mesolithic with some hint of the approaching Chalcolithic due to the provenance of X-ray (second from left) and geometrical division of the animal body (extreme right). As we have seen the geometric device is a sign of the Chalcolithic consciousness. The first animal from the left is a bounding deer, the second a Gaur or Indian bison (*Bos gaurus*). The third and fourth are deer, of the species Sambhur (*Cervus unicolor*). Body divisions may be seen. The rock-art is in excellent condition. The shelter stands alone. The *banded* legs of the second animal (Gaur) were in the opinion of Neumayer (1993) who visited the site with me, an evidence of ice-age drawing when the legs were buried in the snow. In my view the bands are a graphic illustration of the white "stockings" of the Gaur.

Satpahar II

Not far distant, less than half a kilometer, we come to Satpahar II rock-art, set in a distinctive shelter among large boulders, on the top of the range. This is an interesting panel which I shall describe from left to right.

In the extreme left is a wild bull, perhaps a Gaur or Indian bison (*Bos gaurus*) although dewlap and dorsal ridge are not prominent. It has an X-ray rectangle with round forms, perhaps inner body, similar to X-ray forms still being painted in the Khovar of the Kurmis of the region. After it are the faded forms of two animals, apparently bovines. At the bottom is a *chouk* (rectangle with crossed diagonals) above which is a smaller animal, perhaps a wild cow. Above it is a large rhinoceros figure. The Indian one-horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), though now extinct in the area was found in Central India during earlier times and has been found in the rock-art of the region. The interesting thing is that we find in the stomach of the rhinoceros the figure of two hunters, who could have been killed by it, or else the rhinoceros was painted over them. Next we find a graphic illustration of the wild humped cattle of India, *Bos primagens*. Close to it are some sacred markings still found in the Kurmi Khovar paintings in the nearby villages, and this might indicate a later addition of motifs when cattle had been domesticated and had taken a sacred significance for the people of the valley. Below this we find two hunters with bows drawn facing a large animal in whose stomach is another hunter. This figure seems to be of a Cheetah or Hunting Leopard, (*Acinonyx jubatus*) a part-dog, part cat-like animal once found in this part of India but now extinct here! The animal's posture and long tail and body formation lead me to this conjecture.

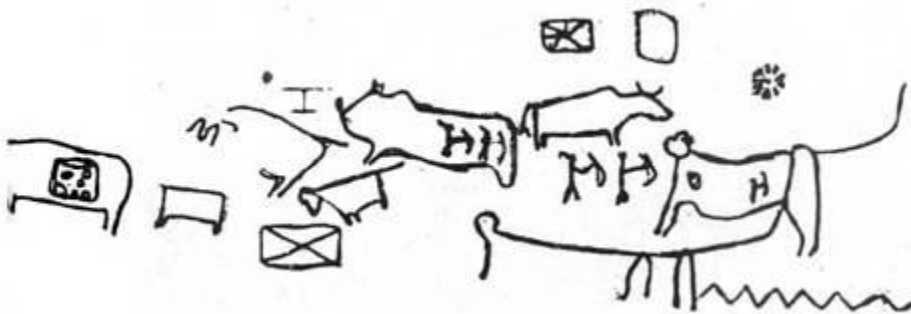


Fig.3.4: *Hunting Scene*

Following this we find a very interesting group of animals, typically delineated by the observant tribal artist who also was an experienced hunter, and intimately knew wild animals. Here is a pair of tigers (*Panthers tigris*), the tigress leading, which is quite common. Both animals are in alert posture. Above them are two sows, and a wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) bringing up the rear, tail raised in alertness.

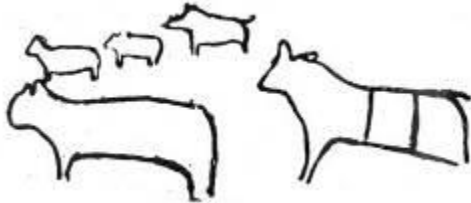


Fig.3.5: *Pair of Tigers with wild boar*

Then there is a slight gap and on the right we find a female and male Nilgai or Blue Bull (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*). Behind them is a fine startled leaping bison, and another, standing still, ears back, in rest.

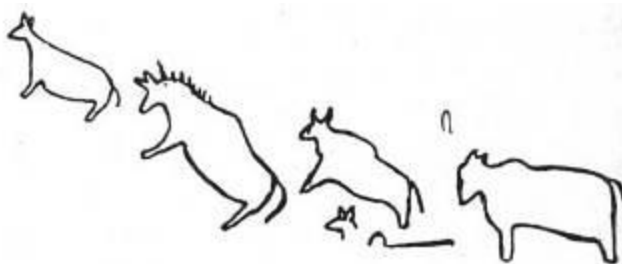


Fig.3.6: *Group of animals*

All the forms are drawn with great knowledge and feeling, as if the pre-historic artist was familiar with his subject-material, as indeed he was, being a survival hunter, whose very life depended upon his knowledge of wild animals and their ways.

Satpahar III

Now we come to the third of these shelters on the back of this range. The first, and the most prominent motif is a cross, with circle in the middle, which is almost identical to a cross from Harappa (2500B.C.) on proto-historic painted pottery. Here, below this we find a line of running Cheetal or Spotted Deer (*Axis axis*), a common motif from the painted pottery of Mehi in Indus Valley, and one found commonly in the Ganju Sohrai painting.

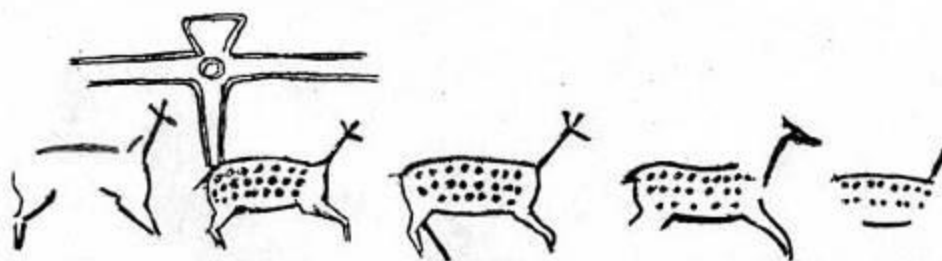
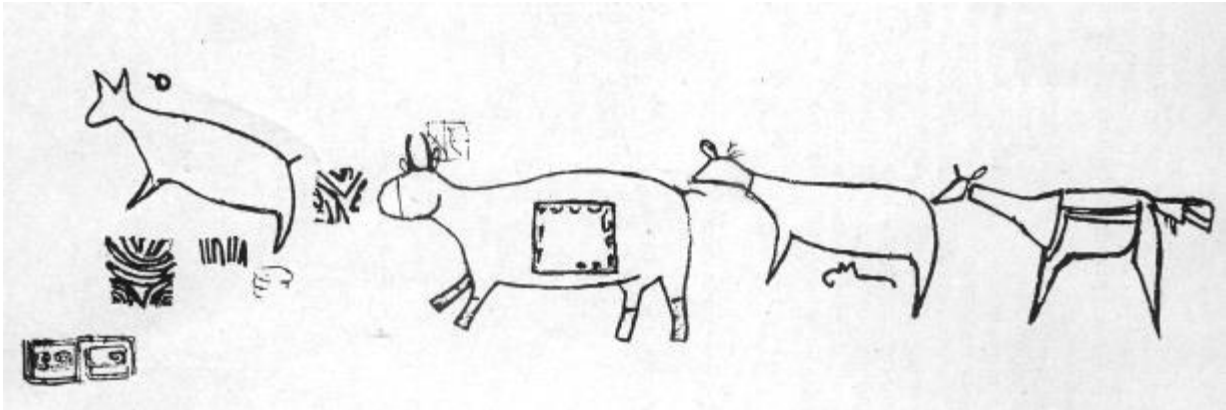


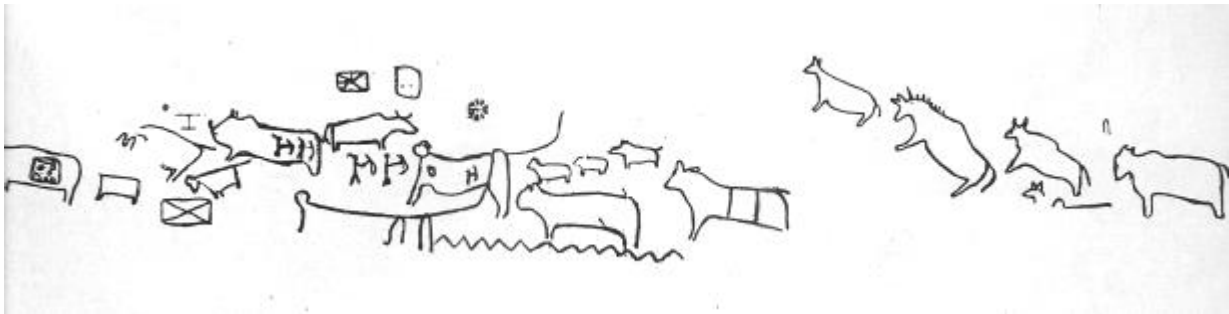
Fig.3.7: Cross and Running Spotted Deer

So with these three engaging rock-art sites, all belonging to the Mesolithic hunting period, set in a remote location surrounded by dense forests in the very lap of nature, we return to a distant time when man was living totally in the company of wild animals. Even today these shelters are remote from man, and where even till today some wild animals depicted in the paintings may be found still. It is our duty not only to study and preserve these earliest manifestations of India's historical record but to also protect and preserve the forests and natural countryside in which these remains may be still found, and above all, to protect the Tribal people whose ancestors painted on rock these oldest records of Indian life. That we are at present not doing so adequately is a shame for which posterity will not ever forgive us.

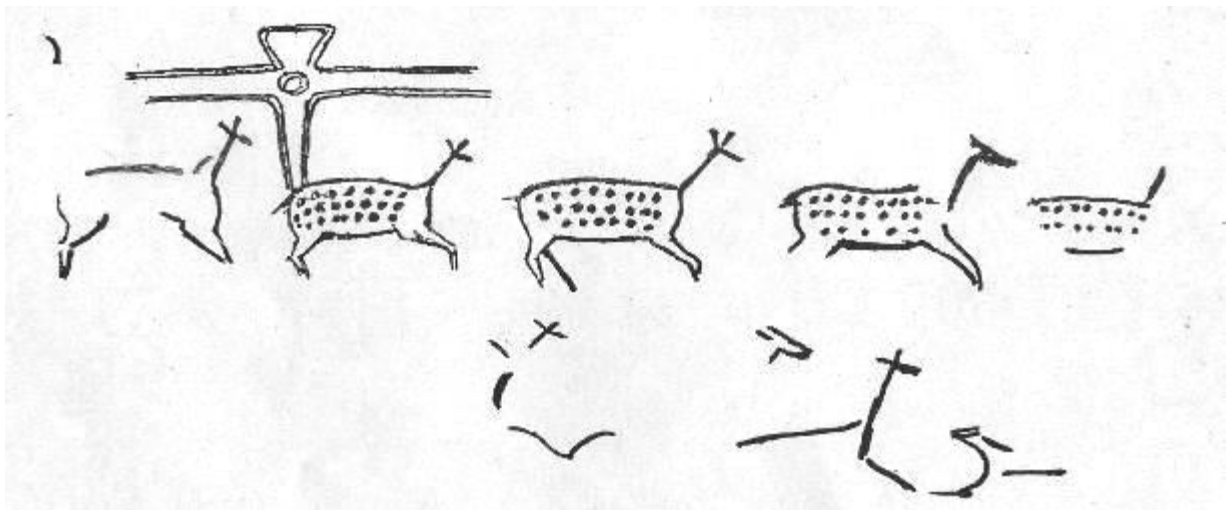
Satpahar Rockart Panel



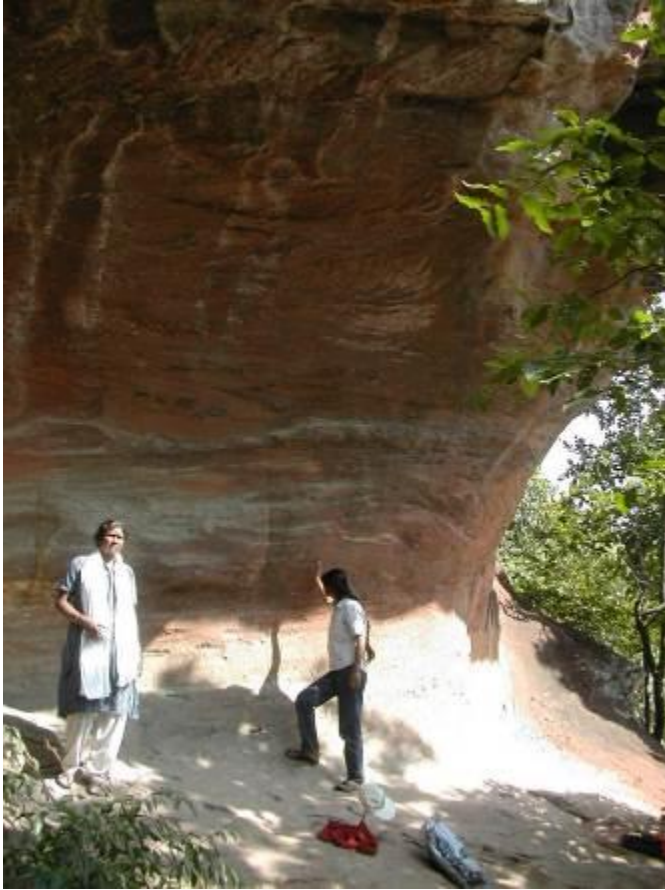
Satpahar I (Length 12' feet x Height 8' feet)



Satpahar- II (Length 15' feet x Height 6' feet)



Satpahar- III (Length 10' feet x Height 7' feet)



Satpahar 2 rock-art shelter



View from Satpahar of the dam submergence area on Garhi river



(left to right) X-ray figures of hunters with bows in the stomach of a rhinoceros, while hunting a cheetah (Hunting Leopard)



(left to right) Behind the Cheetah in extreme left are trio of wild boars (under tail) and below a pair of tigers (Fig.3.5)



(left to right) Behind the tiger we can identify at the top of a pair of Nilgai (Fig.3.6)



Close-up of the Tiger (Fig.3.5)



Satpahar 3 Rock-art shelter



Line of running Spotted Deer, (Fig.3.7) with a dramatic cross above them



Close-up of Spotted Deer in flight (Fig.3.7)



Line of Spotted Deer (note cross in background to top left) (Fig.3.7)

CHAPTER-7

Rockart Site: **KHANDAR**

District: Chatra

Measurements:

Panel No.1: Length 15' feet x Height 6' feet

Panel No.2: Length 15' feet x Height 8' feet



Khandar Rock-art Shelter

Khandar is in the southern flank of the Satpahar range and faces the Ashoka opencast mine. This rock-art was visited by me first some time around 1992 and subsequently I took Erwin Neumayer to see it (1993). He noted in it a butterfly which he called the only one in Indian rock-art! It is very rare to find in rock-art detailed portraits of specific insects. For instance in the second panel of Isco there is a graphic illustration of a water beetle and a scorpion. The Khandar site faces south towards the hills of Netarhat in the distance, which connect with Palamu to the west and Jashpur to the south. Any migrations of peoples, or at least contact movements between south Jharkhand and the Satpahar ranges would have been by this route, and so it is not surprising that the rock-art of these regions bear a common identity, strictly south to Sambalpur and Raigarh.

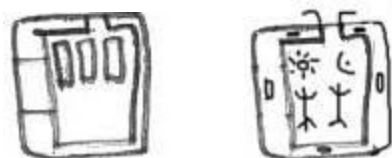
A few miles west of Thethangi one passes below towering cliffs oozing a yellow orpiment those being stone massifs formed under great pressure in ages long past. From these cataclysmic upheavals and geologic changes different oxides were developed which the early man used for his painting by rubbing them on stone with water to get liquid pigment for painting his rock paintings or using the stones themselves with water and rubbed on the sandstone wall leaving a line. In this way the were an ancient form of *Caran-D'Ache* of Switzerland. These stone rubbings may still be found in the floors of the painted caves.

As we move along the side of the range we come to a narrow gully or ravine going into the range through a steep cleft in the hillside, and this is the source of a small rocky rivulet, one of many, draining the hillside. We proceed inward among the stony hillsides covered with thorny bushes and *saal* trees, until we reach a rocky enclosure, and to the right of us up on the stream's bank, is the beautiful painted shelter so unassuming and beautiful, which has withstood the ravages of time for thousands of years to give us this great rock-art.

Between Thethangi and Khandar is another rock-art site high on the range, which is Saraiya, discovered by Erwin Neumayer in 1993. That this rock-art is different to all the other rock-art in the region is of great interest, and I will come to it when I deal with this site.

Note to the Painted Symbols

In panel one of Khandar we find the old motifs and sacred markings we have become familiar with. The artists who painted this rock shelter hardly three kilometers west of Thethangi must necessarily have been a common people. I find much in common between Chhengapahar-Lakhamara and other rock-art from the Sambalpur and Sundergarh districts of Orissa and the art of Khandar. One of the things that interest me most are the square “Labyrinth” houses, which form the basis of the painted genesis legend Dhankul chouk *mandala* painted on the inner walls of houses among the Halbi and on Muria of Bastar. These boxlike structures are comparable also with similar forms in the rock-art of Thethangi and Isco. The form is also comparable to the mandala of the Warli of Maharashtra and the Ittalan of the Saoras of Orissa. These folk traditions had no doubt their genesis in the rock-art of Central India.



Khandar

Muria Dhankul

Fig.4.1: *Box-like form (See fig.4.3) (Temple form)*

These boxlike structures are clearly thought-forms in the earliest stages of “writing”, pre-alphabetic constructions of sequence which could be conveyed between members of a tribe, or different tribes. These squares are sacred spaces, which is drawn attention to by sacred spotting, in-filling with zig-zag lines, etc. If indeed these story-telling “houses” are similar to the Saora *Ittalan* wall paintings which Verrier Elwin described in “The Religion of an Indian tribe”(1955), how can we get the meanings of these messages from antiquity? The square blocks which we find in the rock-art of Hazaribagh I believe are stories told in pictures similar to the Saora and Muria *ittalan*. This shows a tremendous length of time which these forms have endured, many thousands of years. The note to Fig.4.3 mentions the significance

of vertical posts as totem forms and they may represent megalithic ancestor stone posts. In Nautangwa Pahar rockart (Chapter 12, fig.9.2) we discuss the significance of these box like forms with “doors” as the prototype of the temple-form.

In the first panel we come across a pattern of vertical forms with circles at their end, and I have hazarded a guess it may represent a bee’s hive; however, what is important is that this seemingly natural depiction may have metaphysical connotations, since it has two concentric circles, one above the other, the lower having a vertical cowrie design. The concentric circles are in esoteric rock-art motif since very earliest times, continuing down to Tasmanian rock-art, Mohenjodaro, and Buddhist art as the *Eye-goddess*. Here in Khandar two concentric circles, one above the other, form part of what seems a honey comb. The painting is in thick red haematite. The bottom concentric circle centre exhibits a dissected circle (vertical) denoting a cowrie (vulva) in the tribal symbolism.



Fig.4.2: *Concentric circle*

The concentric circle is a very old Tribal motif found in pre-historic art. It has been found on churingas of Aborigines of Australia and in Aboriginal rock-art of (Yuendumu). It is painted on pubic belts in Indonesia (Ceran). It is a symbol of royalty for the African Ashanti tribe. It has been found also in Native Indian rock-art (Baja, Calif.) and in the ritual art of Cuba and Peru. With a cross in the concentric circle it becomes the marriage symbol of the Birhor (*Bana Sana*) and *saran-puja* motif of the Oraon (*Danda-Katta*) when the marriage of earth and sun are celebrated in the spring festival of Sarhul. Concentric circles are found in the painted pottery of Indus Valley.

Concentric circles have been found in Cairn (Scotland) 5000 B.P.; Pont Verda (Spain) 5000 B.P.; Camonica Valley (Italy) 4000 B.P. Dotted concentric circles of flour paste are made on the Khovar paintings during Sohrai festival in Hazaribagh. They are common fertility symbols painted in Khovar art. It is important to note that in the Danda-Katta motif of the

Oraons mentioned above, a *Bhelwa* or Soso twig (*Semecarpus anacardium*) is used. The *Bhelwa* is sacred to Shiva, the forest god of the Animist tribes.

After this are a few “houses”, or what I called *Chouks* (V. Elwin, *Tribal Art of Middle India*, 1949, p.37-45) which are the protozoic forms of similar motifs dedicated to the deity. In the contemporary marriage paintings also these *chouks* appear (i.e. Warli *chouks* to the goddess of plant fertility, Palaghata, in Thane district, Maharashtra) and in the Dhankul *chouks* of the Muria of the Bastar district of Chattisgarh, and among Saoras of Orissa who paint a magic-religious *chouk* called “*Ittalan*” to ward off evil and disease which Verrier Elwin studied (*The Religion of an Indian tribe*, 1955) By contrast the marriage mandalas of the Hazaribagh tribes are very simple, consisting of a rectangle or squares with crossed diagonals. The development of the *chouk* in the rock-art of Hazaribagh would be a seminal transition from the art of the Mesolithic hunters to settled Chalcolithic societies. I have also considered that the “posts” within these box-forms could represent totem poles having ancestor or fertility significance as in the “Kumrathaan” posts of the villages in honour of birth of cattle (see fig.4.1)

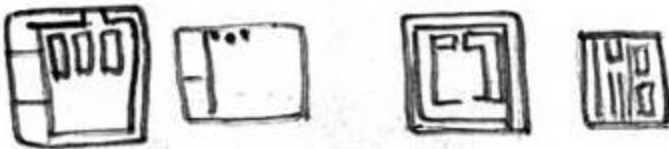


Fig.4.3: *House-form Chouks* (See fig.4.1)

Another very interesting motif in this panel is a horizontal oval with cross in it. The cross in the circle is among the oldest motifs in rock-art, being found in a rock-art shelter in Kakadu National Park, Northern Arnhem land, Australia at a carbon date of 40,000 B.P! It continues in the Bana Sana motif of the Oraons, and in the Birhor marriage *chouk*. In North American Indian art it is the symbol of the Creator. This motif has been found in other ancient rock-art sites i.e. Turkey, 4500B.P, Bulgaria, 6500B.P, Bavaria, 2400 B.P, Salzburg, 2000 B.P, Switzerland, 2500 B.P, so it is a universal symbol. The circle and the cross independent of one another would be much older symbols, and their coming together would be a watershed in human evolution. The cross in circle has been found in the Canary hill dolmen (5000 B.P) and it is also found in the Kurmi Sohrai painting in the villages.

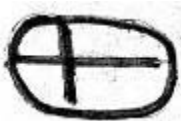


Fig.4.4: *Oval with cross*

Next I will like to take up two enigmatic symbols, both signs of marking a sacred space. One is square with opposed triangles covered with spots, the other a square filed with zigzag lines, both examples of marking sacred spaces. By as far back as seven thousand years ago the idea of sacred spaces *being made by the hand of man* had entered human cognition, and in this we see the period of transition from a nomadic hunting-gathering lifestyle to a settled existence. Up till now all needs could be fulfilled by the natural life, now man had to depend upon gods. Rain had to be prayed for, drought had to be averted, famine was a possibility, placation of the elements was essential, elements became gods. Many of these symbols might have had little meaning, but they were an expression of a deep need. They were the product of uncertainty. The two symbols I give are examples.



Fig.4.5: Sacred marked boxes

Panel two of Khandar presents only a single animal, in the characteristic central Indian style of raised angular hind part and upright ears, probably from a period not separate from the other motifs.

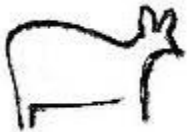


Fig.4.6: Animal

Vertical or horizontal strings of circles such as are encountered in the second and third panels of the Isco rock-art, and in the second panel of the Khandar rock-art, are identical to the welcome *aripans* made with liquid white rice gruel on the ground at the entrance to the house where the cattle dwell, during the Sohrai harvest festival. These *aripans* are made by the women to welcome the cattle home after grazing in the forest.

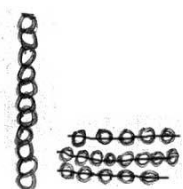


Fig.4.7: Strings of circles

Two rectangular boxes, containing circles are sacred markings, and similar rows of sculpted cupules have been found in connection with stone dolmens. Today we find village children playing a game with stones in the hollows of such cupules. Obviously their earlier significance has been lost. Rows of such circles decorate this panel, generally in groups of threes. In panel two of Thethangi rock shelter we find a similar box with rows of circles. This motif is also found at the bottom right-hand corner of the Isco rock-art. It will seem the cupules are originally of sacred significance connected with the mother goddess (*mata*). (see also Fig.4.7)

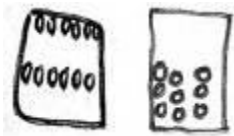


Fig.4.8: *Circles in squared boxes*



To the left of animal form is an interesting motif resembling a gourd container and immediately to the right is a butterfly, which Erwin Neumayer (1993) considered the only butterfly in Indian rock-art.

Fig.4.9: *Butterfly*

Above this is a most interesting motif of strings of circles, if I may be permitted to hazard a guess, and below it are vertical rows of circles which are perhaps related with the Aripans at the cow festival of Sohrai celebrating harvest in October and are meant to be hooves of cattle..

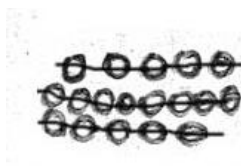


Fig.4.10: a. *Vertical rows of circles* b. *Horizontal rows of circles*

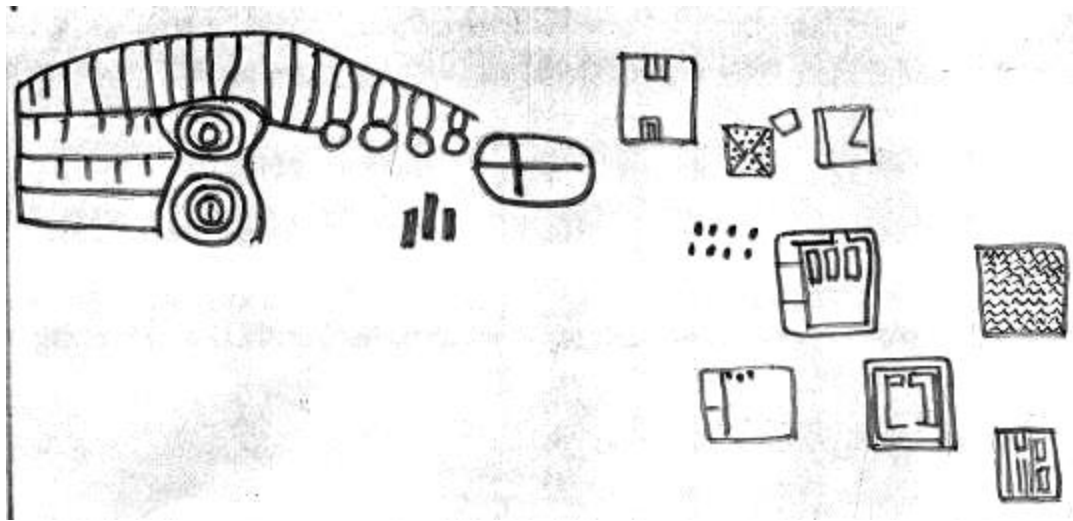
On the right is the partly erased figure of a man with drawn bow.



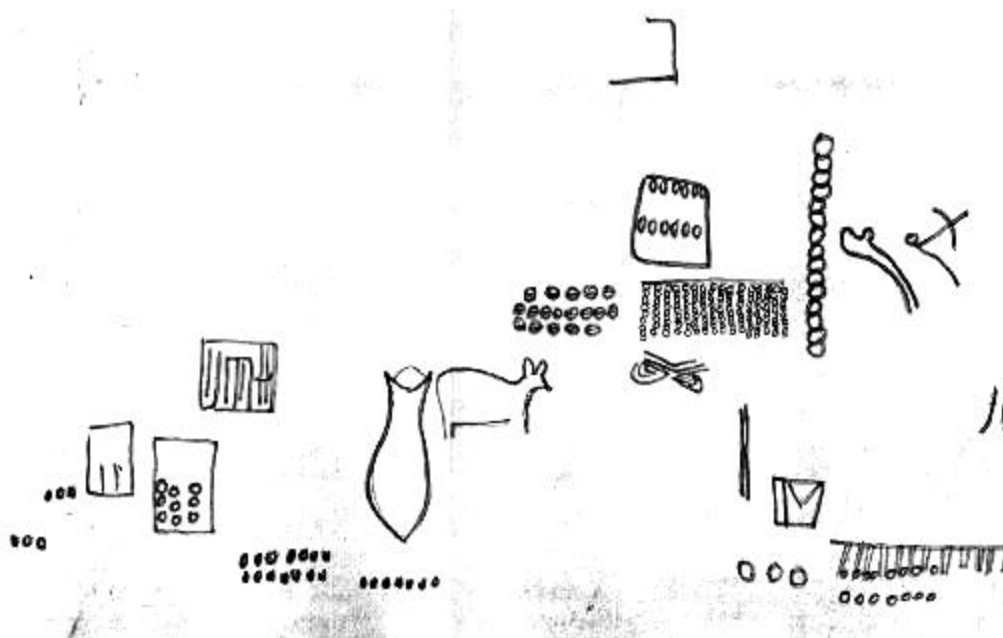
Fig.4.11: *Human figure*

Obviously much weathering has taken place and several messages from the past have been lost at Khandar. However, what remains is pertinent to our fuller understanding of the significance of the motifs of Hazaribagh's rock-art. Khandar is the most south-westerly of our rock-art sites, and since I believe the route of contact with the painters of central Indian rock-art in Chattisgarh is to be established in this direction, it is an important site for us. From this point in the upper reaches of the Satpahar range we can see the blue hills of the Netarhat range in Gumla district where rock paintings are also found. This is in the direction of Jashpur, from where we enter northeastern Chattisgarh state and find the rock-art of Sarguja and Raigarh. Between here and there, in the midst of the forested hills will be found a series of painted caves not yet known, but awaiting the eager explorer, for when we have found two ends of the tapestry can the middle portion be bereft of design and significance? For hitherto the culture of the wild inhabitants of these tracts has been looked down upon with little to offer but now we are becoming aware of the strength and beauty of pre-historic motifs which speak to us from the past, and offer their inspiration to guide the emergent genius of modern India.

Khandar Rockart Panel



Panel-1 (Length- 15' feet x Height 6' feet)



Panel-2 (Length- 15' feet x Height 8' feet)



View of the Shelter



Panel 2, the rare image of a butterfly (Fig.4.9)



Just above the painted image of the butterfly we see vertical and horizontal strings of circles (Fig.4.7) and in boxes (Fig.4.8)



Close-up of strings of circles (Fig.4.10)



Close-up of box with circles (Fig.4.8), note “cowrie” shaped string o circles (Fig.4.7)



Close-up of string of circles compared with Sohrai welcome “aripan” for cattle (Fig.4.7)



Panel 2, Animal figure (Fig.4.6)



Panel1, The temple-form (Fig.4.1) and Sacred boxes (Fig.4.5)



Panel 2, box like structures having vertical posts (Fig.4.3)

CHAPTER-8

Rockart Site: SARAIYA

District: Chatra

Measurements:

Length-8' feet x Height-5' feet



The Saraiya Rock-art Shelter

Saraiya is a small rock-art shelter perched on a south –west facing eyrie on the southern flank of the eastern end of the Satpahar range. It was discovered by Erwin Neumayer in 1993 when Justin and I had taken him to see the closeby Thethangi rock-art. We had come down the hillside from the Thethangi shelter and were surveying the remains of an old Kushan fort which has now been completely destroyed by the overburden of the CCL's railway line laid through it. The remains of the fort were dated to the 1st cent. A.D, and there were considerable quantities of iron slag in the area testifying for Asur presence in the past.

That day in 1993 as Erwin, Justin, and I were surveying the Kushan site below Thethangi, suddenly Erwin's eyes lit up and he pointed to a tiny rock shelter on the point of the range, like an eagle's nest. He believed that it would contain rock-art. I took a one-rupee bet with him, which I lost. (The rupee was placed in a shelf of our cut-glass cabinet which was our first stone tool cupboard!) Erwin promptly went up with Justin, and sometime later appeared in the shelter, yodeling and shouting that it contained rock paintings.

Saraiya, this little eyrie on a promontory of the range, is a dangerous and difficult shelter to get to, and its size is extremely small. But its content of rock-art is unique, un-retouched since it was painted probably ten thousand years ago. The face of the sandstone is rough, open to the wind, sheltered by an overhang, but open to monsoon lashings of rain and swift storms that it must have seen over such a long span of time! It is in Saraiya that we find the earliest hand of man in rock-art in Hazaribagh.

Saraiya is different to all the other rock-art sites of Hazaribagh and Chatra. Erwin Neumayer(1993) had also opined it was the oldest. There are no evidences of a later hand in it. There are a few simple animal drawings, some anthropomorphic figures, and magical

forms. The horned deity, sun, and oldest motifs found in rock-art, a grasshopper deity similar to the Aboriginal figures of “Yamidj” in Australian rock-art, some other shamanistic forms, and elemental fish forms. I will take up various examples of these and give my understanding of them. The date for Saraiya in my opinion is at the end of the Pleistocene, 11,000 B.C, and associated with the long span of the Paleolithic, rather than the Holocene.

Note to the Painted Symbols

In the centre (top) and the left side of the panel two horned figures appear. The anthropomorphic horned deity appears here for the first time. It reappears in the Indus seals from Mohenjodaro, in both seals with hand raised, similar to the Saraiya figures. It is the horned deity with hand raised, the sign of leadership, which is the chief motif of the Sohrai village paintings depicting Pashupati, Lord of the animals, the association of the horned deity with other cultures is inevitable from the Minoan centaur, to the horned magician of the Bushman art of the Drakensberg ranges, in South Africa), to the horned magician of the Trois Freres cave in the Central Massif range in France, to the Cerrunos of the Celts, and the Gautemala aboriginal horned deity. We are reminded of the magical cave paintings of the Tassili-n-Ajjer in the southeastern Sahara. The motif is ancient, and probably associated with the stag long prior to the bull. According to Heras(1951) the raised hand in the Indus seals means “Successful endeavour” and in the Native American it signifies victory. The raised hand in Indus has also been translated as a sign of greatness (Heras, 1953), the stick with an X cross on it is given the value “flag”. If we see the figure in the rock-art it is very much this symbol: although many thousands of years before Indus!



Fig.5.1: *Horned deity*

Then I will take up another enigmatic form in the extreme left (top) which we encountered in the second panel of Isco, which is diamond-shaped form, like an arrow-head, which having a hole in its middle has been sometimes called an eye, and which in the Indus seals has been given the value “inscribed stone” (Heras, 1953) the diamond is a fertility symbol among the tribes, being equated with the vulva, and a common fertility symbol in indigenous symbology from the Romany gypsy symbol of fertility, to its value of water-jar in the traditional Khovar and Sohrai paintings of Hazaribagh. As I have pointed out this form is taken in the Indus seals to be a stylus, and meant to represent “inscribed stone”. It is well known that primitive man was aware of tools for engraving bone since very earliest times, going back 20,000 years, and an engraved fish in stone was collected by me from the Isco river. This sign in Jemdet Nasser is given the value “sheep”; in Babylon “stone”, and as noted, in Indus “inscribed stone”.



Fig.5.2: *Eye*

The fish forms (middle left) are the proto-Indus type, also found engraved in a stone stele found in the Isco river. The reader will be reminded of ancient man’s proclivity for engraving designs (i.e. petroglyph). Similar fish forms are found in the Isco rock-art. These forms are still used today in the village paintings, unchanged. I will draw to the reader’s attention the meanings attached to the form in the Indus are many, and with slight notational changes can mean various planets, i.e., Min, (the fish star), Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, Mercury. The form is also similar to the representation in Archaic Sumerian cuneiform writing.

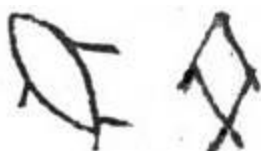


Fig.5.3: *Fish*

The tree of life motif in Saraiya is identical to the form in which it appears in Indus, and in Khovar and Sohrai village painting in Hazaribagh even today. The tree of life appears in two of our rock-art sites, Thethangi and Saraiya. It appears in similar form in the Dogon rock paintings of Mali in West Africa. In the sheaf of rice hung between the bull's ears on the forehead during the Sohrai harvest ritual in Hazaribagh, the motif takes re-birth. It is found in this form between the horns of the deity in Kalibangan in the Indus valley over four thousand years ago.



Fig.5.4: *Tree of Life*

In his book *The Tribal art of Middle India* (1949) Verrier Elwin pointed out the connections between tribal motifs and the Indus valley painted pottery as illustrated in Richard Starr's book *Indus valley Painted Pottery: Harrapan relationships with Iran and Mesopotamia*, (Princeton University Press, 1941). There is a motif illustrated in this wonderful book, Gian iv in Iran (No.44, p.40, No.85, p.54) of a design from Susa in Iran (4000 B.C). The form is found in this rock-art in association with a deer.



The motif of animals in association with plants is a common one in the village mural paintings of Hazaribagh. That geometrical forms in association with plants were emerging six thousand years ago is a sobering thought, and speaks volumes for the people who painted them! This figure is on the extreme right of the panel (I). It also points to culture contacts in the pre-historic deep past. There is on the left side of the panel the motif of a deer eating plants (II).



Fig.5.5: *Animal eating plant* (II)

On the right hand side of the rock-art we find the figure of what looks like a grasshopper, and is! In the Aboriginal rock-art of northern Arnhem Land in Australia we find this figure(Yamidg). We may remember there is a strong protoaustraloid link between the aboriginals of this region and those of Australia. Similar grasshopper images (i.e. Praying mantis) have been found in the wood carvings of Irian Jaya.



Fig.5.6: *Grasshopper*

My favourite frog in the rock-art of my region is the one in the middle (bottom) of this panel. Frogs are among the oldest forms in rock-art. Frogs continued into the megalithic period when huge frog-shaped dolmens were carved out of stone, and large number of which may be found all over Hazaribagh and Chatra district. In this particular image we get *a clear view of a figure worshipping the ithyphallic image of the frog*. This clearly indicates there was a frog cult in Hazaribagh. Huge stone frogs singly and in groups have been found by me in the following places,(i) Marol in Jori, near Chatra , close to the waterfall (ii) Opposite Balaka, Canary Hill road; Nischal House (formerly Duncan House) near Superintendent of Police's residence,Hazaribagh; Canary Hill, Hazaribagh. Frog forms of the Dogons in Mali, West Africa are similar to those in our rock-art.



Fig.5.7: *Frog*

A hatched animal figure in the centre of the panel is of great interest. Similar hatched animal forms come to us from the painted pottery of the Indus valley, and from the Meso-Chalcolithic rock-art of Raisen in Madhya Pradesh and it is a form of body decoration of sacred animals still painted in the village murals during the harvest festival of Sohrai during October. Definitely the rock-painting tradition is the oldest to which these other traditions owe their inspiration.



Fig.5.8: *Hatched animal figure*

In the left of centre of the rock-art is a vertical spotted figure. The significance of the vertical figure is old in rock-art, and common with Australian rock-art. Spotting of figures is also a sacred marking. At the top right hand corner we find squares filled with spotting, which is a similar manifestation of the presence of the sacred. Spotting is found in Sohrai village painting even today in the region.



Fig.5.9: *Spotted figure*

In the middle we also find a monkey figure with barbs on the hands and legs and knotted tail which is a shamanistic figure. This also indicates worship of the monkey. Since I have pointed to the provenance of the rock-art being linked to the ancestors of the Oraons it is worthy of note that the monkey is the totem of the Orang and Oraon.



Fig.5.10: *Monkey*

At the top end to left of centre is a very engaging motif. This is the pyramid with horns or rays emanating outward from the apex. It is found again in ancient Mesopotamia. But here we see it in its nascent form thousands of years earlier! Above it are two suns. In the tribal world it is believed that earlier there were two suns.

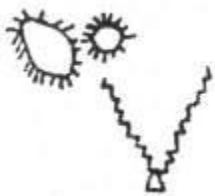


Fig.5.11: *Suns and horned pyramid*

The surface of the sandstone is rough and heavily grained, yet so wonderfully have the unknown primitive artists painted it with a cunning hand that all kinds of small anthropomorphs, zoomorphs, and animal forms, some no more than a few inches in length, appear; many in vertical posture, which again is a sacred portrayal. When we go through this panel closely, small details jump out of the sandstone at us, some impossible for even the best camera to catch, after untold thousands of years. In trying to capture these images and explain their hidden meanings to unborn generations is my objective, so that we may come to realize the great importance of these messages from the past which man is so heedlessly destroying. Already the blasting of the coalmines and railway creeping closer and closer to this precious rock-art announces its wanton destruction. Therefore, it is ever more necessary for us to try and understand these messages of our ancestors who are trying to talk to us through painted words before these sites are senselessly destroyed in modern man's rage of development which sees these drawings merely as manifestations of uncivilized man.

Saraiya Rockart Panel



Panel (Length- 8' feet x Height 5' feet)



The rock shelter is visible above the stone massif as a small roofed space just above centre of picture



View of the shelter from slightly above



From left, Frog (Fig.5.7); above a hatched animal figure (Fig.5.8); Fish (Fig.5.3); Some spotted figures (Fig.5.9); monkey (Fig.5.10); Tree of Life (Fig.5.11); Animal eating plant (Fig.5.5)



Close-up of above



Close-up of above



Monkey and Horned Deity (Fig.5.10 and 5.1)



View of the Upper Damodar Valley (North Karanpura) threatened by opencast coal-mines



View of the railway line being built through archaeological site below the rock-art site

CHAPTER-9

Rockart Site: RAHAM

District: Chatra

Measurements:

Length- 13' feet x Height 15' feet



The Raham Rock-art Shelter

The rock-art of Satpahar range consists of a horseshoe formation of painted caves going round in a semi-circular arc from Khandar in the east, via Thethangi, Raham, Sidpa, to Gonda in the north. On the top of the range are the Saraiya rock-art, and three beautiful Mesolithic painted caves (Satpahar I, Satpahar II, and Satpahar III). It would seem that the caves on the top of the range were not retouched after they were painted during the Mesolithic age, although the villagers living below the range were no doubt aware of their presence.

I believe that Raham presents the most perfect example of the Chalcolithic painted cave with no evidence of earlier painting. I have described the *chouk* or magico religious square mandala at length in relation to Isco, Thethangi and Khandar Etc. so I will not repeat these observations.



Fig.6.1: *Mandala and Chouks*

Note:- Of course these 'mandalas' and 'chouks' at Raham are similar in many ways to Sumerian motifs But no connection can be found of their being brought by a Sumerian people even though there is a history of 'Contact' with Indus Valley through migrations of the Dravidian Oraon tribe via Satpurus and Narmada and Sone Valleys. Asko Parpola believes that the Oraons were the people of Harappa and that their languages (Brahui) is the only living language in which the Indus Script can be read. The Oraons of Jharkhand and their kin the Malpahariyas of Rajmahal Hills of Santal Parganas in Jharkhand are according to Parpola the last linguistic branch of the Brahui speaking family the Oraons speaking

‘Kurrukh’ and the Mal-Pahariya speaking ‘Malto’ both being the ancient Brahui language which Parpola refers to. No phonetic values have been attempted to be given to the signs.

In the top middle of this rock-art is a simple square with crossed diagonals which is the basic *chouk* still used by the villages during the marriage ceremony We shall notice within the square *mandalas* what seem to be vertical posts, either *Khutas* (ancestor posts), *Sirrapindhas* (Head-posts) and *pathal-gada* (Vertical stone pillars) and reticulated triangles, in boxes. All these are known to the villagers. Wooden *khuta* posts are erected to the memory of the founder ancestor of a clan, and the *pathal-gadas* or the stone megaliths are the tribal tribute to a dead person, still very much a living tradition in South Jharkhand (in particular Khunti-Simdega area) and in South Bastar (in particular Bastar-Jagdalpur-Dantewara area) Hazaribagh has many ancient megalithic sites but these were erected by an unknown people, probably Mundas. To my mind the enigmatic obelisks set within all the *mandalas* are megaliths. Whenever crossed diagonals appear they mark the sacred; and rows of vertical lines are in memories of past ancestors of the tribe. The outer frame is the sacred boundary within which the forms are placed.

Vertical posts set in square or rectangular boxes, sometimes with small, circular or square forms, to me it represent megalithic burial sites in memory of ancestors, or even pre-megalith notifications.

Two enigmatic animal forms, possibly tigers (because of long tail) appear in the central panel to the right of a large *chouk* with reticulated triangles. They are outlined in white.



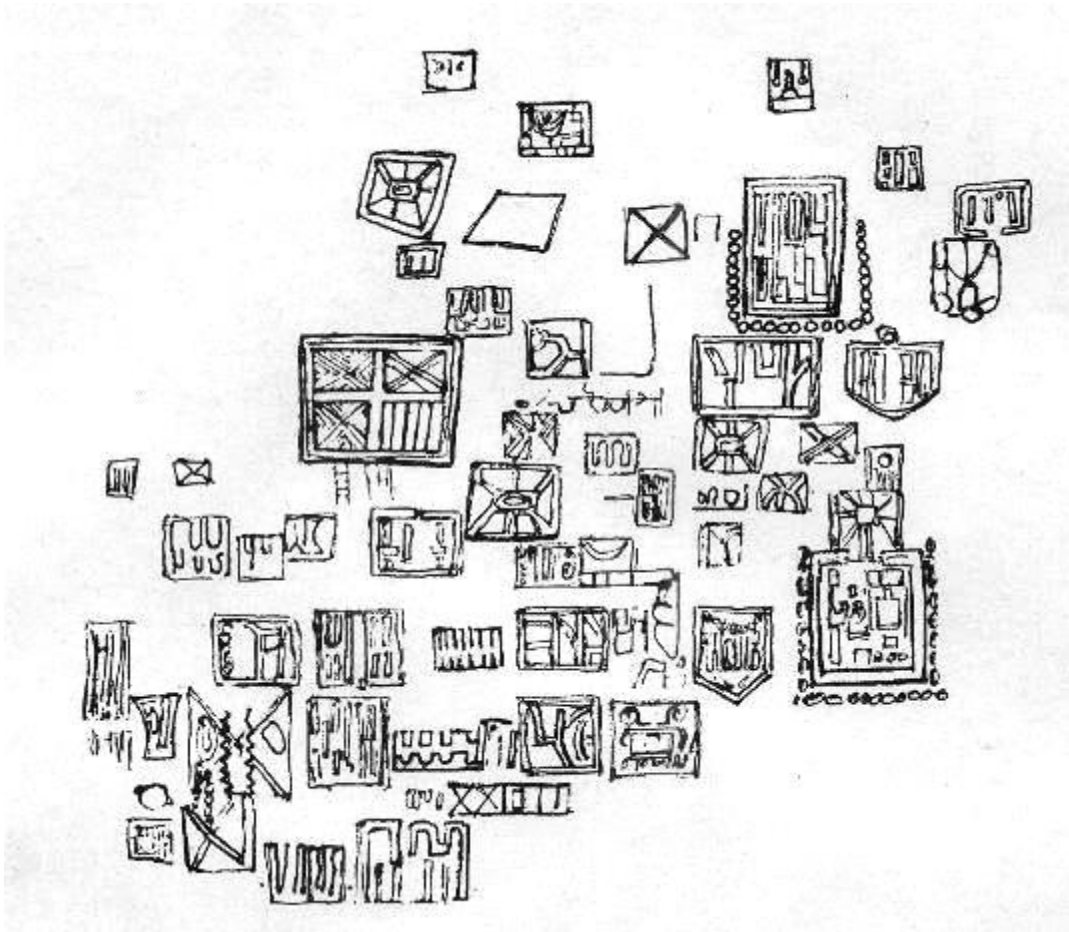
Fig.6.2: *Animal forms*

There is certain urgency in decoding the past. The information left by pre-literate societies is vital, yet never easy to understand, because these messages are left behind in a cryptic shorthand which at first seems impossible to decipher, but which, if we persist long enough, become familiar in their relationship with continuing symbolism in the contemporary

traditions of the tribe which have come to terms with change and retained the old in new forms.

There is a tradition among the Tana Bhagats, an Oraon sect which was sanskritized in the nineteenth century in the wake of the tribal revolts, that members of the Tana Bhagat sect sought refuge in these caves, and that this particular cave of Raham was one of their meeting places. Therefore this cave has an especially revered significance for the Tana Bhagats. The chouk or *mandals* is an icon, filled with deep meaning and significance, and for this reason it is respected even by those who cannot comprehend its full significance.

Raham Rockart Panel



Panel (Length- 13' feet x Height 15' feet)



Raham



The rock-shelter



Mandalas and Chouks in Central Panel (Fig.6.1)



Chouk with reticulated triangles (Fig.6.1), note animals (ig.6.2)



Pair of tigers (Fig.6.2)



Chouks (Fig.6.1)



“Khutas” or ancestor posts (Fig.6.1)



We can see the rectangular boxes containing “Khutas” or ancestor posts encircled sometimes with garland of circle (Fig.6.1)

CHAPTER-10

Rockart Site: SIDPA

District: Chatra

Measurements:

Length 20'feet x Height 15' feet



The Sidpa Rock-art Shelter

The Sidpa rock-art is half a kilometer on the left side of the main road, on the north side of the Satpahar range, at a height of about seventy-five feet, amidst the *saal* forests.

Just before reaching this also on the left hand side, are about sixty stone blocks of quite big size with deep relief carvings. This is believed to be a site of Mauryan period antiquity. It becomes of interest since it depicts a bull striding in the same form and manner as painted in the lower part of the rock-art panel less than half a kilometer away! The ancient stone carver must have drawn his inspiration from the rockart. Other relief carvings portray a man on horse back spearing a deer, a female figure on the tail of a lion, a woman using a pestle and mortar, a panel of fishes, and a votive stupa, and a large stone carved butter churner in the form of a lotus.

Sidpa is west of Gonda rock-art, and a couple of kilometers to the north of Raham rock-art, and the sites are connected by jungle trails.

In continuation of the existing painted Rockart Shelter, two new rockart sites were discovered in Sidpa now named Sidpa-I, and Sidpa II. One was found by Dr.Ansari which contains animal forms and the other was found by Mrs.Philomina Imam containing a deer in spotted outline and ritual markings. Yellow lignite was used for drawings. Animals include deer, bison, blackbuck, wild boar, elephant, tiger, and peacock. The only other peacock in our regions rock art was found by Mrs.Philomina Imam at Raham.

Note to the Painted Symbols

I will move from left to right over the panel. The first two motifs at the top are of great interest. The top most one denotes a shrine, and the lower one a concentric square, as discussed in detail elsewhere in these pages, meaning a pond, or place of emergence. Below it is a boat shaped form with circles probably related to a cattle aripan as still found made on the floor during the harvest festival of Sohrai.

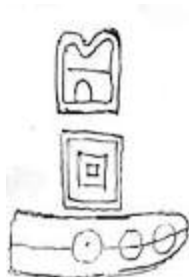


Fig.7.1: *Shrine, pond*

Beneath this is a square with clearly delineated motif of vertical bands interspersed with vertical zig-zag design. This motif is still found today in the Sohrai wall paintings made by the Ghatwal and Kurmi tribals in eastern Hazaribagh. So far the meaning of the zig-zag motif when horizontal indicates mountains, or with a line running below as mountains and river (as in Oraon tattoos, or *Godna*) and in the vertical form it may have similar significance as rock-art is usually for motifs treated as a non-directional plane, and this has been observed as its function at rock-art sites all over the world. See Fig.7.12



Fig.7.2: *Zig-zag chouk*

The next is a square with reticulated triangles being held up by an ithyphallic male figure. I will not go into the meaning of the reticulated triangle in detail as it has been dealt with earlier (Satpahar-I, Thethangi, Etc.) But what is of interest is the ithyphallic male figure holding up the square containing the reticulated triangles. This piece of art would belong to

the Mesolithic level (7000 B.C.). There are other similar motifs of reticulated triangles in the rockart. Similar motifs have been found along with Mesolithic deer forms in Satpahar-I (Chapter 6).



Fig.7.3: *Reticulated Triangles*

I will pass over the few large indistinct *chouks* or square *mandala* forms below it to a very interesting tailed human form in the top part of the painting. This is a monkey-like form with tail. We may remember the monkey is the totem of the Dravidian tribes such as Oraon, Gond, Maler, etc. who I had connected with the painting of the rock-art, and Heras gives it the name Kudaga, or monkey, found in the Indus seals called Kurangas in a later period; and spoken of by Valmiki as Vanaras in the Ramayana (Ibid, 1953, p.117).



Fig.7.4: *Monkey totem*

Heras considered them one of the five Tamil tribes connected with Coorg (*Kudagu*). The form of a monkey is placed in a square banner, and appears identical to an Indus seal motif shown by Heras (Marshall, M.D. No.321; Ibid, Heras, p.117). It is worth noting that the Gond tribes of Bastar, Malers, and Oraons of Jharkhand, are all north Dravidian tribes who consider themselves related with the monkey totem, and the very name Oraon is from *Orang*, which in Malay means “man of the forest”. The Dravidian Marias of Bastar still worship the monkey as the god of the forest (*Bankumar*). The story of the people of the monkey totem is told in CantoVI of the Jaina poem Paumacariya, and they were human beings who had a badge on their banner and arches on their gateways and the like, of the monkey. (Heras, Ibid, p.117) Similar to Dusshera banners bearing the figure of Hanuman, this motif, then might be one of the oldest and rarest of such proof of the epics through rock-art. The same tradition

above mentioned is found in the Kannada epic *Pampa-Ramayana* (Canto X) S.C.Roy has written, “The flesh of the monkey is taboo to all Oraons... Vanara or monkey was once the tribal totem of the Oraons, who were the troop of the hero Rama who called them Vanaras (S.C.Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur*, 1915, p.19; *Ramayana Kiskindhyakanda* XXVI, 6; XV, 2FF). Considering the historical evidence and through the rockart, it will seem that the *Ramayana*, set in the Dandak forests, was after all not a mere legend, but a historical reality.

Under the monkey in a square are several square mandalas, and the reticulate triangles, but as I have dwelt with them elsewhere I shall not expand upon them here. Rather, I will explain what the triple lined zig-zag, referring to mountain with trees, may mean. I have drawn attention elsewhere to the significance of the zig-zag, but this motif I believe extends beyond it. The authors of the Meso-Chalcolithic rock-art as I have held are the Dravidian tribes who had inhabited central-east India even since the earliest post-hunting stage when man was becoming sedentarized into agricultural society. This period would have been as long back as 7000-5000 B.C. These people were the forefathers of the North Dravidian tribes still inhabiting Central India. These people had left behind a wide variety of painted symbols including this motif, carried by them as far away as Mohenjodaro, Kalibangan, and Harappa (Cenetry-H) where they emerge at a much later date in pre-Harappan levels (2500 BC). These influences would at a later date influence Sumerian and Iranian motifs.



Fig.7.5: *River with trees*

The form of the zig-zag as the river with trees appear in Sidpa in a level of rockart dated to 7000-5000 BC, twice as old as Indus. The same form also appears in the tattoo done on the back of the Oraon women, *where a line under the mountain denotes the river*. A similar tattoo is found among the Gond women of Bastar. It appears in Munda wall painting and Kurmi Sohrai. It is found in slightly altered form in the Kurmi tattoo (*godna*) done by the *godnakari* or womenfolk of the Malhar metalcaster tribe in Hazaribagh. It has now become a common *alpana* motif in Bengal done in *Asarh*.

At the bottom of the panel is a clearly drawn bull/cow, a descendant of the small-humped Indian cattle (*Bos nomadicus*). Since there is no depiction of the horse in the rock-art of Hazaribagh and Chatra we may conclude that the Vratyas, who were cattle breeders as well as horse-owners, and who worshipped the deity Pashupati, which is mentioned in the Satpata Brahmana could not have painted the rock-art. The striding posture of the cow as in the ancient Egyptian cults (i.e. Hathor; Saqqara-2000 B.C) is exceptional. That it had been copied by a stone cutter in one of the stone blocks of an ancient Mauryan temple quite closeby is further a matter of importance. The cult of the striding Babylonian bull (Ishtar Gate, 575 B.C.) was still to come. The same form of striding bull is a Chalcolithic tradition still to be found in the votive figures cast in bell-metal by the Malhar metal-casters of Hazaribagh.

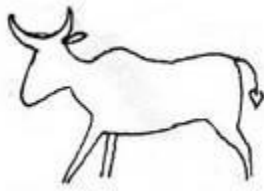


Fig.7.6: *Striding bull*

Above this bull is a row of concentric circles, and above this is a zigzag motif (curving line) and behind the cow are a series of six vertical posts. *These are common auspicious motifs which are still today painted during the harvest festival of Sohrai in the villages.* The zigzag line represents life; the concentric circles the mother goddess, and the posts the *Khuta*, sacred to the ancestors (*Purkha*).

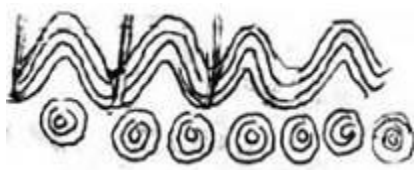


Fig.7.7: *Wavy line and Cupules*

In the central portion of the panel we find several interesting square *mandalas* and squares with reticulate triangles. There is one, next to the monkey, with a ladder in the middle, similar to the one in Isco which I have discussed in detail in the *Palaghata* and *Chouk* motif. At the bottom part of the central portion we find regular mandalas showing the plan of sacred spaces, perhaps shrines and their compounds, including two in the vertical rows of circles identical to the *aripans* still made at Sohrai to welcome the cattle. These may be plans of houses. A concentric rectangle adjacent to it is a pond. The boxes containing vertical posts are significant since these represent ancestor poles, or possibly megaliths, and show the people who made these drawings were conversant with the idea.

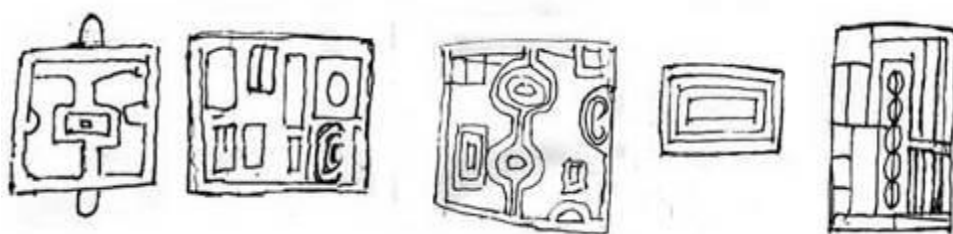


Fig.7.8: *Chouk*

Below these figures is some white chalk graffiti done in the form of stick figures, men carrying a dead animal, etc. which is remarkably palaeolithic in execution, and reminds us that the people residing in the shadows of these hills today are not far removed from their ancient ancestors who painted the rockart.

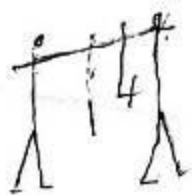


Fig.7.9: *Stick figures*

In the right-hand side of the panel we find a primitively drawn elephant with trunk outstretched as if trying to catch scent. This belongs to the Mesolithic level. It is a reminder that Sidpa is in the middle of the ancient elephant migratory corridor coming from Palamau via Latehar along the Damodar river and crossing the Garhi River a few kilometers to the east and entering the Mahudi-pahar (Mahadeva Range) forests of Hazaribagh. It is sad to note that despite the Indian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) being declared the state animal of Jharkhand a couple of years ago, a dam is being built on the Garhi river at this place which

may even submerge this rockart site, and huge opencast coal mines hundreds of feet deep have completely destroyed these wild elephant corridors along the Damodar river, and the Magadh and Amrapalli mines are going to come just opposite the Sidpa rockart, when these magnificent forests with their wildlife, and their beautiful agricultural landscape and villages will completely disappear.



Fig.7.10: *Elephant*

Next we come to a beautifully painted Muntjac head (*Muntiacus muntjak*) also known as the Barking Deer, and commonly found in these parts. The life-like nature of the drawing by the ancient artists points to a work of the hunters, that is to the Mesolithic period. That this rockart belongs to widely distant periods is indicated by the presence of Chalcolithic period additions.



Fig.7.11: *Deer Head*

Next to the deer is an interesting painting of a shrine with what seems to be snakes on either side, along with some more mandala motifs below the drawing of the elephant. This would be from the Chalcolithic period. See Fig.9.2



Fig.7.12: *Zig-zag chouk*

Directly above the elephant is a form we have met with in slightly different shape in the rockart of Isco, and which has been more fully described in my detailed note on “*Mandala, Ittalan, Palaghata*”. The significance of the human figure in a frame in such an early example as Mesolithic rockart would lead me to consider it as a proto-historic human form deified, most probably the mother goddess. The two T-shape marks on either side are similar to the harrow or comb plough of Indus, found in the Indus seals, later found as a continuing tradition among the sacred marriage paintings of the Warlis of western Maharashtra, which have also been influenced by the rockart of Central India. This is perhaps the oldest example of the harrow on record.

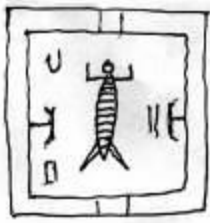


Fig.7.13: *Figure in square (box)*

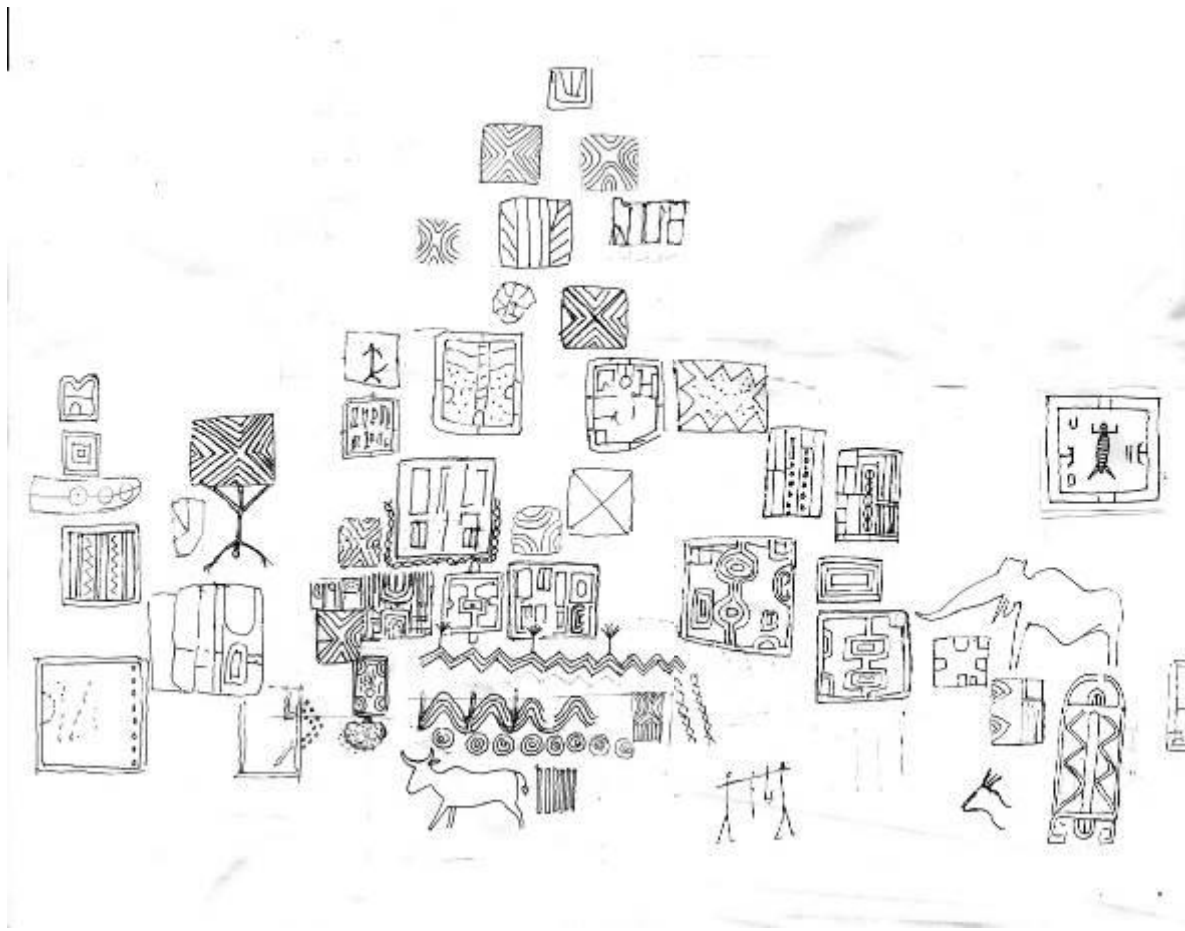
This motif is at the top of the rockart.



Fig.7.14: *Inverted triangle*

As we conclude this short look at the motifs painted by the early artists at Sidpa, let us return right to the very top and take note of a small but very interesting motif which seems to be the Yoni, set in a square. From its point above the rockart surveys the surrounding countryside which must very soon become prey to the greed and avarice of man, when this rockart and everything associated with it shall soon be destroyed for opencast coal mines, big dams, and super thermal power stations. What will be lost is something which has been made redundant in modern industrialized Indian society, for which no one even cares to weep- the great cultural heritage of the people, of which we have become ashamed in the face of the western industrial model with its materialism, greed, and avarices.

Sidpa Rockart Panel



Panel (Length 20'feet x Height 15' feet)



Sidpa



Sidpa Rock-shelter



Reticulated triangles (Fig.7.3) and Chouk (Fig.7.8)



Shrine, pond (Fig.7.1) with zig-zag chouk (Fig.7.2), and chouk with reticulated triangles as above (Fig.7.3)



Striding bull (Fig.7.6), curving lines or zig-zag with cupules (Fig.7.7). Note at top right the zig-zag representing river with tee motif (Fig.7.5) see detail below



River with trees (Fig.7.5)



Chouk and mandala (Fig.7.8) and to the right of centre is the figure of a tusked elephant with its trunk outstretched (Fig.7.10). Note at top right the human form in a square



Close-up of the elephant (Fig.7.10)



Figure in square box (Fig.7.13)



Reticulated triangles (Fig.7.3)

CHAPTER- 11

Rockart Site: GONDA

District: Chatra

Measurements:

Length 20' feet x Height 15' feet



The Gonda Rock-art Shelter

The Gonda rockart is to the east of Sidpa, in the foothills of the Satpahar range in Chatra district (North Karanpura Valley). It is notable for its striking animal forms, especially deer, boar, stag, pair of tigers, and elephant. The painting of a backward glancing deer at the bottom (middle) is particularly of note. It is a form found in a copper tablet from Mohenjo-daro (D.K Area, G. Section). This is not an accident, and points to the prototype of the Indus forms in the rockart of central India. Also, this form appears in the Ganju Sohrai village paintings still made near the rockart sites in Hazaribagh.

Elfen-muller or Elfin-mills (small round hallows) have been found in the stone floor of the shelter.

I will make a brief examination of the forms, as I have been doing throughout this book, for the reader.

The top left finds two forms, a partially erased deer (head missing) and a wonderful outline of a wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) in a highly animated posture, as if alert to something. This expressiveness of animal forms is highly typical of rockart in the hands of hunters of the Mesolithic, and a tradition still carried on by the tribal village women painters of the region.



Fig.8.1: *Deer and wild boar*

The next figure is of a running stag; one can feel the motion, as well as the static quality, as if it is springing forward. Note also the triangular flag tail, typical of the Mesolithic artists.

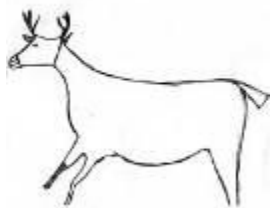


Fig.8.2: *Deer (stag)*

In front of the stag's legs are the forms of two running tigers, painted with an observation and felicity known only to the very greatest animal painters, and one which would win admiration from all knowledgeable animal artists. From a naturalist or hunter's perspective the forms are not only very realistically painted, but accurate in that the tiger (top) is leading, and the tigress (bottom), is following, which is the case when these animals are in flight. The heads are also slightly raised, which is an accurate description of the movement. Both forms are the product of great experience and observation, and great excellence of execution.



Fig.8.3: *Pair of running tigers*

Beneath the pair of tigers is a painting of an elephant with outstretched trunks. This again is typical of the wild elephant of Jharkhand, even to the detail of the slightly upraised ridge on the back. A most important aspect is the marked prominence of the ridge, which is probably a sacred significance. Also, the pair of vertical bands ahead and behind, covering the body from top to bottom, is a sacred marking still used in the painting of votive elephant forms during the Sohrai festival in the Hazaribagh villages.



Fig.8.4: *Elephant*

The “backward glancing” deer figure to the right of the elephant, as I have pointed out, is the prototype for the number of such typical forms in the painted pottery of the Indus Valley, as well as copper tablets (i.e. Mohenjo-daro, D. K Area, G. Section). This is a rare posture taken by a startled deer.



Fig.8.5: *Backward-glancing deer*

Below the elephant and the deer is the figure of a running wild boar, so realistically drawn as if to seem to be alive! Using a minimum of flowing lines how well the Mesolithic artist has caught the form and spirit of the fleeing animal!



Fig.8.6: *Running boar*

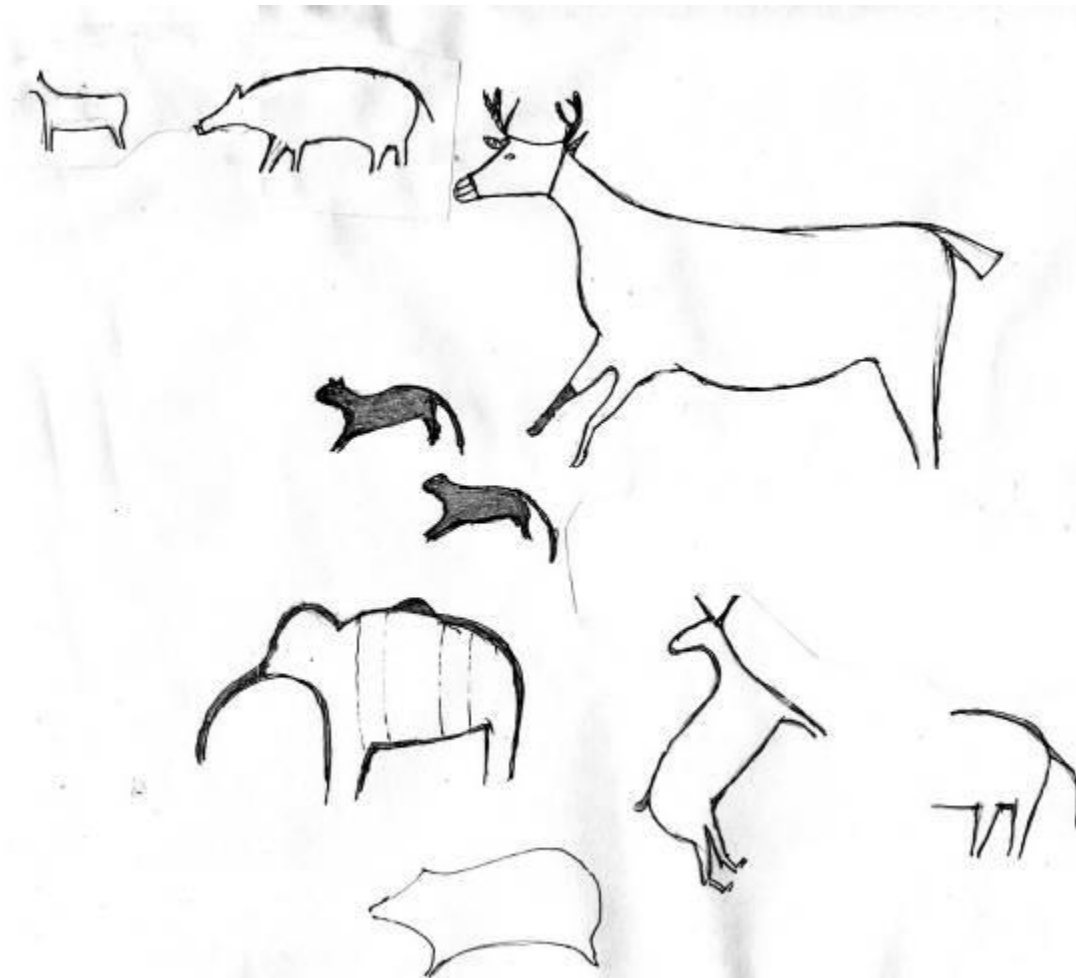
At the extreme right (bottom) is the partially erased drawing of another wild boar, the front part of which is missing.



Fig.8.7: *Boar*

This then, briefly sums up the rockart of Gonda. It is a matter of deep regret that the building of a new dam on the nearby Garhi river will destroy this precious rockart site. We have to remember that such sites of Palaeolithic importance, which show the evolution of man through the Mesolithic and Chalcolithic ages, cannot be divorced from their natural setting, and it is important to note that this is a violation of all international Conventions (i.e. Vienna Convention, 1965) on the preservation of heritage, especially objects to be treated as world heritage, which such rockart is. The area surrounding the rockart is going to be developed as large opencast coal mines (Magadh, Amrapalli,etc) and a Super Thermal Power Station (Tandwa) is planned to be built immediately adjacent to this rockart. The destruction of the ambience of this site and even the site itself is a travesty of cultural heritage protection, and as we have seen, many of the rockart and other cultural and archaeological heritage sites in the north Karanpura Valley are currently faced with such destruction.

Gonda Rockart Panel



Panel (Length 20" feet x Height 15" feet)



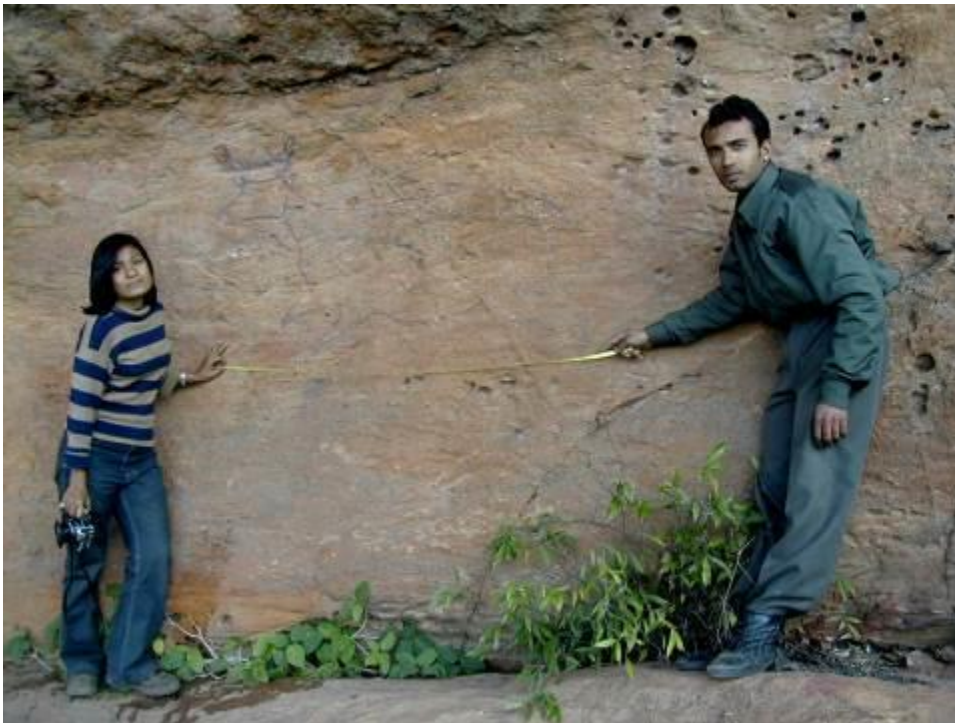
The range in the bottom part of which the Gonda rock shelter is located showing part of the submergence area of the Garhi dam to be built



The rock-art site



View from the painted rock-shelter of the area to be submerged by the forthcoming dam



Measuring the deer (stag) painted in outline on the rock surface (Neelima and Jason)



Close-up of the deer (stag) (Fig.8.2)



Deer and boar (Fig.8.1). The boar is at the right of centre of the photograph



Elephant (Fig.8.4)



Pair of running tigers (Fig.8.3)



Backward-glancing deer (Fig.8.5)



Elfin-muller in floor of shelter

CHAPTER-12

Rockart Site: NAUTANGWA PAHAR

District: Hazaribagh

Measurements:

Panel No.1: Length- 15'feet x Height-20' feet

Panel No.2: Length- 15'feet x Height-20' feet



Nautangwa Rock-art Shelter

One approaches the high Salgah range from the Barkagaon-Tandwa road going down the North Karanpura valley from east to west. The *Kuccha* road to the rock-art site branches off about a kilometer before the Keridari village and goes over a very large tract of iron-stone rubble and enters a network of high hills. About two kilometers from the road as we are moving in the southerly direction to our left hand side and at the towering point of a hill range of the Mahudi series we see a rock shelter with a pointed overhang facing south-west. This will some day found to contain rock- paintings. However, we have to go further and deeper into these hilly ranges east of the large lake and Salgah village, now lying to our west, in order to find the road between the hills which will take us to the Nautangwa Pahar (*Pahar* means "hill") where the rock-art of our attention lies. There is a sizable stream a tributary of the Garhi river, coming down from the network of hills of the Mahudi range and on the bank of it we find a deep cave called "Chunakhan" from where the village women take the white earth with which they *poto* (plaster) their houses. This white earth is from limestone deposits from a time when this valley was a lake and the white substance is a crustaceous limestone and kaolin deposit. This region has seen the early evolution of human society from the earliest ice ages and evidence from stone tools has shown occupation of the valley at least from the early Pleistocene (750,000 + B.P) As I have pointed out a pebbled shoreline covers the edge of the entire basin formed by these forested hills. It is one of those perfect sites of human evolution uptil now preserved, such as are found in few places in the world.

As we move along the stream a new and hidden world reveals itself to us, a mysterious forest world where only wild things live. Even the villagers come here only to collect wood. Till recently these hilly forested ranges have heard the roar of the tiger and the trumpet of the elephant. Now with the opencast coal mines being developed around them, and mining of new ores planned, the old wildlife corridors have been turned into huge three-hundred feet

deep opencast coal mines. There is an old legend of the mundas that once long long ago Singbonga the tribal sun-god became very angry with the Asurs who were cutting down all the trees and making them into coal and burning it for smelting iron and polluting the grass and the trees and the sky; and so Singbonga devised a plan to destroy the Asurs. This story has a parable for us today. The discovery of Nautangwa Pahar rock-art was from information by a Lohra ironsmith, a cousin of the Asur, whose workshop is on the main road.

Now as we leave the riverbed and move up the steep sides of the hill over stones and boulders, the way ahead becomes dense and tangled with forest while behind us, to the north and west a wide expanse of virgin forests spreads like a green carpet with the white hole of the *Chunakhan* in the middle in the distance. We have come a long way and climbed to a height of several hundred feet! Suddenly the guide points, and to our excited gaze the rock shelter on the Nautangwa Pahar comes into view, across a narrow gully. A huge, flat, pointed stone placed on its roof points to the south-west. Did these rock painters come from that direction, or did they go in that direction. To the south-west is Chhattisgarh, where similar rock paintings, made by a similar people, is found a few hundred kilometers away.... The story of Tribal India is story of the Paleolithic habitation and continuous migration by early foraging groups until sedenterization was established. These people did not vanish, and their descendants are the tribes who still live and hunt and practice agriculture in these same hills and valleys. Their ancestors left behind them in the floors of these cave shelters where they stayed evidence of their occupation by way of the stone tools. Every painted shelter, including Nautangwa, has yielded these stone tools from the oldest chipped flake tools, strippers, burins, and microliths, to polished celts and blades, ring-stones, geometrical and surgical microliths of 5000 B.C provenance, which brings them within the emergent time rame of the beginning of “civilized” sedentarized societies in the Sindh and Baluchistan who would be the precursors of the pre-Harrapan, and the real authors of the so-called Indus civilization.

The Nautangwa Pahar rockart was discovered by Neelima and Jason on 20th November 2001. The site is located on the Mahadeva or Mohudi Range of the upper Damodar valley in Hazaribagh. In my opinion this cave shelter offers the finest animal forms (I believe from the palaeolithic period) as yet found in the prehistoric rockart of the Hazaribagh region. It is painted in red haematite colour on grey sandstone rock across a long gallery high on a

mountainside with scenic view of the surrounding hilly countryside. The animal figures are very large and some measure several feet across. It is believed that these animal forms belong to a palaeolithic level of art, while the second level infilled with white depicting stick-figures and *mandalas* are believed to be of a more recent date.

Starting from the left top end of the panel I shall make my passing comments moving towards the right. We find the Third butterfly as yet noted in Indian rockart. The first one was pointed out to me by my learned friend Erwin Neumayer of Vienna the great expert on Indian rockart, in October 1993 in the Khandahar rock shelter, which butterfly was painted in red haematite on a pale sandstone wall in the south face of the Satpahar Range, some fifty kilometers to the west of Nautangwa Pahar. The deer with bands resembling folded wings to the right is typical of a similar deer found in the rockart of Satpahar Range (Satpahar-I). The deer to the immediate right of it is also of the same stylistic genre. Judging from the stylistic dating done by Erwin Neumayer, on the basis of “bandaged” legs in the animals of Satpahar-I (The art was dated to some period when ice or snow may have been found in this region. The animal’s hooves are not being visible due to being in the snow) painted by artists who had encountered ice or snow, sometime during the closing centuries of the Pleistocene and the opening centuries of the Holocene. This could be variously anywhere between 11,000 and 9,000 BP, but could be much older or more recent, while still belonging to the Upper Palaeolithic school of art. The beautifully drawn outline of a female Sambar deer (*Cervus unicolor*), which is actually an elk, is followed by a beautifully drawn Indian Bison (*Bos gaurus*), which is stylistically very similar to a bison found painted in Satpahar-II. Before proceeding I will like to make some immediate observations in the present area of the panel. Just above the back of the second deer mentioned is a black horn-shaped crescent held by a stick figure painted in white. A female figure holding a horn comes to us from the palaeolithic with the 22,000-year-old Venus of Laussel (illustration), discovered in a cave in southern France, which is representative of the mother goddess figure in the palaeolithic, being big-breasted and steatopygous, both associated with maturity and fertility. Next to the black horn/crescent form, and shifting slightly to its right is a white crescent, also associated with an attendant stick-figure. The stick-figures which we encounter in this rockart seem to have been filled with white at a much later date perhaps, because a similar white addition seems to have been added at a much later date, especially in the square and rectangular *Mandala* details. The three figures in the stomach of the bison, the left hand side one having

a child on its back, are similarly filled in with white. As the reader will see in the illustration itself, all these mandalas have in them a crescent form associated with the mother goddess in earliest times, a level of prehistory commensurate with Ur of the Chaldees, four to five thousand years old . That the mother goddess was worshipped in the form of the crescent moon or virgin (Kanya) in Hazaribagh at this early date is supported by these mandalas worshipping the crescent. Also, in the Isco rockart about forty kilometers to the east up the valley , in the central panel we find a crescent atop a pyramid, which symbol is found in the Indus seals, and read by Fr.Henry Heras,SJ, as “Queen” (Heras, 1953). The moon goddess Sin was worshipped at the ziggurat of Ur at the height of that nation’s glory, over four thousand years back and archaeologists excavating this site found a crescent with star in the middle on the the altar on the top of the ziggurat dedicated to the moon goddess Sin or Nana. In fact in the Stele of Ur-Nammu from the Chaldees the mother goddess is depicted at the top of the stele as a crescent moon with a star in the middle. We find it in exactly the same form and placement in the stone memorial megaliths of the Maria tribals of Bastar ! (megalith, Kasanpal, Bastar) In the ritual art of Bastar the crescent moon is shown with a star in the middle, and this is a very old tribal custom which we also find in the Chaldees. Bastar is the southern most region of the Central Indian state of Chhatisgarh, which has been recently formed. The Marias are a Gond tribe similar to the Oraon and belong to the North Dravidian branch. The round-topped stele is surmounted with the crescent moon and star. Below it, as in the stele of Ur–Nammu, are events from the deceased’s life. In the Bastar stele the star is replaced by a lotus.

It is perhaps therefore no coincidence that Sindur was the original name of the habitation of the goddess, and that the name Indus itself comes from this root, and indeed India was known in western China as Sin-tu, the land of the moon; it is of deep interest therefore, that less than forty kilometers to the north of the valley we find the village of Sindur in Hazaribagh. It has been speculated that the purposes of the pyramid had originally been to support a crescent. This is the prehistoric significance of the moon in Chaldea. The tribal goddess of the jungle is Chandi-bonga, the goddess of the moon. (*Chandi*: moon, *bonga*: deity). The repetition in all the mandalas of one, or a pair of crescents shows that they were the principal objects of veneration to that vanished civilization.

It is quite reasonable to therefore assume, and there is no evidence so far to the contrary, that these square or rectangular mandalas in the rockart of Nautangwa Pahar, did not in any way relate to “temples”. But, that that they did relate to some sort of a megalithic period shrine is clear, because such megalithic shrines having been converted to brahminical temples has been evidenced in Hazaribagh and several such shrines have been found (i.e., Bagodar, Rola, Etc). For purposes of clarity and objectivity I am now dividing the rockart panel in front of us into three sections from here on. Within the first section which we have been looking at, and about halfway down, below the second deer, we find a mother goddess figure in the typical attitude of pregnancy. Such mother goddess figures have been found in the rockart of Isco, and are still commonly being painted in the local village paintings. These village paintings are house decorations during the marriage season of Khovar, when the houses are decorated with comb-cut images to welcome the bridegroom to the bride’s house. During the harvest festival of Sohrai, a similar art painted with coloured ochres is practiced in the villages of Hazaribagh. Both of these artforms are today internationally recognized.

I will carefully look at the four mandalas in the second part of the panel. In the top row we find three mandalas, one after another, all having conspicuous features. In the first two crescents appear the mandalas have doorways at either end top and bottom, indicating a shrine. Moreover, the second one has two vertical lines on either side of the doorway at the bottom and gives us perhaps the first frontal elevation of a building in Indian rockart. Under the crescent moons are rows of cupules, another mark of the mother goddess, regularly found in the megalith sites of Hazaribagh, and perhaps pointing to an association. Perhaps this could be cited as a connection although cupules are vastly older in their original form in Indian rockart, perhaps tens of thousands of years old as found in the Bhimbetka and Chambal region. In the third mandala we find a pair of crescents, one above, and the other below, the row of cupules. In this level of of the rockart we find three very interesting forms.

- (a) a large animal, presumably a deer, with the rectangle containing crossed diagonals, which is one of the earliest rockart symbols, also found in the prehistoric rockart of Australia, where it is called a dilly-bag (carrying bag).
- (b) the second interesting figure is a goddess with raised arms at the top.
- (c) The third interesting figure are two plant forms with stylized branches or fronds, which we find as the Tree of Life in Indus.

All the above three designs are common in the contemporary village art throughout the valley. Now, as we progress down this middle portion of the rockart we are looking at we find a frog, which is also found in this form in several Hazaribagh rockart sites, notably in the Thethangi shelter. There is reason to believe the frog was one of the revered animals since huge stone frog-like animals have been found shaped into dolmens in Hazaribagh. Just to the right of it is a charming little domestic scene of a mother chasing her child ! Here is a large drawing of a deer again, this time with a large circular *chakra* painted on its belly, obviously a later addition, resembling a five-armed cell form also found in the bottom right-hand central panel of the Isco rockart. The design painted on the deer's stomach is not a primitive X-ray form. It is of interest here to note that the X-ray forms found painted in the animals' stomachs in the rockart of the North Karanpura Valley are commonly painted in this way in the house painting of the villages of the region even today. Many experts have studied the matter and agreed to this. This means the societies living in the valley must be the descendants of its original palaeolithic inhabitants !

This evidence of two time-zones or cultural levels manifest in the rockart readily makes us believe that the earlier art and the later art represent two different periods of evolution. Immediately to the right of this deer with the "cell" in its stomach is a Spotted Deer (*Axis axis*). This very realistically drawn animal is reminiscent of a deer drawn in a remarkably similar manner from the Satpahar-III rockart forty kilometers to the west of Nautangwa Pahar. Here also there is a human stick-figure outlined in red haematite and in-filled with white, which seems a later addition. Immediately below it is another mother goddess form which shows the figure is clearly pregnant. Such pregnant goddess figurines are typical of the palaeolithic age. Such figures have been found elsewhere in the rockart of Hazaribagh, and also in the village paintings. This form appears much later in the chalcolithic bronze hand-axe. (i.e. anthropomorphic copper figure of Shahabad, U.P. belonging to the 17th-18th Cent. B.C. presently in the National Museum, New Delhi, and the INTACH logo).

It is of interest to note that animals naturalistically drawn have been found in association with small stick-figures also in Satpahar-II rockart. These as I have noted, could be later additions. Stick-figures are not new to the art of very primitive cultures and are common in the rockart of the Bushman in the Drakensberg in South Africa, as well as in Aboriginal rockart of Arnhem Land in Australia where they are adduced to sorcery and sympathetic magic. Here

at the bottom of this panel we again encounter such human stick-figures. They appear to be aiming their bows and arrows at a wild boar or sow which is drawn with great realism. The stick figures have been in-filled with white at a later date.

In the third part of the panel we find a stag with antlers *drawn with a hump*. This is a very interesting observation and the hump, painted in white, may have been added by the artists who painted the white in the stick figures. Here we are seeing an addition on a Mesolithic wild animal like a stag, a sure sign that it was a later manifestation. The stag was originally associated with the mother goddess during palaeolithic times and it has survived in Celtic tradition and Aboriginal traditions in Guatemala, etc. In India too the stag is connected with the goddess by the Eynars of the South. The over painting of a pronounced hump, infilled with white, on a wild stag is a most remarkable sign. Below this is a rather crudely drawn animal, possibly a deer, because the stone ground is very uneven it could not have been helped perhaps, and it is to be viewed in this light. Under the jaw of this large animal is a rectangle filled in with white spots. We know that spotting represents the mother goddess. Spots, either white, red, or black, indicate fruits. Immediately below it is another similar square box filled with white spots. Such spotting is done on the cattle of the household during the Sohrai festival. This portion of the rockart has some very interesting mandalas for us to examine. Take for example the one behind the legs of the big oddly shaped animal we have been looking at. It contains the so called "cell", as well as the Basera motif which I have called the Symbol of the House elsewhere. This crescental sweeping series of lines is the natural outcome of finger-painting on a mudwashed house. It is a common house pattern throughout Hazaribagh. It has also been found in the rockart of Satpahar-I.

To the bottom right hand side we find another shrine-formed Mandala, and a series of rectangles one inside the other which represents the village pond. It is a common motif in the village art of embroidering the Ledra or stitched quilt. The design is also found in the Khovar painting. It is a mapping symbol. This idea of an aerial view, either in this motif of the pond, or in the plan view of the shrine Mandala, represent the primitive adult or child-like view of landscape seen from above. It has been carried on in a resolute idiom in modern Aboriginal art in Australia by great masters such as Rover Thomas.

Detailed exposition on the motifs of Nautangwa rock-art

It is clear that the artists who painted this shelter belonged to the same group which painted the other rock-art sites, including Isco, but that the *mandalas* are stylistically independent of the motifs of Isco. Several motifs, however, are common. The main motif show the hand of two time frames, one during the Mesolithic hunting stage (7000 B.C) and the other during the more recent Chalcolithic (4000 B.C) Because their rock paintings unravel our country's oldest level of cultured social order it is necessary for us to carefully study those motifs to put in place a plausible story for the coming of "civilization" in so far castigated "backward" Tribal India. It is my sincere belief that Tribal India laid the foundations of our country's very first civilization several thousands of years before the Vedic period. The rock-art is a glimpse through an eye-glass into that beautiful and almost lost world, which breathes still among the last tribal strongholds such as parts of Jharkhand and Bastar, which are truly one region, one spirit, one people, and point the way to the future of India's true development...

Nautangwa is in the Hazaribagh district and to the west of it in the Satpahar range the rock-art sites fall into the Chatra district. But I predict that at least a dozen more important rock-art sites will be found in the Hazaribagh district of today within the Mahudi and Sati ranges. As we move along the commentary I am about to give the reader must remember two different overlapping time zones are spread before us, and I will try to separate one from the other as I go along.

Note to the Painted Symbols

Nautangwa I

In the top left hand corner are some interesting motifs these motifs have been made over a considerable lapse of time. At the top are two deer, and a small one, belonging to the earlier period (Mesolithic), and the second butterfly in Hazaribagh's rock-art (the other having been found in Khandar in Satpahar, slightly further to the west). Next to the butterfly is a stick figure. This art will seem to belong to the period of similar stick figure in rock-art a few hundred kilometers to the south west in Surguja and Raigarh districts of Orissa and

Chhattisgarh. Stick figures have been placed in the upper Palaeolithic in Bhimbetka (Wakankar and Brooks, Stone age painting, 1976, p.52). the stick figures are holding quarter moons (see note ahead). The stick figures and the deer are of different date, the deer possibly being older.

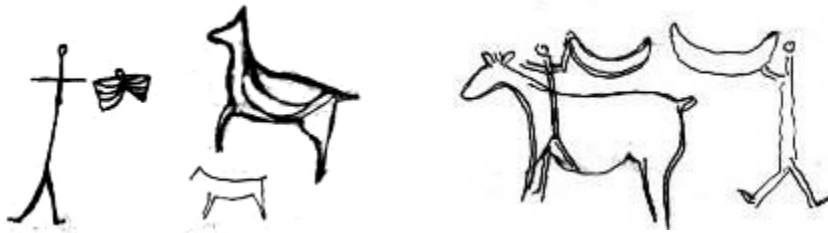


Fig.9.1: *Deer and butterfly*

Along with the stick figures we find repetitions of the quarter moon, the tribal expression of the virgin goddess (Kanya). This is an important Dravidian motif, the crescent-shaped pendant Kokkethathi of the Kodavas of Coorq in South India. The quarter moon is the day of the major spring festivals in Tribal India (Basant Panchami, etc.). This motif appears in Nautangwa in a series of “mandalas” in the form of shrines to the deity similar to the Saora *ittalan* or *Dhankul* of the Muria. In between these mandalas is the figure with upraised arms similar to the one found in panel-2 of Isco and which appears to the bottom right of centre in this panel, resembling a pregnant female, representing the mother goddess. The square enclosures in my opinion represent the protozoic form of the shrine which eventually became the Temple.



Fig.9.2: *The Horned Moon (Kanya) or Quarter Moon with Mandalas in the form of proto-shrines and Great Mother*

I will like to say a few words about thee “crescent moon” *mandalas*. First of all, they are, I believe, Chalcolithic manifestations. Apart from that, they are diagrammatic illustrations of the earliest shrines, seen in plan. With regard to the “house” in which the moon deity is presented, these are the early pre-historic *Chouks* which later figure in sacred marriage painting (i.e. *Chouks* made to the fertility goddess Palaghata by the Warli’s of Thane district of Maharashtra). A similar *chouk* is found in the upper part of panel-2 of Isco. What is significant is the *sticks* in the corners, which in Warli panting have been described as combed-shaped harrows used for tilling the soil in the loamy soil of the Indus Valley, since the plough was not invented uptil then. Perhaps it was the harrow that gave the sacred significance to the comb.



Fig.9.3: *Stick figures with quarter moon*

We then have two stick figures holding a boar’s tush which represents the crescent moon. As I have pointed out in the text earlier a female figure holding the moon (Boar’s Tush) which is similar to the Paleolithic representation in stone relief in the Venus of Laussel (22,000 B.P.) discovered in a cave in the South of France holding in her left hand a similar boar’s tush (or horn). The boar’s tush is a symbol of the Crescent Moon, which is the symbol of the Virgin goddess. It is similar to a small stone statue of antiquity found in Hazaribagh, which is in my museum (22,000 B.P, Dr. K. Thapar, 1995), which is also similar to the *Venus of Willendorf* carved in limestone (Austria, 30,000, B.P).

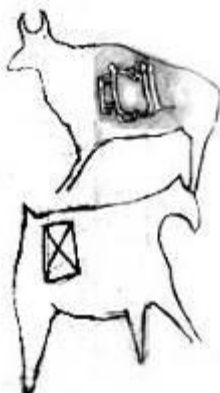


Fig.9.4: *Bison*

Proceeding to the right-hand side we come to a large figure of an Indian Bison or gaur, in the belly of which stick figure have been made perhaps at a later date, probably commemorating an event. These have been in-filled with white at a later date. Immediately below it is the figure of a large animal, perhaps a deer. On this large animal figure is a *chouk* comprising an upright rectangle with crossed diagonals, inferring a sacred significance. Such *chouks* have been found in the company of Mesolithic animal paintings in the Central Indian regions.

In the top middle is a human figure with two quarter moon mandalas below it. The figure may belong to a much earlier period. Immediately below this is a large deer, stylistically the same as the deer like animals painted in the first panel of Isco, which has in its stomach a probably later painted motif of a cell with concentric circles. The concentric circle for the Birhor hunter-gatherers is a symbol of human continuity. The cell form is familiar to the Khovar women painters of Hazaribagh who understood this as an esoteric symbol without prescribing to it any meaning. In the Nautangwa rock-art we are looking at this concentric cell figure appear again in a rectangular mandala to the right, some feet away from it. The mandalas or square *chouks* painted in white have quite clearly been over painted in the red haematite markings depicting among things the tree of life.

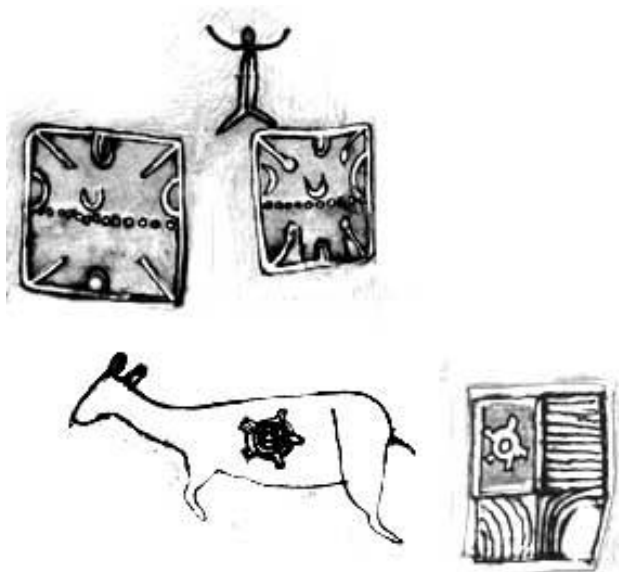


Fig.9.5: *Description of a panel*

Here as in Thethangi the frog appears, and is of the same provenance as the Mesolithic deer I have described. In Dagon rock-art in Mali in West Africa the frog appears in connection with emergent life-forms from water in the rock-art in the same forms.



Fig.9.6: *Frog*

Under the neck of the deer in the middle are forms implicit with life of a mother chasing a child. I am particularly fond of this fragrant and joyous secular image experienced by the unknown tribal artist of prehistory which is so ancient and yet co contemporary in subject and handling. Immediately beneath these two figures are a row of rectangles representing the rabbit snare *Phansa* or bird snare *Khuji*.



Fig.9.7: *Woman chasing child*

Above the deer are some plant motifs, and below a stick figure shooting a deer in the neck with an arrow. The figure seems to be wearing a flamboyant headdress and using a short bow similar to the ones used even today by forest dwelling tribals of the area.

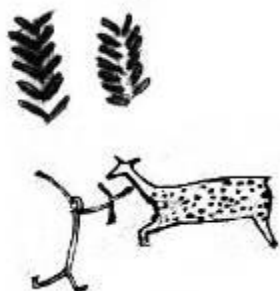


Fig.9.8: *Spotted deer and hunter*

Right at the bottom are two figures hunting a wild boar. No scale has been used, and the boar seems enormous in relation to the hunters. To the right hind leg of the boar, we may find an over-painted mandala. The two figures have been filled in with white at a later date. We may note while the pre-historic artist was good at drawing naturalistic representation of wild animals he was not able to draw naturalistic human figures, picturized as “stick figures”. This is a feature prevalent in other pre-historic rockart of the world.

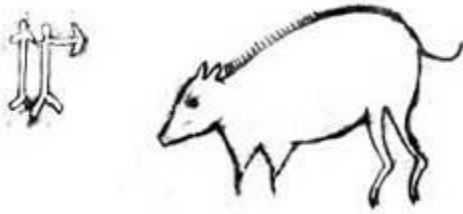


Fig.9.9: *Boar and hunters*

Now we come to the third quarter of the panel. Here is a fine example of a stag which has been turned by a later artist into a humped bull (*Bos primagenus*) by adding white colour in the hump. Under it is a widely drawn deer. Below this deer are some interesting sacred symbols. One is the spotted rectangle. As we know, spotting is the mark of the mother goddess in Tribal India. It is similar to both the cupule and the concentric circle. An individual spot is called a *bindu* associated with Shiva; and multiple spots are called *Mata*, or mother. Again we find the concentric square which we have dealt with earlier and seen in an esoteric motif representing the place of emergence or a water-pond, we also find the Basera or “arch” still used in village wall painting.

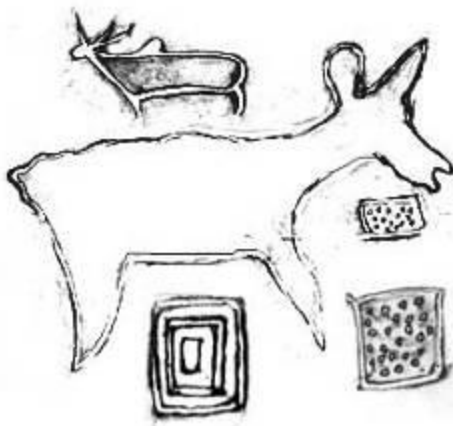


Fig.9.10: *Large animal and humped stag*

We are happy to bring before the reader the first attempt to study and interpret our indigenous rock-art on the basis of meanings of symbols found in the contemporary village painting and meanings understood in related primitive Tribal and Aboriginal societies. We must bear in mind that making diagrams or drawings on the walls of houses in honour of the dead or honouring the mother goddess in marriage paintings is an ancient as well as contemporary Indian tribal tradition. The Saoras make drawings on the walls of their houses to honour their dead, or avert disease; and the Warli's make drawings on the occasion of marriage honouring the mother goddess palaghata The Hazaribagh Adivasis, both schedule castes and tribal;s make similar drawings to celebrate the harvest or marriage, and as symbols on the house walls to drive away evil spirits, a custom absorbed into temple architecture, i.e the *rakshasa* erotic images in the Khajuraho temples of the Chandela tribes Such motifs are still used to protect the village houses.

Nautangwa Pahar II (Salga)

Adjacent to panel-1 (from the right side) there is a smaller, exposed surface of the sandstone having some paintings, prominent motifs being as follows:



Fig.9.11: *Hand stamp*

Palm of hand (drawing in haematite) with cross-hatching hand stamps and silhouettes are a well known feature of ancient rock paintings. They are also a common feature of the village wall paintings in which hand stamps with rice flour or vermillion are made. Here the cross-hatching motif is an ancient example of cross-hatching, later used commonly for in-filling animal and bird form in the Indus Valley, and as a decorative motif.

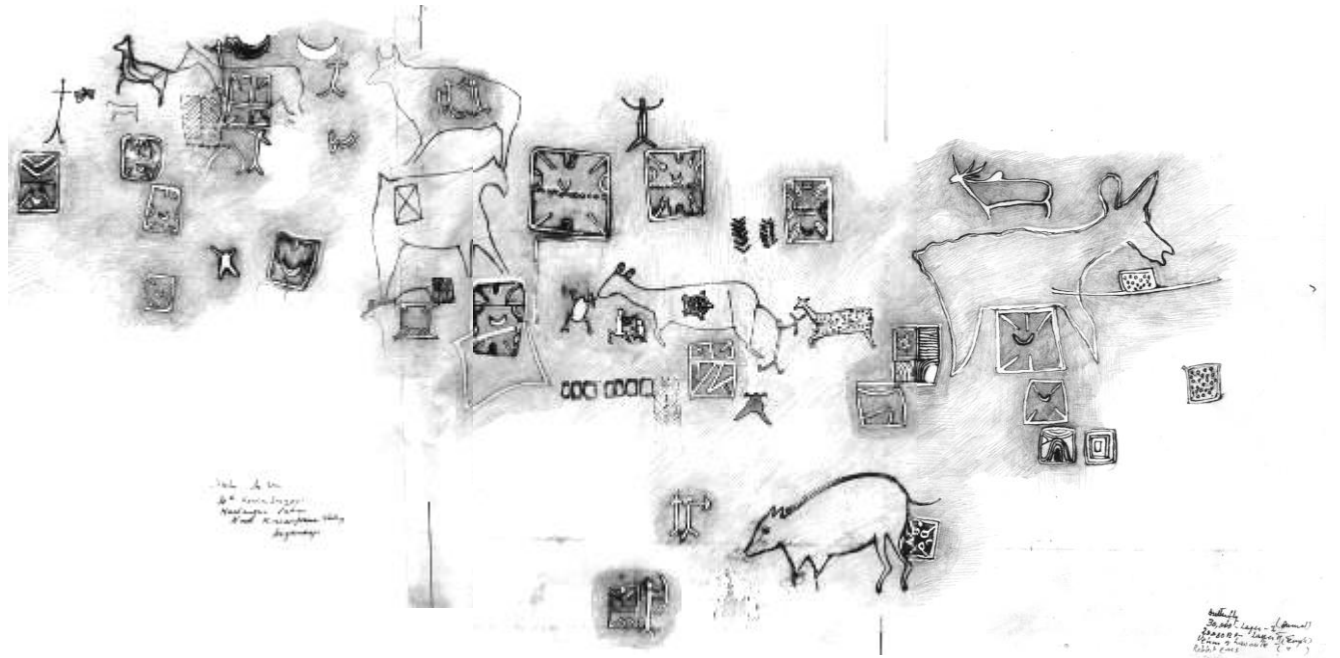


Fig.9.12: *Deer*



Fig.9.13: *Great Mother*

Nutangwa Rockart Panels



Panel (Length- 15'feet x Height-20' feet)



Nautangwa Pahar rock-shelter



Bulu Imam photographing the central panel



From left, deer (Fig.9.1), and stick figure with crescent moon (Fig.9.3). In bottom right hand corner is an enigmatic symbol



Bison with stick figure (Fig.9.4)



These two photographs represent the panel described in the text as Fig.9.5. We can see the white mandala have been painted over earlier drawing in red haematite



This engaging scene represents different periods of art, and for a fuller appreciation the note Fig.9.5 may be read. Details of the motifs are given higher including that of the Great Mother figure at bottom right-hand corner; and a large mandala (Fig.9.2). At bottom note line of snares (*Khuji*), Fig.9.7



Frog left (Fig.9.6), mother chasing child (Fig.9.7), head of deer (portion of Fig.9.5)



The Great Mother (Fig.9.2)



Extreme right-hand portion of the panel showing parts of the figures already studied, old haematite drawings of plant forms, and a large animal with hind right of centre, above which is a humped stag (Fig.9.11). Sacred spotted squares and pond at right



Close-up of humped stag (Fig.9.10)



Spotted deer facing a hunter with head-dress armed with bow (Fig.9.8)



Below the above panel is a wild boar (top right of middle) facing its attackers with bows (bottom left). Note two stick figures (top left) (Fig.9.9)



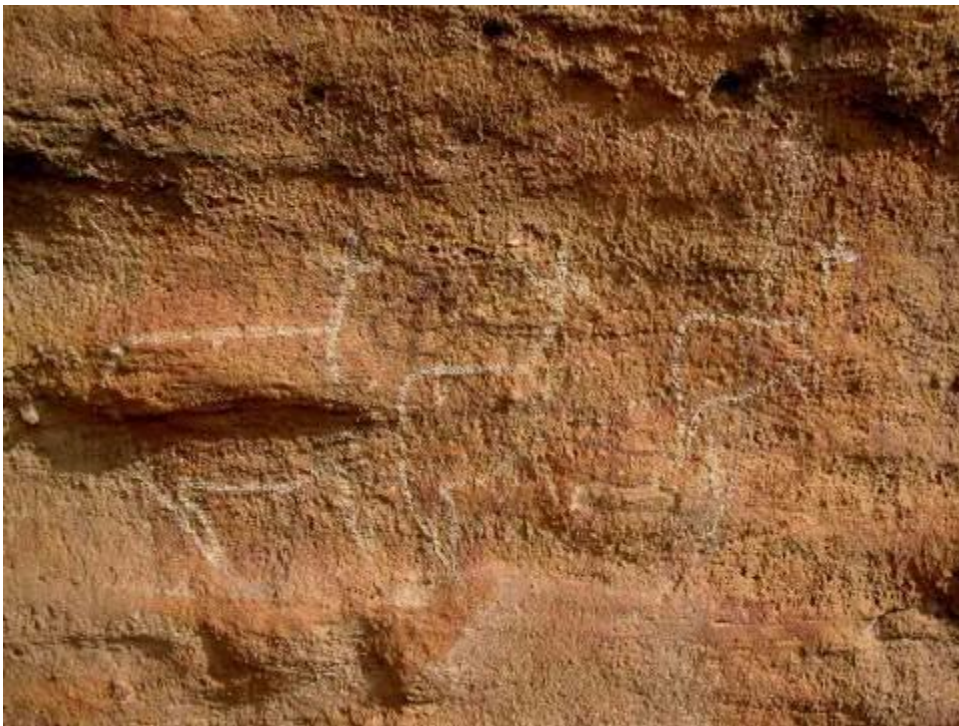
Pointer-stone above the rock shelter facing to the South-west. These pointers have sacred significance



View to the north from the rock-art site



View of the Salga (NautangwaII) rock-shelter



Line of deer at Salga (Fig.9.12)



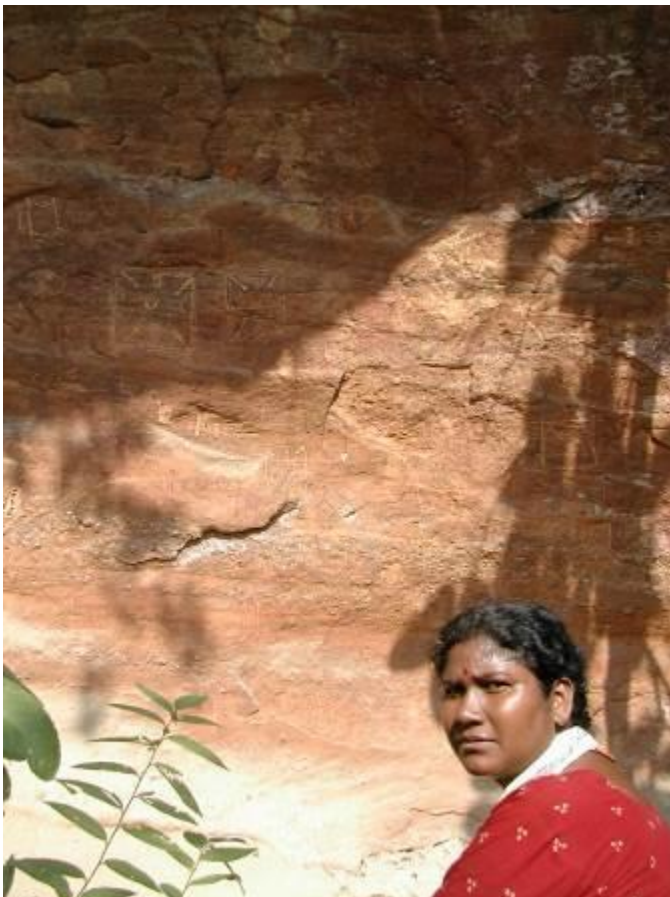
Hand stamp painting (Fig.9.11)



The Great Mother (Fig.9.13)



Close-up of deer (Fig.9.12)



Mrs. Philomina Imam, well-known Oraon tribal artist, in the Nautangwa Pahar Rockart

Afterword

Forager Art

The forager authorship of primitive rock-arts is uncontested. The imagery and symbolism is extra-ordinary, and much of it the work of primitive hunting and gathering societies who led a nomadic life-style. Foragers had an oral remembered tradition similar to those of the nomadic Birhor of Hazaribagh today. The Bihors of Hazaribagh claim their ancestors painted the rock-art of Hazaribagh. Shamanism was and is common in such societies whose thought process belonged to the bicameral mind. In the earliest levels of such rock-art images are non-symbolic and represent objects (which may only thereafter be associated with ideas). The earlier rockart of Hazaribagh such as preserved in Saraiya represents shamanistic images, and from this primitive rock-art iconography more modern religious symbols evolved. Two important considerations are (i) the memory of an ancestral journey in the tribe, and (ii) the relationship between the rock-art and its site with the sacred landscape surrounding it. Its importance is not divorceable from the landscape in which it is set and destruction of that landscape is destruction of the sacredness of the site and its images. The symbols are of an other reality, and the metaphors are of the Great Journey, Death, Rebirth, Cosmic Tree, Sacred Centre, and an attempt to connect with those underlying energies which sustain and guide the human soul. The motifs which we have studied are the expressions of an Animist world and represent the powers of the natural world and its seasonal significance as well as their evolutionary transformations over many thousands of years. They represent hundreds of generations of received wisdom and the expression of a heightened intuition in response to the voice of a higher reality. The art traditions found in the rock-art have survived in the ritual mural wall paintings done by the village women, the marriage art of Khovar, and the harvest art of Sohrai.

Threats

Threats to the rock-art sites surveyed in this book are mostly man-made-industrial development and mining which have come right upto their doorsteps. Some are threatened by dams which will submerge the landscape in which they are set, displacing the village people to whom they have relevance. Railway lines have caused blasting right under the sites, causing cracks, and huge coal mines are steadily creeping upto the rockart covering their

surface with a heavy coating of grime due to atmospheric pollution. Since I bought the rock-art of Hazaribagh to light several sites have suffered from “visitor-manifestation”, which means people have been writing or scratching their names or messages over their surfaces. In some sites there has been witnessed state-sponsored mis-handling of the cultural and archaeological environment by cementing the floor of the shelters containing the record of the past, and building incongruous constructions next in close proximity to the rock-art, violating not only the aesthetic purity and sacred nature of the site, but also such Charters as the Vienna Convention (1965). In view of these threats it is incumbent upon the departments concerned to display greater caution and restraint in developing these sites in view of their nomination to UNESCO as cultural heritage sites of world importance. I NTACH filed the first nominations as far back as 1993.

It is now important to consider the adverse impact of tourism to these sites since the cultural heritage of the primitive world is not easily reconciled with the tourism of the modern world unless expert advice is entertained by the state authorities.

Lastly, in view of the massive mining projects in the upper Damodar Valley in North Karanpura and its environs, we are facing a massive wave of destruction of the landscape through opencast coal mines, big dams, super thermal power stations and other industrial developments. There is a distinct danger of ever greater mining of other minerals and ores in the forested hills. Along with the disappearance of hundreds of villages the village art-forms of Khovar and Sohrai directly descended from the rock-art are destined to disappear also, and as pollution chokes the air the rock-art is also destined to become relics poised over huge mines which have uprooted the landscape and all which it held that was sacred to the rock-painters and their descendants.

Threats to rockart from opencast coal mining

One of the major threats to the rockart of Hazaribagh and Chatra is from the opencast mines of the North Karanpura Coalfields. The mines cause atmospheric pollution which coat the painted surface with a film of dust and seep into the rock pores. The blasting from the mines and ancillary developments like railways, Etc. cause cracks in the sandstone painted surface and even cause portions to collapse. Great threats await great rockart sites like Isco which is located in the Rautpara mine block.



*Openast coal mine in the North Karanpura Valley with
Satpahar Range having rockart in the background*

Dating

The rock-art of Hazaribagh evidences a pebble-tool culture hundreds of thousands of years old, and a Middle Paleolithic culture upto fairly recent times with Upper Palaeolithic approaching the Holocene (10,000 B.P.) and retouched flake tools as recently as perhaps five thousand years ago. If this is so, could the rock-artists have been primitive societies in a fairly recent period, perhaps even commensurate with the Chalcolithic? I am placing this period around 4,000 B.P. The presence of both microliths and polished stone tools point to a few thousand years either side of this date + -. This is a personal opinion.

The question that begs answer in Indian rock-art is why is our rock-art not as old as European rock-art which is more than ten thousand years older? My response to this is that some of our rock-art may be older and this has been over-looked due to a continuous living tradition, and secondly, our rock-art is on unstable sandstone under severe weathering due to extreme conditions of heat and cold, dryness and rain, in vast open shelters, which may have weathered and faded faster. This would explain why our rock-art, while having an ancient palaeolithic root (as evidenced in the rock-art sites) and a continuing living chalcolithic level of cultural heritage, cannot boast the great antiquity of rock paintings in Western Europe.

The expression of their ideas for the Mundas, Hos, Oraons, and other tribes and caste group was through a hand-written expression of symbols and images which had long been noted by etymologists and linguists like Hoffman and Emelen (Encyclopaedia Mundarica, op.cit.vol.10, pp.3090, 3092. The Olchiki script of the Hos, and the Santal script are still in

use. These symbols and images are writing and thus capable of transmitting historical records. The stone pillars erected over the urns containing the cremated remains of their ancestors (bid-diri or sasan-diri) are for the Mundas, Oraon, and the primitive tribal societies who still carry on the tradition the landmarks to their land, and deeds of title (Encyclopaedia Mundarica, op.cit.vol.8, pp. 2382-2387 and 2388-2403.



Breaking stone steps and cementing the floor of Isco rock-art shelter



Obtrusive concrete constructions near the rock-art-site



Erosion in Thethangi rock-art



Visitor manifestation in Raham rock-art site

Conclusion

The rockart of Hazaribagh consists of chronological continuity in keeping with the palaeoarchaeological calendar, demonstrating a significant co-relation between the painted surfaces and the archaeological material found. It demonstrates evidence of an outward-bound tribal cultural dissemination of forms found in the rockart to western and north-western India at a pre and post-Chalcolithic level, without a returning impact of influences from western and northern India. There is no evidence of “contact” motifs such as horse-riding or elephant-riding societies. Further, a contiguous rockart culture may be discerned with the rockart of Orissa in Sambalpur and Sundergarh region, and with the rockart of Raigarh and Sarguja of Chhatisgarh. The theory is maintained that the rockart during the Chalcolithic phase was the work of North Dravidian tribes like the Oraon, whose line of travel was via Chhatisgarh and the Narmada Valley to Sindh and Indus.

Further, it has been established that the rockart painting tradition is today continuing among the village societies of the respective regions where the rockart is found, and that the ancestors of these people must be the rock-painters. Further, it has been established that certain very primitive tribes still living in the region like the nomadic, hunter-gatherer Birhors, carry on a lifestyle similar to the oldest rock-painters whom they claim were their ancestors. The art of these people is still similar to the oldest levels of the rock-paintings.

The condition of the rockart in the Hazaribagh and Chatra shelters is overall in good condition considering their age, but certain measures for their conservation and preservation are required.

Though I have been continuously concerned with the rockart of Hazaribagh and Chatra since 1991 not on a single instance have I been able to find any government or state sponsored conservation measures. I had to install drip-lines to prevent run-off rainwater from eroding the rockart surface in Isco, and similar measures are urgently needed in Thethangi. Further, there is some degree of exfoliation due to fungal and insect attacks damaging some of the

paintings i.e. Thethangi, and these require expert conservation techniques for which the state-sponsored, or non-governmental conservationists (i.e. INTACH) are best suited.

The next point is that in a mood of welfare the rockart sites may be damaged by well-meaning attempts of state-sponsored authorities. A recent example of this has been the construction of a brick-and-cement flooring below the Isco rockart by the Tourism department which I have vehemently protested against. This has destroyed the surface archaeological deposits to a very large extent. Also the building of steps and cement structures beside or near to the rockart is completely un-warranted and violates archaeological norms and requirements. The rockart is a tribal heritage and not simply a boon for modern governments to exploit and destroy in quest of revenue.

Lastly, the rockart sites should be developed along modern lines for tourist visitors, and the rockart and its environment must be protected from visitor manifestations such as scratching or marking the painted surface, or collecting archaeological objects from the vicinity. For the regular guards and maintenance facility must be setup. At present, the tourism department initiatives at Isco bring the visitors right up into physical contact with the rock-art, which must at all costs be avoided otherwise visitor manifestation will destroy this precious rock-art, and the palaeo-archaeological artifacts on the ground of immense archaeological importance will be plundered.

Finally, the coal mining development plans will have to be stopped from destroying the rock-art and archaeological sites. Even as we talk of rock-art the cultural landscape of the North Karanpura Valley is being completely destroyed by three hundred feet deep coal mines that are several miles across. These mines are being developed at a rapid rate and all cultural legislation is redundant since saving certain precious archaeological sites in a sea of coal mines is senseless. The cultural landscape in which these sites have to be seen are disappearing forever in Jharkhand. It is only the spirit and resilience of the village people which may live on beyond this age of vandalism and lead to new forms in an unknown and uncertain future.



How green was my Valley.....



Sunset on North Karanpura

Appendix

APPENDIX- I

Ethno – Archaeological Background to the Region

It has been observed that information on ancient India comes from two distinct sources or traditions, namely, the archaeological, and the literary. We have to here add that there are two other traditions, which have been long neglected by academicians in India and foreign scholars on India at large, namely the continuing peasant and tribal traditions with their artistic and non literate expressions, which are the great oral traditions. Emphasis on archaeology and Vedic traditions has been placed by Vedic scholars who neglect the pre-Vedic archaeology of India and the oral literature of living contemporary peasant and tribal societies today in India. Such scholars treat the archaeological evidence as represented by the Harappan tradition unsupported by any written account, and the Vedic texts remain uncorroborated by any firm archaeological evidence. Thus does it become increasingly important for us to establish in this country archaeological traditions throughout India, especially where these are supported by continuous traditions of contemporary traditional peasant and tribal societies whose traditions are strongly corroborated by rockart and other palaeoarchaeological evidence on the very same habitation sites as their ancestors far back as early man in India.

In examining the archaeological evidence of early India in the proto and pre-historic times solely with reference to Vedic texts and Harappan archaeology is biased and limited, even though it was encouraged by British scholars with a view to stressing India-Aryan links with England and Europe until the Indo-Aryan term become unfashionable after the Second World War. Therefore, we require to base our research upon new perceptive paradigms, and in my own researches I have turned increasingly to contemporary peasant and tribal societies who truly represent the most ancient heritage of India, and gained insights by studying their artistic expressions and oral traditions as documents of posterity that have been much neglected by scholarship. These put flesh on the bare bones of archaeological evidence and clear the record to view. From this it becomes abundantly clear that the Indo-Aryan presence in India (i.e. Brachycephalic cranial type) entered India first from the river valley trade routes connecting the Indian plains with central Asia, from to South Asia, from the river valley trade routes connecting the Indian plains with Central Asia, from where the mongoloid Indo-Aryan type was traveling to and from to South Asia millennia before the Vedic Aryan influx over the northwestern passes from Afghanistan could enter the Indus valley, and this mongoloid presence is witnessed in the archaeological record of Harappa as well as its trade connections with Mesopotamia before Vedic times.

Salt from India was traded for wool from Tibet and Mongolia. The mixing of the Central Asian Mongoloid type which was Indo-Aryan with the South Asian Dolichocephalic (long headed) type was predominantly manifested along the Himalayan valleys and is still evident, and to a lesser extent along the Siwaliks and plains abutting the Himalayas along the whole of North India through the Ganges and Brahmaputra valleys which were the homelands of the Dolichocephalic Indo-Mediterranean type, and the long admixture of the mongoloid Indo Aryan with the Indo Dravidian or Mediterranean type created the present mix today of the peoples along these rivers.

Today it is more important than ever to try and understand the Paleolithic and megalithic archaeology of India, in the light of the living traditions of the peasant societies whose iconic and artistic traditions fill the void of understanding of our country's prehistory by reflecting

images found in the Mesolithic rock paintings of Central and eastern India including Hazaribagh and Navada. Further, the oral tradition of these tribal societies tells the stories of long distant migrations and hoary passages across vast distances in place and time. The legends of our Asura, an ancient iron smelting tribe mentioned in the Rig Veda, tells how these people came via the great mountains of Dhaulagiri and Mainagiri (Annapurna) in the Nepal Himal along the valley of the Kali Gandaki River. Further they can trace back their migration to the two rivers Rakshas-tal and Mansarovar-tal on the Tibetan plateau. The Indo Aryan mongoloid traces in our north Indian tribes, even among the Kel and Mundaric tribes, cannot be ruled out.

The great megalith builders of southern Bihar plateau are still making megaliths in accordance with a five thousand year long tradition as proved by the archaeological record, along with burial and funerary practices which may be witnessed from the northeastern hill states (Meghalaya) to Central India. The cut and dried blocks into which modern anthropologists have divided the tribes, which were in the beginning essentially the same people divided into familial structures on basis of kinship, has concealed the larger common identity of these peoples. These prehistoric families were but very recently classified individually as tribes. The evidence of a Neolithic stone culture and a megalithic stone culture points on the other hand to a common people throughout North India without dozens, and even hundreds of divisions, which has succeeded in dividing rather than uniting the tribal and the peasantry in a common human identity. If we are to enforce the precept "Unity in diversity", then we must look at the fundamental ethnological unity of these peoples and the superficial textbook nature of the diversity. A common culture presents itself to us from Bilaspur near Simla to Bilaspur in Madhya Pradesh, and from Chotanagpur plateaux to Assam.

The upper valley of river Damodar presents an interesting pattern of an ancient palaeoarchaeological genre evolving ground in a rift valley perhaps long after the sinking of the carboniferous shelves between the plateaus of Ranchi in the south and Hazaribagh to the north. In the eroding scarps of these plateaux as the Jharkhand plate moves 5 cm a year northwards, one finds chopper stone tools of a variety comparable to Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania, and perhaps this will be one day found to be a site of early man. A distinct shoreline with pebbles and sand ring the entire upper trough of the upper trap of the Damodar watershed, closed on three sides and elevated in the western end. There is evidence of Middle Paleolithic intra-glacial habitation in deep subterranean caves, and fishing cave sites along this shoreline about a hundred feet above the valley where a broad lake of about five by twenty miles would have once existed, and along these sites we find the cave shelters with Neolithic stone polished axes and others, microliths, points, and fine chert blades. In the immediate proximity we also find the heavy hammer stones and hand axes of the Middle Paleolithic, and horsehoof hammer stones of an immense antiquity (250,000BP). In the immediate vicinity of these sites are painted caves of Mesolithic rock art that have suddenly made Hazaribagh famous over the last decade. In the shadow of these forested hills lie scattered Munda and Oraon hamlets who carry on the artistic tradition amidst fields which contain the iron slag rubble of a rich Iron culture, and many iron and copper implements have been found. In the same tribes exist a number of megalithic sites of hoary antiquity whose age can only be determined archaeologically and which are placed around the same antiquity as Stonehenge. However, there is a very feeble living megalithic culture left in Hazaribagh, and this is obviously due to pressure from northern Bihar in its ancient cultural traditions, and is not surprising. A younger and more vibrant living megalithic culture, however, is to be found on the southern plateau of Ranchi where there is no such hoary palaeoarchaeological heritage like Hazaribagh region. There shows to be a steady migration southwards of the megalithic culture. In Hazaribagh we have discovered urnfields, or rows of hundreds of small urns containing cranial, tibia, fibular, fragments of cremated bone and ash.

These are in megalithic sites and reminds one of the classic burials of the Urnfields people of Western Europe. I believe there was a migration around the second or third millennium BC from North Chotanagpur to South Chotanagpur because we find less evidence (or none) of iron workings and Neolithic tools in the present areas of megaliths. S.C. Roy and Edward Gates had discovered the rare series of copper-age sites in the whole of the Lohardagga, Gumla, Khunti, Torpa-Basia region, and this culture I believe was the beginning of the megalith building in southern Chotanagpur because I have not evidence of megalithic sites in the pre-Chacolithic in south Ranchi whereas in the Hazaribagh region I find the megalithic clusters in company with Neolithic tools and even microliths.

Along the valley of the Suvarnarkha, however, and along the Tamar Range towards Tatanagar we do find immense megalithic grounds such as Choka Hathu between Bundu and Baranda Covering seven acres and having over seven thousand megaliths. This would perhaps be linked with the areas of interest to the late Priya Ranjan Sarkar in Western Rahr. This entire region into Manbhum and Dalbhum would have had rich evidence of early man but much of it has unfortunately been damaged through coal mining. However, speaking for the unused, ancient megalith and dolmen sites of Hazaribagh, their immense size and cryptic glypts, will point to a vanished megalithic culture of stoneage antiquity. On the other hand the visitor to Khunti, Torpa, Basia will find a rich living megalith erecting tradition in south Ranchi in dozens of villages where even Christians erect megaliths in the name of deceased relatives who are treated as ancestors. The stone blocks are cut and shaped by the Lohras or ironsmiths whose number are also responsible for making the excellent stone blocks for building for which south Ranchi is justly famous.

In the Hazaribagh region we find a rich Buddhistic tradition in the proximity of iron – working sites in which I have found Painted Grey Ware pottery, Black and Red, and Polished Black Ware. It would seem likely that this region, which abuts on the ancient Magadh to the north, was a very early Buddhist site from the enormous and well preserved quantities of Buddhist statuary found in over two dozen sites across the Hazaribagh plateau. The sculptures are from Pala, Gupta, Kushan, and Mauryan periods, showing the rich part which Buddhism has played in the evolving culture of the region. It is also reasonable to speculate that the Lord Buddha spent some time in Hazaribagh which would have been well forested and inhabited by simple peasant tribes. This opinion is held also by eminent foreign scholars like Sir Edwin Arnold who wrote “The Light of Asia”, in tracing the footsteps of the Buddha. Buddha is referred to as Mahadeva in Hazaribagh and the ranges along the Damodar River are named after him. There are relics of Buddhist statuary and sites along this entire region which is also one of the most threatened areas as opencast coal mines are planned to cover the entire valley which is ringed by rockart sites and for which I had appealed for protection to the UNESCO as far back as 1993 but received no support for protecting it. This is most unfortunate.

The Sohrai art of the harvest in Hazaribagh is rich in Buddhist motifs and imagery, throughout Shiva and Mahadeva being interfaced, as often happens when Buddhist statuary such as Bodhisttvas are being put in a Shiva temple or the image of the Buddha being worshipped as the image of Vishnu, or Padasambhava and Alokitesvara confused with Shiv-Parvati, etc. The master figure in Sohrai art is called both Mahadeva and Shiva and is represented by the Lotus as well as Bhelwa (*Semecarpus anacardium*), the former being the traditional icon representing the Buddha, while the latter is the traditional icon representing Shiva. In the art of Sohrai I have found the two dozen and more sacred and auspicious symbols of Buddhim represented which will no doubt point back to a time when Ashokan rule had converted the Hazaribagh peasantry and tribals to Buddhism. The strong anthropomorphic and Zoomorphic artistic idiom is used as in

rock painting of a very early age also found in Hazaribagh, and it has been amply demonstrated by now that the artistic traditions of Khovar (marriage) art and Soharai (harvest) art are continuations of the prehistoric rockart traditions of the Hazaribagh region. In this art Shiva is depicted in plant form again and again, tracing the lithe and rhythmic evolution of the Bhangas in the sinuous plant forms in which the only mark is the recognizable eyes, the face desacralized very conspicuously by the marks of the mother goddess (cowrie, triangle, lozenge, circle). Such *bhangas* entered Buddhist art from Magadha itself where these artistic traditions would then have commonly been found. From here it would have gone to such faraway places as Sanchi and Ajanta, affecting Buddhist statuary figures and painted mural forms. Besides, in the sheer marvelous examples of the early Buddhist statuary found in the earliest period in Hazaribagh do we find these same plant forms and figures in tracery of motion implied from the plants in the various Bhangas. Such stylized forms still do appear upto today in the wall paintings in the peasant villages of Hazaribagh such as the Buddha himself must have glimpsed. The iconography of Buddhist sculptures may be successfully compared with the comb-cut art of Khovar and the painted art of Soharai found on the walls of our village houses in Hazaribagh. The Khovar art decorates the Bridal Room and courtyard and walls of the houses leading to the bride's house, while the Soharai art is painted in celebration of the harvest season.

As I have drawn attention there is every reason to believe that the Lord Buddha had visited Hazaribagh region, and the fact that he is still affectionately called Mahadeva by the villagers is very important. Mahadeva is distinct from Shiva, who is also called Mahadania, or the giver of boons, especially of progeny. Mahadeva has a completely different, celibate, cognizance. This I believe is of major archaeological significance in reconstructing the history of our over two dozen major Buddhist sites in Hazaribagh facing arrant neglect and pilferage over the years, as nobody is heeding my pleas to study and save them, especially in the region of south Hazaribagh where the mines of the North Karanpura Coalfields Project have already begun to destroy vast areas through opencast mining.

The pictographs of Khovar have been shown by me to represent the early pictographs out of which the proto-Brahmi script may have evolved. Nobody has looked at this seriously as yet. The script of Isco being related to the Indus valley script was pointed out by us some twelve years back and the same letters were pointed out in the khovar symbols still painted throughout the North Karanpura Valley, perhaps recalling the memory of a long vanished script in these parts still finding expression in the art of the simple peasant women. This was pointed out in our book *Bridal Caves* (INTACH, 1995), but it was not taken seriously by scholars. I recall the researches of my colleague late Nawal Kishore Verma of Bhagalpur who had compared the Santali script with Harappan characters and who after visiting the Isco caves in Hazaribagh told me the rock-art script was the basis for both these scripts. These are matters of speculation and compel further research both for scriptologists and archaeologists to look into. The sum of human knowledge will never be perfect and will repeatedly remain the interpreted domain of a handful of scholars who may be right or wrong. However, the region of Hazaribagh has given a rich crop from which serious researchers may reap a rich harvest if they but try.

Appendix- II

INTACH-IGNCA Multi-disciplinary Rockart Survey 2007

-: Rockart of Hazaribagh-Chatra, Jharkhand :-

REPORT

Bulu Imam

After studying the reports of the team I have compiled an overall summary which is as follows:-

Rock shelters with paintings surveyed were:- in the Hazaribagh District 1. Isco 2, Nautangwa Pahar, and in the Chatra district 3.Sidpa I,II (new) 4.Gonda 5.Raham 6.Satpahar I, II, III, IV (new), 7.Thethangi I, II (new), 8.Saraiya, 9. Khandhar

The Setting

The description of the setting of the Rockart in Hazaribagh and Chatra may be summed up as follows, in Erwin Neumayer's description of the Rockart country in between the Narmada in the south and the Jumna-Ganges plain in the north (E.Neumayer, Lines on Stone, Manohar, 1993, pp.13-14),

“Geologically this mass was formed by the remnants of an ancient, horizontally laid, sandstone sheet which was broken at places by tectonic movements. Between the dislocated individual tables, basaltic formations were cast over vast stretches of land, forming the Deccan trap enclosures in this landscape. The hills, which were cast from these basaltic masses are abruptly rising stiff rocky cliffs, which are topped by flat tablelands, scarred by the different erosion agents.”

“The typical quartzite landscape are low hill chains, gently rising above the plains and abruptly dropping down on the other side of the rise in sharp, cliff-like rock walls, in which the different strata of the sandstone layers are laid bare. These differently compacted layers react to the erosional agents – like water and wind –irregularly, depending on their structure, hardness and exposure. The softer layers get eroded faster than harder layers. In this way recesses and shelters are formed.”

Humidity at the bottom of the rock walls caused the fallout of minerals from the rock and weakened the rock's structure. That is why long, abri-like shelters are a common sight at the foot of these cliffs. The pressure of the rock masses above these faults very often caused the cliffs to collapse, and chunks of the huge stone masses tumbled down, leaning against each other, forming other cavities and hollows. Hard, unweathered sandstone layers often project over the general surface of rock shelter walls, dividing them into “stores”.

“On the highest points of these hills there are frequently tough remnants of sandstone, which have weathered at a slower rate than the equally high sedimentary material. These projecting rock structures, which often have the appearance of crumbling ruins of ancient forts, and are aptly called in the colloquial language “*dant*” or tooth, are hollowed by caves and shelters of different sizes. These weathering faults have in many cases weakened the structures of these rocks, so that their own weight have caused them to collapse and form the most fantastic sculptures, which are often revered as auspicious in local legends, and related to ancient heroes of the great Indian epics. The famous site of Bhimbetka derives its name from “Seat of Bhima”.

“The shelters and caves so formed were used by man since the early stone age, as finds of stone tools from the lower palaeolithic periods amply prove. The rock paintings are found on the walls and ceilings of shelters and in cavities of the cliff walls or on well-protected cliffs wherever they could withstand the onslaught of the different weathering agents.”

Quite often these paintings are found in deep gorges of the numerous seasonal water-streams which channel the monsoonal water-masses towards the perennial rivers and streams. Even in the dry season, waterholes and sometimes large pools, fed by underground springs, remain in these gorges. Some of these gorges part the flat tablelands, meandering canyon-like between vertical rockwalls, fencing for long stretches the tableland from the sole of the gorges. Only in places where rockwalls have collapsed do paths reach down to the bottom of the gorges. Several of these canyons are wide enough to support a particularly rich forest vegetation, even with evergreen elements which can flourish at the bottom near perennial pools of water.”

In this description we have a clear picture of the nature of topography of the sandstone masses in which we find the Mesolithic and Chalcolithic Rockart shelters in the upper Damodar (North Karanpura Valley) in the districts of Hazaribagh and Chatra. As in the valleys of the Chambal and its tributaries, many of the Rockart sites in north Jharkhand with particular reference to Hazaribagh and Chatra, are in the hollow shelters formed in these gorges which had at one time been the campsites of the early men who were Mesolithic hunters who left on these sandstone walls vivid drawings in red haematite and yellow lignite of the animals and birds which they hunted over nine thousand years ago or more. Naturally these sites over ensuing millennia faced erosion and also new drawings and we can trace their career from an ancient microlith-using culture to the more recent polished stone celts of the Neolithic as have been found at Isco and many of the other painted shelters. We can say that these open-air shelters were their art galleries and dwelling places right down to quite recent times from the hand-coiled, black, red, and red and black ware found in the proximity of shelters such as Isco. Further, a rich iron-smelting Asura culture had once dominated the area and iron-smelting hearths, furnace pipes, and iron slag abound throughout the area. Such sites have further proved of great archaeological importance since upper palaeolithic stone tools (i.e. quartzite handaxes) have been found in the mass of sandstone overlaying the shelter and heavy middle palaeolithic granite-gneiss handaxes and hammerstones in the deep palaeolithic caves (i.e. Marwateri). In the eroded scarps above the shelter horsehoof hammerstones of 250,000 B.P. have been collected, and in the upper portion of the hills a pebbled shoreline had afforded the early men to make pebble choppers going back to a much earlier date. A representative collection of the entire stone tool range is in the Sanskriti Centre museum in Hazaribagh. Furthermore it is interesting to note that the continuation of the rock paintings is to be found in wall murals painted on the mud walls of tribal (Kurmi, Munda, Ganju, Oraon, Kumhar, Bhuyan, Agaria, etc.) village homes in the shadow of the Rockart (i.e. Isco, Chapri, Saheda, Jorakath) and further afield among the artisan castes of the Damodar valley in a more ornate style (Rana, Teli, Turi, Prajapati, etc.). One of the scholars participating in the survey (D.N. Kaseria) who has been decoding the symbols (writing) of the Isco rockart is of the opinion that the shelter was a pedagogous arena for imparting training of writing to students, which although sounding far-fetched requires to be considered in the light of his research. The art of Isco and other sites having rich geometrical and *mandala* designs finds expression in the art of the valley dwellers who are Hinduized and among the hill dwelling animist tribes we find the enigmatic wild animal forms of the Mesolithic in the village paintings. Many of these tribes like the Munda, Oraon, Ganju, Kurmi, Santal, and Agaria live a partly agricultural and partly hunting-gathering lifestyle in the forest areas. One of the most interesting tribes which is left in Hazaribagh only is the nomadic Birhor who have always lived by hunting and trapping, the womenfolk gathering edible roots and tubers and wild medicines. These people claim their ancestors painted the earliest rockart. It would thus seem that the

Rockart sites had been a stage in the development of the tribes and castes who still live close by to them throughout the region and it should be expected that dozens of Rockart sites are still known to the tribal peoples in the hundreds of villages of this largely forested and isolated area. However, as a result of massive open cast coal mining, big dams and super thermal power station projects coming into the area it may well be that the destruction of modern development will wipe out the memory of the undiscovered sites as well as many of the sites themselves within the foreseeable future.

During the INTACH-IGNCA Multidisciplinary Survey of the Rockart of Hazaribagh and Chatra districts nine rockart sites previously brought to light by INTACH were surveyed. These nine sites had up to then eleven known painted shelters. During the course of the Survey four new painted shelters were brought to light. The geological report found the rock type to be of generally red sandstone in all the shelters with the sole exception of Isco shelter which was reported to be comprised of granite-gneiss. The materials used for the paintings were uniformly red haematite, yellow lignite, and more rarely, white kaolin. In Khandar a touch of blue has been discerned, which is problematic. The overall formations were Pre-Cambrian in Isco, and Damodar Series of Lower Gondwana in all the other painted shelters. It could also be said the Isco Rockart with its maze of geometric designs could also be the most recently worked on Rockart site with these designs painted over the earlier Mesolithic Rockart, as these geometric designs in haematite and lignite are of a more sophisticated nature with script-like symbols which have led to speculations and studies by scholars of them being a Proto-Indus alphabet (Bulu Imam, *Bridal Caves*, 1995) and a proto-Brahmi form of writing through which it has been claimed the Indus script can be deciphered using Hindi (D.N. Kaser, *Prachin Bharat Ki Lipi Aur Bhasha*, 2007).

In his book on the Rockart (B. Imam, *Rockart of North Jharkhand*, 2006) written on commission for the Department of Culture, Govt. of Jharkhand, Bulu Imam has put forward the thesis the rockart could be the work of proto-Dravidians like the Oraons who had a constant traffic between southwestern Sindh (Indus) and Jharkhand and the proto-Australoids like the nomadic Birhor who have such an oral tradition of their ancestors painting the rock shelters. Imam has also made a comparison in between the prehistoric Rockart and contemporary village mural painting tradition, Chap.1, (also: B. Imam, *Cultural Concepts Implicit in Tribal art and Identity*, Australian Rockart Association Journal, IFRAO-AURA Conference paper, Cairns, 1993). The important discovery has been the living tradition of village mural painting carrying the symbols and forms of the Rockart in Hazaribagh and Chatra. This mural tradition is carried on by the village women both tribal and scheduled castes during the harvest festival (Sohrai) and marriage season (Khowar). Further shown by the research in the book (Chap.2) the tattoo designs which the local village women wear on the arms, neck, legs are exactly similar to the Chalcolithic Rockart motifs. The tattooing is done by the womenfolk of the Malhar metal-casting tribe, a descendant of the iron-smelting Asuras. The *aripans* or ritual floor paintings (lines of hoof-ovals) made by the village women with rice gruel during the harvest festival to welcome the cattle are also similar to the *aripan* designs and forms of cattle being welcomed in the rockart (i.e. Sidpa, Isco, etc.). In the rockart of Isco we find the wheeled spotted animal of the Kurmi Sohrai wall paintings called *ghoda*, which is the bull. The use of deep purple haematite, yellow lignite, and white kaolin in the rockart is comparable along with the motifs in the village paintings. On the floor of the Isco and other painted shelters the ground nodules of the various stone colours used by the cave painters is to be found. Many of the designs and symbols used by the cave artists are found in the village murals today, as well as in their pottery, metal casting, and woodwork. Detailed comparative studies of these motifs had been started a decade back at the

Sanskriti Centre in Hazaribagh by Shri Imam who has in his findings reported their coincidence with a pan-continental old world prehistoric culture of a global character.

The similarity between the tattoo of the village women and the Chalcolithic rockart being identical it is important to also note that these tattoos are made by the womenfolk of the metal-casting Malhar tribals who are directly linked with the early copper culture which was responsible for much of the post-Mesolithic Rockart. Therefore a similarity of motifs is quite understandable. The Malhar craftsmen use the same designs and motifs in their metal casting. Since these motifs are closely akin to Harappan designs, and since they may be in genesis vastly older, they have been claimed as progenitors of not only the Indus, but Sumerian, Egyptian, Danubian and Trojan writing. The claim of their being a form of proto-Brahmi closer to home is maintained by local scholars as indicated earlier

It is thus clear that this is an old tradition evolved out of the Mesolithic play of forms, displaying no doubt shamanistic tendencies, but also displaying a strong matriarchal shamanistic significance, favoured by the persistence of Sohrai and Khovar ritualistic paintings by women. Thus it is also clear that a strong cultural tradition binds the simple villager and artisan of today with their distant chalcolithic, Mesolithic, and palaeolithic ancestors of thousands of years back. Nor is this an isolated feature of the Hazaribagh Rockart but is to be found in central Indian Rockart as well (Erwin Neumayer & Yashodhar Mathpal, *Village Paintings at Smardha near Sanchi*,(? p.691)1997; Yashodhara Dalmia, *The Painted World of the Warlis*, 1988, p. 21) As we can find evidence in the single localities of a continuous series of ages going back from the contemporary to the iron, bronze, polished stone tools of the neolithic and microlithic period, and to the preceding Upper, Middle, and Lower Palaeolithic, we may presume to say this is the longest continuing artistic tradition in the world.

In the region of Isco we find in the shelter an abundance of microliths, core-stones, chipped flakes, flints and polished stone tools; in its surroundings in a radius of one square kilometer we find an abundance of older palaeolithic stone tools like hand axes, hammerstones, borers, strippers, cleavers, etc.; and in the scarps in the hills encircling this corner of the valley leading up to the Hazaribagh plateau we find a variety of horsehoof -hammerstones, polyhedrals, spheroids, and uniface and bi-face pebble tools. On the plateau above we find an abundance of stone tools. A stone mother goddess figurine identical to the Venus of Willendorf dated to 20,000 B.P. (B.K.Thapar, 12994) The area is having only forest-dwelling indigenous tribes like Munda, Oraon, Ganju, Kurmi,etc. who practice a similar mural art on their mudden houses as is found in the nearby Rockart. The indigenous status (*Mulwasi*) of these people deserves to be recognized as they have been forcibly displaced from their fields, villages and forests to make way for vast opencast coal mining eating up the region, or are facing it in the near future. Over two hundred villages are being displaced for coal mining with an average of a thousand families per village. These custodians of the “Ancient Spirit of India” ,as Sri Aurobindo called it , deserve to be recognized as Indigenous Peoples and granted protection under the United Nations’ DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES. The upper Damodar (North Karanpura Valley) is facing total destruction by coal mining, the building of super thermal power stations , big dams and other heavy industrial projects which are all Government of India sponsored projects. Not only the peoples’ rights but the Cultural Landscape and Indian Heritage of unborn generations is being stolen from them in the interests of economic growth index while the living standard of the people destroyed completely. Such development projects cannot be acceptable in the interests of Indigenous Rights, Democracy, Cultural and Natural Heritage, and real development as understood under the Kyoto Protocol.

The indellible birthmark of Early Man in North Jharkhand is found in the Rockart and its continuing presence in the Damodar Valley Civilization – a civilization of continuous cultural development from the indigenous wellsprings of the region's cultural heritage where one of the first great cultural epochs of the sub-continent was played out over ten thousand years ago, and where its offspring are in the villages displaying a high watermark of ancient civilizational culture. We are witnessing one of the greatest single attacks upon one of the birthplaces of civilization in India. We are witnessing the contionuing evolution of a legacy which is both ever changing and yet changeless being attacked by economic and industrial greed of the State.

Apart from the Khovar and Sohrai traditions the rock paintings are very sacred for the Oraon tribe and a sect of the tribe called Bhagats in the Basant (Indian Spring in February) perform pujas to the Rockart and ask for boons and blessings. This year the puja by the Bhagats to the Therthangi Rockart was held on 2nd February (2007). Nearly two hundred men and women dressed in white assembled in the painted rock shelter. The men wore their traditional white khadi Gandhi caps and the women wore their hair open. The men had stayed overnight in the rock shelter and the womenfolk came up to this high shelter on the southern face of the Satpahar range in the western end of the valley in the morning. They formed rows in front of the paintings, the women in the front and men behind. With their flying the women immersed themselves in shamanistic trances sitting forward on their knees and bending forward arms outstretched, swaying from side to side, shaking their heads and tossing their hair back and forth. They appealed with arms outstretched to the Rockart to grant their requests, crying out prayers and appeals to the spirits of their ancestors. The older women were either on their knees or standing shaking their heads with open hair, rolling or crawling toward the Rockart, muttering or chanting some stood with hands outstretched to the paintings as they gently swayed. Some women suddenly got up and ran wildly as if seized by a spirit, falling on the hard rock floor and hurting themselves, or running to the jungle surrounding the shelter. The men also accompanied with a continuous chanting to the beating of brass gongs. The ceremony continued from morning to late afternoon without a pause. Here is an eye-witness account of one of the greatest proofs of the Rockart belonging to these people. No other country in the world perhaps excepting Australia can show such a contemporary link with palaeolithic Rockart except Australia, and we know the Indian palaeolithic tradition is far older than that continent.

The Rockart of cthe Upper Damodar Valley in the districts of Hazaribagh and Chatraare similar to the rock paintings of Hemgiri and Osakothi of the Sundergarh district of Orissa, and Vikramhole in the Sambalpur district. It is alksa comparable with the Rockart ofChhatisgarh. The Mesolithic animal art in the high hilly sheltersin densely forested and isolated tracts overlooking the upper basin or trap formed by the Damodar valley between the plateaux of Hazaribagh in the north and Ranchi in the south are unique in the Rockart of the Vindhya. These ranges are the easternmost ranges of the Vindhya chain of mountains in Hazaribagh and Chatra districts of North Jharkhand. The Mesolithic animal art here has few parallels even in the Kaimur ranges to the northwest facing Mirzapur in the Ganges valley, and they are in excellent condition. There is no evidence whatsoever of "contact" or a non indigenous artistic flowering on the cave walls, nor of the late agricultural forms (bull and plough, Etc.) witnessed in central Indian Rockart. The floors of these profusely painted shelters have yielded large assemblages of stone tools. At Isco in the eastern corner of the Valley microliths, cores, and polished celts and chipped flakes, leaf blades, and other tools have been found in large numbers as noted earlier. The cementing of the floor of the shelter in the knowledge of the Archaeology department of the Department of culture under the aegis of the district administration in 2005 was a sad moment for Rockart in India. Under this five-feet wide and hundred feet long strip of concrete was buried much of the heritage of Early Man and the cave painters who painted the Isco

Rockart, which is believed to be the major Rockart site yet brought to light in eastern India. The Isco shelter is having pottery of various kinds both hand coiled, thick red and black ware, Etc.

The Rockart of Hazaribagh and Chatra districts represents the first expressions in drawing and painting by Man in India. During the early Mesolithic period it manifested wonderfully alive drawings of wild animals including rhinoceros, elephant, spotted deer, sambhur, boar, nilgai, muntjack, tiger, leopard, wild ox, cow, bison or Gaur, and peacock, fowl, etc. In the sites which manifest maximum Mesolithic art, (I.e. Nautangwa Pahar) we find the emergence subsequently the emergence of mandalas with the quarter moon representing the virgent goddess (*Kanya*) perhaps for the first time in Indian art. Dozens of such mandalas are found in this shelter alone. Stick figures are found in abundance, no triangular forms. Several of the sites were clearly shamanistic and are still maintained by the Bhagatas who are the traditional custodians of these sites. Magico-religious anthropomorphic and zoo-morphic forms predominate in several sites and in some sites --- like Saraiya – are entirely of this type. Frogs, insects, butterfly and horned and tailed human figures appear. One humped ox has been found (Satpahar II) which would have been then wild, but there are absolutely no village cattle and plough scenes or horses and chariots, or war-elephants and soldiers with shields, as found in more recent Rockart sites in central India.

Work on trying to decipher the enigmatic symbols that form the bulk of the Isco Rockart has been started by a Hazaribagh scholar Shri Dev Narayan Kasera. He has given us interesting insights. His research is nearly half a decade old and primarily based upon 84 the symbols of the Isco Rockart which Bulu Imam had claimed were similar to the Indus script (B.Imam, *Bridal Caves*, INTACH, 1995, Chap.8, p.61) The Foreword to this seminal work drawing attention for the first time to the Rockart of Hazaribagh and Chatra and the continuing contemporary tradition of the Rockart into the Sohrai and Khovar mural painting tradition of the villages of the region, was by the late Dr. B./K. Thapar the renowned archaeologist. Although Dr. Thapar did not attach much significance to the Rockart being a proto-Indus script he was appreciative of the work done and described in the said book. This is the area of Shri Kasera's study. In his view the later Chalcolithic rock paintings are symbols, and the script-like forms are the work of settled villagers who finding no permanent surface on their then thatch walled houses (?) used the rock caves having the murals of their Mesolithic ancestors. Indians are quite used to ignoring past relics and reworking them as they please (this is a cultural tradition, now under the race of globalization making ugly monsters of ancient traditions), and so we are unable to find in Isco much trace of earlier Mesolithic paintings, although these undoubtedly existed and some still peek through the maze of chalcolithic designs. The Brahmi script which was discovered by James Prinsep in 1837 and used for reading the Ashokan inscriptions, were a source of inspiration for Kasera. Using this Brahmi script he worked out a phonetic value for dozens of symbols in Isco, adding to this many phonetic values different to Prinsep's, to several of the symbols. When he began to use this new phonetic alphabet he had devised on the same symbols as in the Indus script he began to get Hindi words, and so he deduced the Harappans spoke Hindi not much different to what we speak today! Another discovery which he made was that using his new alphabet a compound of the various symbols (letters) used to make up a single word in so doing creates the form of the object expressed in Hindi language. Examples are the words "leaf" (*pata*) and "footprint" (*puga*) in which the symbols for P are the same (U-shaped, much like the Hindi letter "P") and those for "ta" and "ga" are respectively shaped like (a) veins of a leaf, (b) toes. Such symbols used in other combinations for making words help in establishing both their sound as well as form. In this discovery Kasera seems to have gone beyond the pictograph to a new level of image. According to him the words when formed of various symbols may be read from right to left, left to right, top down, or bottom up. This

would be due to the essentially pictographic nature of the symbols (letters) making up a word. In Shri Kaser's view the Isco rock shelter was an ideal site for pedagogous instruction to students. His opinion is that the Isco symbols are of a proto-Brahmi nature and the question is asked why the Brahmi of Princep could not have had a more complete phonetic alphabet. It is also notable that in the research of Bulu Imam the Khovar curvilinear comb art or crescentals are claimed by him as the source of Brahmi letters (B.Imam, *Origin of Maheshwari Brahmi Script in the Crescental Khovar Tribal Totemic Signs*, B-235/2, 1999). Shri Kaser's scheme involves Hindi as the language of the script instead of Prakrit or Pali, and certainly not the Kurrukh (Oraon) language claimed by Asko Parpola as the language of the Indus script (Parpola, *Ibid.*, 160-175). Kaser also sees in the Isco Rockart eclipse, zodiacal interpretations, and the work of an advanced society familiar with astronomy and astrology. This is perhaps far removed from the origin of the art or writing in the manner of the hunters and foragers who were early agricultural societies learning the arts of agriculture and artisan crafts. However, Shri Kaser's research requires to be looked at carefully for further clues to the understanding of the riddle posed by the Isco Rockart.

It is very interesting to note that there is a tradition current among the nomadic Birhors of Hazaribagh— a hunter-gather tribe who lived until recently in leaf kumbas --- that the Rockart had been painted by their ancestors. They refuse to visit the painted shelters in the company of outsiders. These people will be seen as the oldest living palaeolithic race in the subcontinent and their evidence is crucial in better understanding the authors of the rock paintings. As a people the Birhors are comparable to the protoaustraloid Aboriginal of Australia who have a long tradition of rock-painting in the Central Australian desert, the Bushman of the Kalahari Desert in Namibia (whose ancestors painted the prehistoric Rockart of the Drakensberg Ranges of South Africa), and hence their testimony is to be treated with respect. Even today the Birhors are accomplished, if primitive, artists. The Birhors are a proto-Australoid Mundaric speaking people with their own Brahui dialect which has been a challenge for linguists, but it is clear that they are autochthonous if not negrito.

The claim of authorship on the epic mural scale animal art of the Mesolithic is by the proto-Dravidians, in particular the Oraon. The similarity of the Indus pictographs, both the painted pottery as well as the enigmatic "writing" of the steatite seals, with the Rockart of Isco and other sites in the upper Damodar valley asks for an explanation around the Meso-chalcolithic. This comes to us through the linguistic researches of Asko Parpola (*Decipherment of the Indus Script*, 1993) anthropological researches of J.H. Elfenbein (1955) which points to the perennial migration during that period of early sedentarization in southwestern Sindh and the Baluchi hill tracts which would form the pre-Harappan culture through its antecedents in Mehargarh (6500 B.C.) in a fully farming society with proclivities toward pastoralism. Thus we see the pastoral migrationism of post-Mesolithic societies using the Narmada river valley and valleys of the Satpuras for migrations from Sindh to Jharkhand where these people who were Brahui speakers of the Kurrukh language early on became the Oraons and Tirkis of Jharkhand and Maler an Malpahariyas of the Rajmahal hills of the Santal Parganas. All the while in this distant period of time six or eight thousand years back proto-Australoids like the Mundas and their linguistic kin the Birhors and other tribes wandered intermittently about Jharkhand, Sambalpur, Sundergarh, Bastar and the Maikal Hills through Bundelkhand to the Kaimur ranges. These peoples were the creators of much of the Rockart we find today in these regions. The setting is unique and ready for human emergence on the threshold of what would become "civilization" (much disputed idea). The upper basin of the Damodar in North Karanpura formed a glacial lake along which a pebbled shoreline is still found. Perhaps after several hundred thousands of years early fishing villages settled, Isco being one of these. The presence of pebble chopper tools suggests for Isco an antiquity comparable with Rivat in the Soan basin in Pakistan.

Megaliths were erected by the ancestors of the Mundas and Hos and their abandonment in regions now long since occupied by Bhuyas and other Bhumij people indicates their abandonment of these lands, title of ownership to which is written in their large *sasandiris* or megalithic burial grounds evident even up to today. (B. Imam, *Antiquarian Remains of North Jharkhand*, INTACH 2007). The other passing owners of the land were the great iron-smelting Asuras who had held out from the hilly bastion of Jharkhand against the enemies of the Kurus and whose vast heaps of iron slag bedew the ground from the Sone to the Suvarnarekha, and whose descendants would be all the metal-working kin of northern and middle Jharkhand from the bronze-casting Malhars of whom we have spoken, and the early iron working Sravaks of Manbhum who would be the earliest converts of the Jain Tirthankaras Lord Parasvanath and Lord Mahavira in the seventh century B.C. shortly after the Mahabharata war. The old megalithic sites have manifested chipped flake tools dated in Dresden (Palaeolithic in situ) to 3500 B.C. of flakes made in an earlier antiquity. It is interesting that the tradition of erecting stone memorials for the deceased is still a common tradition among the Hos, Mundas and Oraons. Chipped flake tools, megaliths and iron slag are also found in close proximity of six of our rock art sites (Raham, Khandar, Isco, Gonda, Sidpa, Thethangi). At Raham we have an industrial microlith site at Laranga and megalith site close to the Rockart. Immediately to the west of Raham is more iron slag and a row of Rockart sites on the Satpahar range (Satpahar I, II, III, IV). The lives of the rock painters and iron smelters is intertwined by the growth of the Chalcolithic cultures in between who developed bronze and plough agriculture and brought the Khovaras --- the painted rock caves --- from the high, forested, hill ranges to the pleasant little villages in the valleys.

Now those villages are threatened by the most massive displacement conceivable --- two thousand square kilometers of displacement threatens the entire range of the upper Damodar which harbours the most valuable coal resources in the country. Scores of villages have already been displaced despite the peoples' indigenous rights using the powerful mineral extraction Act of 1957 which has been used time and again ever since Nehru's time itself. This has completely destroyed the Lower Damodar and now the Upper Damodar and its peoples, their agriculture, forests and wildlife, are set to pay the heavy price for raising more fossil fuels to cause further Global Warming. Doublespeak is the order of the day as usual. Within the next twenty years over two hundred villages will disappear in coal mines. A single mine like NTPC's current Pankhri-Barwadih opencast coal mine (nine hundred feet deep, 17 sq. km area) is set to swallow eighteen villages and displace fourteen thousand villagers at a stroke, starting in December 2007. Similarly, the entire area to the north of Sidpa, Gonda and Raham Rockart will disappear in the huge Magadh opencast coal mine which is as big, to be followed shortly by another mine, Amrapalli. NTPC has four new mines in gear in the Valley. The earlier mines facing the Rockart sites of Thethangi, Saraiya, Khandar, of the south Satpahar range that started the North Karanpura Coalfields Project in 1986 (Piperwar, Ashoka-I, Ashoka-II) have already destroyed dozens of villages and hundreds of square kilometers have been traumatized. These modern machine-run coal mines employ few labour and go down to depths of 900 feet. To the east of the Satpahar range the Garhi river is being dammed for a super thermal power station to be built nearby and scores of villages and hundreds of archaeological sites will be lost. INTACH had applied to UNESCO in 1993 to ask for the valley to be declared as a threatened world heritage site. Since then reports have appeared consistently in the ICOMOS *Heritage at Risk* World Report on Monuments and Sites in Danger but this has led to nothing. Thrice we have raised the issue of indigenous rights violations at the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples in Geneva in July but it has led to nothing. Now we are disposed to accept the inevitable.

FINDINGS of the INTACH-IGNCA Rockart Survey

(notes made by Bulu Imam)

Isco Rockart

Name of the hill /site:-- Isco

Approach- Hazaibagh-Barkagoan-Napokhurdh- Barbaniya-Isco

Village- Isco

Block- Barkagoan, Dist-Hazaribagh

State-Jharkhand

Shelter—Painted, open air, cavern

Rock type—Granite-gneiss

Colorent—Hematite, kaolin

Flora & fauna---vegetation ,bushes, no wildlife.

Formation- Pre-Cambrian

Weathering effect—The rock art site less eroded

Vandalism - chalking work present

Measures-Immediate action should be taken to control further erosion from rain water.

Observation-A concrete platform made at the base of site. This type of activity must be stopped.

Measurements: Panel No.1: Length- 18'7" feet x Height 20' feet

Panel No.2: Length- 14'10" x Height 20' feet

Panel No.3: Length- 16'10" x Height 20' feet

Panel No.4: Length- 8'10" x Height 20' feet

This site occupies a strategic place in the corner of the union of the Sati Range with the Hazaribagh plateau, being on the southeastern corner of the upper trough or basin of the upper Damodar valley in Hazaribagh district. It is about 100 feet above the village in a natural gorge formed in a large expanse of rock. The site was brought to light by me in 1991. The eye-catching feature of the rockart is the wealth of geometric designs, with some animal drawings including wild cattle, rhinoceros (glypt), concentric circle, wheat-ear, zig-zag, deer, ponds or concentric rectangle, human figure, betel leaf, fish, marriage chouks, temple-form, Mother Goddess giving birth, kamaldhara, river, arcs, reticulated triangles, yoni triangle, hieroglyphic script, rayed sun, diamond, scorpion, betel, compound and enigmatic symbols, anthropomorphs and zoomorphs, spotted wheeled animal, lajja-gauri, triangle with arms (panda-baba), yakshi with swish (glypt), etc.

Worship: The Isco rockart is worshipped by the Mundas as Khovabara. There is a small opening at the left side which by tradition is the place where two Birhor brothers trapped in the cave behind it, having entered from the Marwateri cave side, were last heard when they told their companions to go away and leave them. Puja is also done on the extreme right hand panel at end of the painted shelter.

Material : It was believed that the Khovar was made of sandstone till recently when Hazaribagh State Geological Laboratory geologist has given the opinion that it may be composed of granite-gneiss

Other observations: Cup-holes (*Elfin-Mueller*) also sometimes called “ Post-holes” are found along the rock in front of the Khovar and petroglyphs made in the sandstone floor of the approach are made more recently by children , similar to other sites at Laranga and Khandar (see). The damage done by the cement flooring by the government agency in the Khovar was deplored.

Script: Dev Narayan Kasera of Hazaribagh has for several years been working on the Isco script. The idea of the Isco symbols being comparable with the Indus script was first brought to my notice shortly after the rockart was discovered, by my son Justin. We noted it in our book *Bridal Caves* (INTACH, 1995). Thereafter the matter languished until Kasera actively involved himself with studying the Isco symbols, which he claims represent the key to a proto-Brahmi script through which the Indus script itself can be deciphered. He was part of the present study group to Isco and gave examples of reading the Isco script on site.

Discovery: On 26th January two hand axes were found in the Isco painted shelter, one by Mrs.Philomina Imam, the other by Mrs.Elizabeth Imam.

Thethangi Rockart

Name of the hill /site:--Thethangi1&2

Approach--Barkagoan-Keradari –Tandwa-Laranga.M.School-Mandair-Kalyanpur mor-kuttcha road-Thethangi village-site

Village:--Thethangi

Block- Tandwa, Dist. Chatra

State--Jharkhand

Shelter—Painted, open air, cavern

Rock type—Sandstone(red)

Colorent—Hematite, yellow ocher ,kaolin

Flora &fauna--Full of vegetations ,bushes, wildlife reported.

Formation –Damuda series of lower Gondwana.

Lithology--Red sandstone, ironstone shale, limestone, clayey material,Pebbles of different colors.

Weathering effect-- Rock sites less eroded. salt formation occur.

Vandalism No. A place of worship of local tribes(Tana bhagath)

Observation-- A fissure is developed in middle of site. A portion of it dampen due to seepage of rain water. This site is adjacent to Thethangi1. Most of the painting has disappeared due to erosion. Some remaining paintings are hardly visible..

Measure-- A big site that should be protected from rain water. A portion of site may fall if immediate action is not taken.

Measurements: Panel No.1: Length- 15’feet x Height 20’feet

Panel No.2: Length- 10’ x Height 20’ feet

Panel No.3: Length- 15’ x Height 20’ feet

The site is about 300 feet above the plain. This site is on the southern face of the Satpahar range and to its west side a few kilometers apart are two more important rockart sites, Saraiya and Khandar. The sites were brought to light by me in the mid 1990s. Below the rock-art was the remains of an old fort which was recently destroyed by a new railway line of the coalfields. The

shelter is typical of central Indian sites with a wide overhang, and it overlooks a ravine on a steep slope of the hill-side.

Motifs:-It has the motifs common with the region and a large number of specific forms like chouks, tree of life, trident, honey-comb, sun-in-oval, owl, deer, marriage chouk, reticulated triangle, human figure, frogs in numbers, animal forms, cupules concentric circle in square, concentric rectangles, vertical lines in square, square with triangle, panda baba (triangle with arms), enigmatic motifs, symbols in squares.

Naag ka Swaar: This curious rock formation in the shape of an upraised cobra hood, with six small cobra hoods along its upper portion (formed by erosion) is worshipped by the local Tana Bhagats as *Naag ka Swaar*. A puja takes place here on 2nd February each year.

Local population: The local population of the South Satpahar region is mainly Oraon: Saonsar animists, Tana Bhagats, and Roman Catholics.

Megaliths: There is an important megalithic site containing about twentyfive megaliths at the foot of the Satpahar range in Bandey Bhagat's house. The tallest of these is over eight feet in length. (See Khandar).

New Rockart observations: On the top left of the left hand panel the bull form I had drawn earlier in naturalistic form was found to be a geometrical form similar to the forms drawn during Sohrai in Bhelwara, and also an Indus form. (ii) Similar rectangular (comb) forms have been noted in Satpahar IV (discovered during this tour by Mrs Philomina Imam) in a backward-glancing deer (see Satpahar IV) (iii) Spotting in squares was noted at top of the rockart panel. (iv) a cow was noted to right of owl in right hand panel. It is similar to the form painted in village Khovar and Sohrai paintings (i.e. Putli cow).

New rockart discovery: Dr. Hitendra Anupam found some symbols, including sun, in the extension of the shelter to the left side some distance away.

Worship: Thetrhangi has been a site which has traditionally been worshipped like many of the other rockart sites in the Satpahars, by the Tana Bhagats.

Damage: Names have been written in charcoal in large letters on the right side of the shelter, and chalk markings have also been made. These require to be removed.

Stairway to the site: It is learned that the district administration (Chatra) is planning to build a stairway to the site. Earlier, funds had been allotted for the protection of the site. INTACH has written to the administration that the work be entrusted either to INTACH or the Archaeology section of the State culture department, Jharkhand, and not to government contractors as this could lead to damage of the site as earlier happened in the Isco rock shelter.

Satpahar I, II, III & IV

Name of the hill / site:-- Satpahar, I, II, III, & IV

Approach--Barkagoan-Keradari –Tandwa-Laranga-Mandai mor –Shiruha mandair-rock site.

Village: Shiruha mandair.

Block- Tandwa, Dist. Chatra

State-Jharkhand

Shelter—Painted, open air, cavern

Rock type—Sandstone(red)

Colorent—Hematite, yellow ocher ,kaolin

Flora& fauna---Full of vegetation ,bushes, wildlife reported.

Formation –Damuda series of lower Gondwana.

Lithology-Red sandstone, ironstone shale, limestone, clayey material,Pebbles of different colors.

Weathering effect- Rock sites are eroded. salt formation occur.

Vandalism NO .

Observation- This is a beautiful site, difficult to reach An elongated fissure is present in between two blocks.

Measure- Site that should be protected from rain water and .Fissure must filled by cementing materials. Satpahar IV is a new discovery, difficult to reach .one or two paintings present.

Note- Satpahar 2,3&4 are in continuation.

Measurements: Satpahar I Length 12'feet x Height 8' feet

Satpahar II Length 15' feet x Height 6' feet

Satpahar III length 10' feet x Height 7' feet

These three sites are in large, separate rock shelters standing out boldly from the back of the north-south facing Satpahar Range of hills in the western part of the upper Damodar valley in the Chatra district and were formerly in the Hazaribagh district. They were brought to light in the mid 1990s by me. They are small shelters, and had been dated by Erwin Neumayer to the Mesolithic period (1993-4) and the lines in deep purple haematite of the wild animals depicted are vivid and massive. The individual shelters depict as follows,

Satpahar-I: Motifs:- Rectangular motifs, reticulated triangles, line of large running animals including deer, stockinged bison or Gaur (Indian Bison , *Bos gaurus*) having X-Ray in stomach area, Sambhur (*Cervus unicolor*), etc.

Satpahar-II: Motifs:-A large panel depicting hunters with bows, hunting wild bison (*Bos gaurus*), wild cattle, rhinoceros, and other animals; another panel shows tiger and tigress with wild boar; a third large panel shows a group of wild animals including two wild Bison, and Nilgai (male & female). The drawings are large and accurate. It is one of the best wild animal drawings of the area.

Satpahar-III :- Motifs:- Line of running spotted deer or Cheetal (*Axis axis*)

New observations and findings: cup-holes (or “post-holes) found in a row on floor of Satpahar I by Julian and Yvonne June. Dia. Of cup-holes 17cm. Antlers with tines were noted on the second deer from right side, so it is not a bison (gaur) as earlier thought. This also changes its relationship with the animal in front of it which is a bison (white stockings). In

Satpahar II some new markings were noted. Satpahar III was unchanged and no new observations to be added to my original observations.

Discovery of new rockart: Mrs Philomina Imam discovered a new rockart at what is now named Satpahar IV. This is immediately around the bend from Satpahar III with its racing deer and tribal cross, going west. The entire large sandstone wall must have once been painted and is now but a shadow of itself, the shelter roofs having crumbled and erosion scarred the face of the rock. Satpahar IV presents us with three animal forms, all of deer. A large one in geometric shape with head turned backward and antlers pointing downward depict the typical posture of a deer browsing on leaves above its head. A similar backward-glancing deer had been found in the Raham and Gonda rockart shelters but in naturalistic form (see Raham, Gonda). Such back-ward glancing animal forms, are found again in the painted pottery of the Indus valley. Since the rockart of the Satpahar ranges is vastly older than Indus precedence falls to us as the earlier cultural expression, also strengthening the claim of the Indus forms having their root sources in Central-East Indian rock painting. Two more much smaller deer forms in more naturalistic mode are found to the right. All the forms are painted in lignite (yellow).

New observation: We have noted in Thethangi the rectangular animal form in Meso-Chalcolithic rockart. It is here in Satpahar with the enigmatic “backward-glancing deer” that this form should be found in such close company with realistically drawn racing deer in Satpahar III immediately near it. It points to the possibility that the Mesolithic and Chalcolithic could have been converging around this time, and that they cover a similar range over vastly separated periods. (see note on rockart, Thethangi). We may consider the evolution of animal art from the naturalistic forms painted by the Mesolithic hunters, and the stylized forms painted by the Chalcolithic people. The rectangular animal form would be commonly found in the Indus and we may consider this evolution of such early rock painting traditions to the Indus painted pottery. Such comparative studies may better help us to reconstruct the lost lifeways of our indigenous peoples who are being forced into displacement and cultural extinction and fast disappearing due to government development projects such as mining of their lands and forests.

Khandar Rockart

Name of the hill /site:-- Khandar

Approach--Barkagoan-Keradari –Tandwa-Laranga –Mandair-Kalyanpur mor-Thethangi-Saraiya-Khandar village- Nav jagriti primary school-site.

Village: Khandar.

Block- Tandwa, Dist. Chatra

State-Jharkhand

Shelter—Painted, open air, cavern

Rock type—Sandstone(red)

Colorent—Hematite, yellow ocher, kaolin

Flora & fauna---Full of vegetation, bushes, wildlife reported.

Formation –Damuda series of lower Gondwana.

Lithology-Red sandstone, ironstone shale, limestone, clayey material, Pebbles of different colors.

Weathering effect- Rock sites are heavily eroded. salt formation occur.

Vandalism NO . A place of worship of local tribes(Tana Bhagat)

Observation- Difficult to reach. A river is situated at the base of rock art site.

Measure- Site that should be protected from rain water.

Note It is longer way to reach . Better way to reach through Satpahar4 because it is situated 500 meter away from Satpahar.

Measurements: Panel No.1: Length 15'feet x Height 6' feet

Panel No.2: Length 15' feet x Height 8' feet

Khandar is a site set between gorges in the southern flank of Satpahar range beside a small gully. Erwin Neumayer found in it a butterfly painted in red haematite and white ochre. It is a few miles west of Thethangi rock-art site.

Motifs:-It manifests the box with human figures similar to the Muria Dhankul genesis wall-paintings, and boxes containing small objects resembling vertical stones; other motifs include concentric circles, chouks and oval with cross, boxes with zig-zag lines, deer, strings of circles similar to aripans made on floor of house to welcome cattle; circles in square boxes; butterfly, vertical rows of circles, human figure, etc.

Worship: Khandar is a sacred site of the Tana Bhagats like Raham and Thethangi. The Khandar rock shelter is about 400 yards from Satpahar II, III, IV.

New observations: Some new forms were noted: spotting in the top left hand; a cupule in the stone which has been circled with haematite having traces of blue colour. Blue colour was noted in parts of the panel just below the butterfly in the right-hand panel, etc.

Discovery: A stone slab of half inch thicknes and 4" x 4" size with the letter Ka in Devnagri was found by Juliet in the rubble of the road in the hills about a kilometer and half from the painted shelter. It was duly noted as a significant find by archaeologists present.

Territorial Boundary:Khandar rock shelter falls into the territory of Khandar village about five kilometers to the south in the plains, while a few hundred yards away Satpahar I, II, II, are considered the property of the villagers of Mandair village and its tolas on the other side of the range to the east.

Megalithic habitation site: Between Khandar and Saraiya village a large expanse of rock has rows of post-holes (cup-holes), approximately 17 cm in dia. Petroglyphs have been cut into the flat stone similar to what has been observed in Isco and Larange (see Isco, Laranga), much of it being the work of tribal children, some obviously of megalithic antiquity. This site is of interest since it is close to the Khandar, Saraiya and Thethangi rockart sites, and the cluster of megaliths in Bandy Bhagat's compound in Thethangi. (See Thethangi)

Saraiya Rockart

Name of the hill /site:-- Saraiya

Approach--Barkagoan-Keradari –Tandwa-Laranga –Mandair-Kalyanpur mor-Thethangi-Saraiya.

Village: Saraiya

Block- Tandwa, Dist. Chatra

State-Jharkhand

Shelter—Painted, open air, cavern

Rock type—Sandstone(red)

Colorent—Hematite, yellow ocher, kaolin

Flora & fauna---Full of vegetation, bushes, wildlife reported.

Formation –Damuda series of lower Gondwana.

Lithology-Red sandstone, ironstone shale, limestone, clayey material, Pebbles of different colors.

Weathering effect- Rock sites is painted on previously eroded sandstone formation.

Vandalism NO .

Observation- Difficult to reach. The site is situated on the south east facing hill side of the Satpahar range

Measure- Site that should be protected from rain water.

Single panel 8 feet in length and 5 feet height crammed with anthropomorphs and zoomorphs in red/orange coloured haematite. It is now in Chatra district. The site was discovered with Erwin Neumayer and my son Justin in 1993. Erwin found it by a sound guess after we had visited Thethangi rock-art and were on our way to Khandar rock-art. It is situated between the twain a small eyrie perched about 350 feet high on a promontory overlooking the plain . In the opinion of Erwin it is among the oldest and best preserved of the early Mesolithic painted shelters having numerous small anthropomorphs and zoomorphs.

Motifs:- The horned deity appears for the first time, in many forms; fish, diamond, tree of life, wheat-ear, animal and plants, grasshopper, frogs, hatched animal figures, spotted insect and animal figures, monkey, suns, triangle with zig-zag horns; bison; etc.

Saraiya rock shelter is poised in a difficult situation on the Satpahar range overlooking the village of the same name. Descent to the shelter is difficult with a perpendicular drop of several hundred feet. The shelter is only five feet wide, eight feet in length and five feet in height. It is a tiny shelter with surface of tiny cupules highly eroded covered with tiny zoomorphs and anthropomorphs in light red haematite and shows work of a single period of time only. In the opinion of Erwin Neumayer it is the oldest painted shelter in the Satpahar range so far found.

Raham Rockart

Name of the hill /site:--Raham

Approach--Barkagoan-Keradari –Tandwa-Laranga- Raham

Village:--Raham

Block- Tandwa, Dist. Chatra

State-Jharkhand

Shelter—Painted, open air, cavern

Rock type—Sandstone(red)

Colorent—Hematite, yellow ocher ,kaolin

Flora & fauna---Full of vegetations ,bushes, wildlife reported.

Formation –Damuda series of lower Gondwana.

Lithology-Red sandstone, ironstone shale, limestone, clayey material, Pebbles of different colors.

Weathering effect- Rock sites less eroded. salt formation occur.

Vandalism No. A place of worship of local tribes(Tana Bhagat)

Observation- The Rockart is in fairly good condition with some animal forms and large number of geometrical forms.

Measure- Conservation measures may be taken.

Measurements: Length- 13' feet x Height 15' feet

The site consists of a single large panel of 13 feet length and 15 feet height. Situated on level ground opposite the little village of Mandair it is in the Chatra district now. It presents the best example of the more recent period of the rock-art and consists of elaborate squares or chouks painted in red haematite. It seems that there is a message being conveyed by these chouks and would be a subject of further study.

Site note: This shelter is very sacred to the Tana Bhagats. They believe that during the Tana Bhagat Movement their elders hid in this cave and that some of the symbols were painted by them. As a local rockart living tradition this information is very valuable. Even now these Bhagats are the best people to protect the rockart of the Satpahars which they regularly visit and offer puja to.

New Observations: Some more animals have been found in the rockart, one having spotting, and the symbols have to be redrawn.

General observations: (i) The animal forms in yellow (lignite) and crimson-red (haematite) exist, but there are (a) an earlier purely red (haematite) drawing from the Mesolithic age (7000B.C.) and (b) the yellow (lignite) is generally believed to be from a later period Chalcolithic (5000-3000 B.C.)

(ii) That the animal forms may be divided into two (a) the early Mesolithic animal forms painted in red (haematite), and those painted later in yellow (lignite) during the Chalcolithic.

(iii) That the realistic portrayals of animals in haematite (and some times yellow (lignite), as in Satpahar III, are the work of the early hunters of the Mesolithic period, but that they are some times found in close association with the non-realistic animal forms (i.e. rectangular/comb figures) of the later Chalcolithic (i.e. Satpahar IV), when stylization had entered, and this period manifests an abundance of geometrical forms such as found at Isco, Raham, Thethangi, Etc. Nutangwa is a good example of the art of the Mesolithic animal painters. (see note in Nutangwa Pahar)

(iv) That reticulated triangles painted in yellow (lignite) regularly found in the art of the animal painters of the Mesolithic (see Satpahar I.), are found in Raham in a level that may represent Chalcolithic painted motifs and have been found.

(v) The backward-glancing animal has been found in both natural form as in Gonda (see Gonda), and in stylized form in Satpahar IV (see Satpahar IV).

(vi) That the Raham rockart uses much yellow (lignite) as well as white (kaolin) with some red (haematite)

(vii) That the geometrical forms are more apparent in the rock shelters closer to the valley and plains which hold the villages, whereas the animal forms of the Mesolithic are up in the inaccessible forested hills.

(viii) That the people who painted both the Mesolithic animal art and the Chalcolithic geometric forms are the same, and that the present populations of autochthones in the villages (i.e. Kurmali, Munda, Oraon, etc.) are definitely their descendants.

Sidpa Rockart

Name of the hill /site:-- Sidpa

Approach- Hazaibagh-Barkagoan-Keradari-Tandwa-Tandwa college-Gonda-Sidpa

Village:- Sidpa

Block- Tandwa, Dist-Chatra, **State-**Jharkhand

Shelter—Painted, open air, cavern

Rock type—Sandstone(red)

Colorent—Hematite, kaolin

Flora &fauna---Full of vegetation ,bushes, wildlife reported.

Formation –Damuda series of lower Gondwana.

Lithology-Red sandstone, ironstone shale, limestone

Weathering effect—The rock art site less eroded

Vandalism No. A place of worship of local tribes(Tana Bhagat)

Measures-Immediate action should be taken to control further erosion from rain water.

Observation- A beautiful site. It should be developed as a tourist site.

Measurements: Length 20'feet x Height 15' feet

Situated on the north side of Satpahar range (opposite side of the range from Thethangi) the site faces north-west about seventy-five feet above the plain. Nearby are the remains of a Buddhist chaitya. The panel has shown itself to be repeated in some stone blocks in the remains including a bull on tether and other motifs. The motifs are as follows going from left to right:-

Motifs:- concentric square, temple, square with zig-zag,reticulated triangles, monkey in box; zig-zag river with trees,similar to present tribal motifs; striding bull, wavy lines with cupules similar to present harvest paintings;chouks of different types; stick figures, elephant, deer head, enigmatic arches, figure in box, etc.

Megaliths: There are two megalith sites at Sidpa. These are on the north side in the fields beside the road opposite the Khovar on the boundary of the proposed NTPC coal mine, about 400 yards apart.The western site has about a dozen megaliths, one having 20 cupules. The eastern site has 14 megaliths. There is a flat stone dedicated to the mother goddess under a Mohwa tree at the site. The local people call the megaliths Maithaan, or “Mother’s place”.

New rockart reported: Two new painted rockart shelters have been reported by one Ram Kumar Karmali of Sidpa village, these being southeast of the painted shelter at a place in the Satpahar hills called Chetri, perhaps Satpahar II and III.

New rockart discovered: Two new painted shelters were discovered in the continuation of the Sidpa shelter some distance away (now named Sidpa-II,III), one by Dr.A.H.Ansari, the other by Mrs.Philomina Imam. The panel found by Dr.Ansari contains a large number of animals and is contemporaneous with the earlier discovered shelter. The panel found by Mrs.Philomina Imam contains enigmatic spotted outline of deer and ritual marks. Yellow lignite has been used in painting. Drawings of both panels were made by me. Animals include deer, bison, blackbuck antelope, wild boar, elephant, tiger, deer and peacock .This is the second peacock found in our crockart, the other being found by Philomina in Raham).Chalk vandalism requires to be removed from the old shelter.Erosion and seepage was noted, the cause for damage to the I and II sites. On the old painted shelter some new forms were noted, most importantly that there are 3 striding bulls, not one.

Carved stone blocks: It had been noted that a short distance from the megaliths opposite the rockart on the road towards Tandwa carved stone blocks of large size had been gathered, and it was conjectured also that these may have been part of a Buddhist stupa or temple dating back to the Mauryan period. About half of these have been recently removed by the villagers and taken somewhere close by where a temple is being built. Some of the blocks have been damaged including the panel of a striding bull almost exactly the same as the one found in the rock painting at Sidpa. On the portion of the broken stone block that remains on the site only the head, bell and foreleg of the bull is found. The other part is missing and may have been moved to the above place. **Search for new**

Rockart sites: The team was of the view that a thorough search should be made to find new painted rockart sites in the Satpahar range (20 km X 15 km), and that it be proposed as a Biosphere site and cultural site to UNESCO. At least this may protect it from predatory mineral and ore exploitation by vested interests.

Gonda Rockart

Name of the hill /site:-- Gonda

Approach- Hazaibag- Barkagoan-Keradari-Tandwa-Tandwa college-Gonda

Village:- old Gonda

Block- Tandwa, Dist-Chatra

State-Jharkhand

Shelter—Painted, open air, cavern

Rock type—Sandstone(red)

Colorent—Hematite, kaolin

Flora & fauna---Full of vegetation ,bushes, wildlife reported.

Formation –Damuda series of lower Gondwana.

Lithology-Red sandstone, ironstone shale, limestone

Weathering effect- Rock sites eroded. salt formation occur.

Vandalism No. A place of worship of local tribes.

Measures-Immediate action should be taken to control further erosion from rain water.

Measurements: Length 20'feet x Height 15' feet

In the same side of the Satpahar range as Sidpa, in the district of Chatra. Small hollows (elfin-mueller) are found in the floor of the shelter. Motifs:- deer, wild boar, running pair of tigers, elephant, backward-glancing deer, running wild boar, etc.

Notes: This shelter was visited the same day after Sidpa. Gonda contains deer, boar, tiger, elephant, backward-glancing deer, etc. Other backward-glancing deer has been found in the new rockart discovered by Mrs.Philomina Imam at Satpahar IV. (see Satpahar IV) The condition of the rockart was unchanged since last noted. Gonda has a beautiful view to the north. Unfortunately this will look directly over the Magadh opencast coal mine to be developed by NTPC from December 2007.

Nautangwa Pahar

Name of the hill /site:-- Nautangwa1&2

Approach--Barkagoan-Keradari Block-Motorable road- Kuttcha road- river-pagdandi

Village:- Keradari

Block- Keradari, Dist-Hazaribagh

State-Jharkhand

Shelter—Painted, open air, cavern

Rock type—Sandstone(red)

Colorent—Heamatite, yellow ocher, kaolin

Flora &fauna--Full of vegetation ,bushes, wildlife reported.

Formation –Damuda series of lower Gondwana.

Lithology-Red sandstone, ironstone shale, limestone

Weathering effect- Rock sites less eroded. salt formation occur.

Vandalism- No. A place of worship of local tribes.

Measures-Immediate action should be taken to control further erosion from rain water.

Observation- An excellent rock art painting site. It should be developed as a natural museum. This site show sign of disappearance due to heavy erosion by rain water. Rock painting are made on contact rock (sandstone with limestone).

Measurements: Panel No.1: Length- 15'feet x Height-20' feet

Panel No.2: Length- 15'feet x Height-20' feet

This site is in the Hazaribagh district and was brought to light in 2001 by my second son Jason ,and Ms Neelima Prasad who has just completed PhD from Kala Bhavana (BHU) on *Rock-art and village paintings of Hazaribag*:. The rock-shelter is located in a spectacular mountain in the Mahadeva Range running east to west through the upper Damodar valley spouth-east of Keradari and overlooking the village of Salgah from some 500 feet height. The shelter faces west.It is perhaps the most interesting panels and in the four mandalas in the second part of the panel in the top row are three one after another, with conspicuous features; crescents appear within with doorways at top and bottom indicating a sacred space; crescents and cupules are associated with the mandalas; in this panel are a deer with chouk in x-ray in belly, woman holding crescent with arms up-raised; frogs The space is filled with deer drawn realistically, pregnant femalke forms, rectangles, figure holding butterfly, figure holding crescent superimposed by deer; various human anthropomorphs with crescents in rectangles; stick figures holding crescents; Indian Bison (*Bos gaurus*) and deer with X-ray mandalas and stick-figures; many interesting chouks; woman chasing child; hunter with bow -and-arrow shooting deer; hunters with bow-and-arrow shooting wild boar; large animal forms, concentric rectangles, spotted rectangles; hand-stamps.

Note: The two painted shelters of Nautangwa, set high on the shoulder of the Nautangwa hill range to the east of the Satpahars in the complex of what have been called the Mahudi ranges by me, are the best example of the art of the animal painters yet found in Hazaribagh. The shelter has a grand panoramic view to the north. (See note in Raham). Some new forms were noted such as wild boar, etc.

New rockart reported: (i) Bigan Bhuiya of Keradari reported two new rockart sites at Pachparwa, about four kilometers north-east of Nautangwa Pahar rockart. (ii)Another new painted shelter was reported at Neeri to the west of the Nautangwa rockart shelter.

The Nautangwa rock shelter was measured on GPS to approximately ten kilometers from the highway at Keradari.

Other rockart sites in the area: On the way to Nautangwa Pahar in the hills to the left many shelters may be seen, some of which could contain paintings. A thorough search would bring to light several new painted shelters in the Mahudi, Nautangwa, and other ranges of the upper Damodar (40 km X 25 km)

Laranga

The Laranga microlithic industry site was discovered by Erwin Neumayer in my company in the summer of 1993. It has large deposits of white quartz industrial megaliths though several chipped flake tools have been collected from the site. Lines of cup-holes (post-holes) have been found over the large extended rock surface overlooking a high promontory in a bend on the Garhi river, which after the dam is built will be the foreshore bank of a vast dam submerging dozens of tribal hamlets and their cultural and archaeological heritage between Satpahar and Nautangwa Pahar ranges. On the rock at Laranga large petroglyphs have been sculpted by early man some new copies being made by the tribal children in of a new settlement nearby (see Khandar, Isco).

Observation in Conclusion

The landscape of the western North Karanpura Valley has undergone drastic changes since the Piperwar and Ashok mines began nearly two decades back. Therthangi and Saraiya have been devastated by the new loop railway being built to Mangardaha washery which has displaced the settlements of the Tana Bhagats under the Rockart and destroyed the remains of a second century fort and large area of Palaeolithic to Iron age remains. The mining has turned the gentle forested landscape which here flanked the left bank of the Damodar river into over a hundred square kilometers of coal mines over five hundred feet deep. It has uprooted dozens of villages. The process is now going to be repeated in Barkagaon where the Punkri-Barwadi mine is due to begin in 2007 December in the hands of NTPC. On the north side of the Satpahar range another huge opencast coal mine called Magadh is already being measured for commencement of mining by NTPC. A Super Thermal Power Station and dam on the Garhi river will displace scores of villages. Another big mine, Amrapalli, adjacent to Magadh, has received environmental clearance. Thus is the cultural, archaeological, environmental and human heritage of the North Karanpura Valley being destroyed in what the government calls “bringing development” to people.

When the Magadh mine begins shortly it will gouge out the earth to a depth of hundreds of feet immediately opposite the Sidpa and Gonda painted rock shelters. The many megalithic sites and vast remains of stone statuary from ancient periods in the region will simply disappear. This is said to be necessary in order to develop the area. The dam on the Garhi will submerge the landscape between the Satpahar Range to the west and the Nautangwa Pahar range in the east, both repositories of the finest rockart sites in eastern India. The cultural landscape of the autochthones who carry in them the genius of their ancestors who made these rock paintings, the first authors of the unwritten history of proto-historic India, will simply be wiped out. It is a crime for which unborn generations of Indians will have to pay. The NTPC power plant is designed to supply electricity out of the state. In the east of the valley a similar game will be played in the new mines coming up in Chatti-Bariatu, Keredari, Punkri-Barwadi covering

40,000 acres , destroying 19 villages, displacing over 14,000 families in Punkri-Barwadih mine alone (for which NTPC was given clearance by the Union Coal Ministry in Oct. 2004), and Badam where another NTPC Super Thermal Power Plant is being built with captive mines and another big dam on the Barki river. Seven new mining companies are coming into the North Karanpura Valley at one time, they are: National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), Barwadih Coal Mining Project, Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC), AMTA, NICO-Jayaswal, Abhijit Group Co., Central Coalfields Limited. The villagers, in an attempt to lay claim on the lands which are acquired under the Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development) Act, 1957 have started to raise the coal and coke it by primitive open-air methods, then ferry it by cycle to local town markets. The result of this is a heavy smoke screen engulfing the once pure valley and creating a toxic health hazard of monoxide gas. The mining of NTPC is slated to go ahead on schedule. Central Industrial Security Force jawans are being called in by April and violence is bound to erupt .

Hundreds of square kilometers of mines over three hundred metres deep shoulder to shoulder stand to destroy the entire North Karanpura Valley. Desertification and mining will change the natural, social and cultural landscape of the entire area. In what has been called the “rice bowl of Hazaribagh”, the Barkagaon valley will disappear into a network of mine pits and thousands upon thousands of acres of the best rice and crop-lands of the district will be destroyed for ever. Satpahar range will remain an island between Piperwar, Ashoka I and II to the south and Magadh and Amrapalli mines to the north. The Garhi dam sinking the heritage of early man in Karanpura and Laranga microlithic site may become a fishing village. North Karanpura was once a lake in the ice ages. A new industrial landscape is emerging before our eyes. The rockart sites in the high hills may not be long left lonesome as hungry miners greedy for ores and minerals find their way up its scarps and valleys. The tribals, like the Aborigines of Australia or the Indian in North America, will hide in the backwoods and witness another Thanksgiving in the name of development. The tribal people will be destroyed and become extinct like the Aboriginal and the Indian.

Remedial Measures

The rockart sites may be declared as protected monuments under the Union government’s “Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958” or the State government’s “The Bihar Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites, Remains and Treasure Act 1976” effective in Jharkhand at present.

Local bodies such as Panchayats can fence the area by barbed-wire with watch and ward staff to maintain the sites within its rights and jurisdiction as the heritage preservation is also one of its constitutional duties as per the 73rd Constitutional amendments and the corresponding XI schedule.

Presently large sums of money are being given by the State government to district administrations to develop the archaeological sites. This needs to be stopped and the proper archaeological expertise in the field (ASI, IGNCA, INTACH) should be awarded the work.

All large scale destructive development projects such as Coal mines, big dams, and Super Thermal Power Projects in rockart areas should be put on hold till such time proper mandatory archaeological clearance is obtained from the State and Central authorities.

Bulu Imam

04th March, 2007

APPENDIX- III

Paper submitted for conference at

XXIV Valcamonica Symposium

Art and Communication in Pre-literate societies

Capo di Ponte, July 13 to 18, 2011

ANIMALS IN THE ROCK ART OF HAZARIBAGH

By Bulu Imam

Introduction

A recent examination of early remains in the immediate vicinity of the cave paintings of Hazaribagh in the hill ranges flanking the Damodar valley has provided further evidence of the fact that hunters and food gatherers were the earliest people known to have existed on Indian soil. Moreover, their presence is attested not only by their stone tools and other implements, but also, after a given date, by their rock paintings and rock engravings. Historians and linguists are shy to call these writing or the documents which give body to history and so the people who made them are relegated to prehistory. But this is unfair since the paintings of animals would have been having names and formed part of the speech of the people who made these drawings, hence giving them meaning, and therefore historical place. Similarly for the engravings and forms other than of animals such as geometrical forms and designs, plants and animals. These paintings to me are a firm historical document and the first historical statement made by man in India. At the same time each picture is a valuable document on the earliest manifestation of Indian art.

The majority of these rock art sites are to be found from Central India, such as Chhatisgarh, eastwards through the rock paintings of Jharkhand and Orissa. To the west they are connected to the rock paintings of the Vindhya such as Bhimbetka, and Raisen and then through Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and other states where the Mesolithic hunters left their markings on stone. These sites depict wild animals painted by these hunters and the bows and axes used by them, as well as their traps and snares, and in the rock art of the Damodar valley south of the Hazaribagh plateau in North Jharkhand we find such paintings in large numbers. The difference with other similar sites is that no domestic animals have been painted in the rock art which clearly shows a pre-agricultural phase, and where geometrical designs do appear (which would be in the agricultural) there also no domestic animals are found. This shows the art to be of a purely hunting stage when man was still living a nomadic life and living in caves or leaf shelters, the latter being a form of housing used by the nomadic Birhor tribals of Hazaribagh. These tribals claim the rock art in the caves were painted by their ancestors. They still make drawings on enforced government housing, where the drawings are directly comparable with the rock caves. Bird traps and hunting nets, sticks and wild animals in flight, and other smaller birds and animals are all depicted in a familiar resemblance to the rock paintings in the jungles alongside the open spaces where they make their leaf dwellings called Kumba. These encampments are called Tandas. They still hunt with

the same long nets called Jhali and small noose traps called Phandi. Their drawings were brought by me to paper from the mid 1990s and a considerable collection is in my archive. In the rock art of Hazaribagh and the new district of Chatra recently carved out of it the typical hunting scenes such as animals at rest or flight, and some times in confrontation with the hunters during the hunt. These hunters are shown armed with bows which is of interest since the Birhors, being trappers, do not use bows, although they do use a short axe called *Kulhari*, to kill trapped game. The interesting thing is the forms of unidentifiable objects in flowery exuberance or meaningless abstractions in their paintings which are comparable with the rock paintings.



Birhors with their catch (Old photo 1970s 1990s)



Birhor trappers with nets, Sultana



Birhor child drawings



Birhor tribals in traditional leaf dwellings



Birhor painting on govt. housing

Unlike the rock art of Central India the Hazaribagh rock art has no depiction of domesticated animals or plough animals in yoke or men carrying things in baskets (Bhangi), or religious practices related to the sedentarized agricultural period. There are no dancers adorned with horns and feathers or masks, or engaged with fighting animals or offering them worship as has been found in other rock art sites in India. Further, I will later deal with the special attribute of the Hazaribagh rock art being its connection with a living village mural painting tradition in the villages in the jungles directly beside these painted shelters.



A Ganju tribal house painted with animals in the Sobrai style near the rockart of Isco in Hazaribagh



A Kurmi tribal house near the rockart painted with animals in the Khovar style

The Mesolithic rock art of Hazaribagh is a definite stage in the evolution of early Indian society because the agricultural society's practices seems unrelated with the rock paintings, the agricultural practices not being portrayed, pointing out a stage of sedentarized society at a point when rock painting by the Mesolithic hunters had ended. Yet there is another interesting development in the connection between the post Mesolithic rockart motifs and in particular symbols and forms connected with the sedentarized period appearing and having direct counterpart in the harvest wall paintings of the villagers today. We find the form of a wheeled

and spotted animal to the right of the central panel of Isco rockart. Similar wheeled and spotted animals are painted on the walls of the village houses during the Sohrai harvest festival during October.



*Similar contemporary figure by Kurmi tribals in
Bhelwara for the Sohrai harvest mural painting*

*Isco rockart wheeled and spotted figure
(Chalcolithic)*

In several of the painted shelters we find the strings of circles representing hoof-prints of cattle which are still painted during the harvest festival of Sohrai to welcome the cattle. At the same time the walls of the mud village houses are painted with huge murals of the spotted cattle (called Ghoda) which are mounted by a horned deity called Pashupati (Lord of Animals). The link between the rock art and the village paintings is thus unmistakable.

That the nomadic Birhor survived in all his primitiveness into the twenty-first century is also a wonder, and important because these people are non-agricultural except for a very tiny number who had long back settled and are known as Jagghis. The Birhor could have been the painters of the rock art up to fairly recent times, even if some of the earlier rock paintings done

by the hunters were done thousands of years back by their ancestors who were Mesolithic hunters, and the more recent diagrammatic and ritual paintings done by the ancestors of the villagers who live in the open fields beside their encampments. The practice of rock painting by any of the other tribes would have definitely not lasted later than the iron age which would mean it did not reach the Jain or Buddhist *sravaks* or disciples, otherwise we should have found images of their saints.

Much may be learned from closely observing the rock paintings in the so far discovered fourteen painted shelters. For example the white stockings on the deer in the Satpahar ranges points to an ice age which affected the region perhaps more than ten thousand years back. The scratched glypt of a rhinoceros on the left end of the Isco panel and the Yakshi with fly-whip a hundred feet distant at the other end of the long panel, clearly points to the Mauryan period over two thousand years ago when rhinoceros was found in the grasslands of the Damodar, and Yakshis used fly-whisks in the Mauryan court in Patliputra three hundred kilometers to the north! Strangely no peafowl have been found in the rock art, nor jungle fowl of any kind. Peafowl are common in Central Indian rock paintings. One butterfly has been found in Khandar. Animals found include the wild buffalo, tiger, deer of various kinds, Nilgai and Four-horned antelope (*Chowsingha*), hyaena, jackal, wild boar.

It will seem the Mesolithic rock paintings are preceded by an even earlier level of voodoo art which has queer looking anthropomorphs and zoomorphs many of which appear today in the Birhor drawings, and point to the distinction between the hunter-gatherer and Mesolithic hunter, since the ancestors of the hunter-gatherer may have been a parallel advanced society living in leaf huts while the even more primitive hunters roamed in the jungles and lived in caves. These people may have had bows which had replaced stone tools used in hunting. If the animal art is in fact preceded by these half animal, half human, half plant drawings such as found in the rock art of Saraiya we shall have an interesting field before us indeed! Such zoomorphs and anthropomorphs appear in very primitive rock art in Australia and which during the 1980s Lesley Maynard identified and applied the nomenclature **Panaramittee Style**. This style consists of simple silhouette forms and primary motifs (no outline) including bird-tracks and animal tracks. It is of note that this silhouette art has been found all over the world showing how ancient it is, and in greatest density in regions where it is believed to have started – such as the Australian continent – and perhaps now we may say in primitive India! The style is silhouette in form and corresponds closely to the Saraiya rock art motifs and also to the black sgraffito motifs which are comb cut in Khovar village murals in Hazaribagh, also shown to have descended from the rock paintings of the region. In the Damodar valley the cut such motifs with broken pieces of comb out of the white earth coating laid wet on the black coated house walls. Khovar means the marriage room, and the rock art caves are also called *Khovar*. Anyone having studied Panaramittee Style in Aboriginal Australia would find the *Khovar* of great interest!

The rock art of Hazaribagh has brought to us a wide variety of geometrical motifs and over a hundred symbols which have been compared by researchers with the Indus script which I first brought to light after an observation by my son Justin in 1992. It has now become a bone of contention among scholars and a wide field of research also. These geometrical motifs are found here among earlier layers of Mesolithic art. The circle, square and cross, the earliest human markings, of an even perhaps earlier level than the Mesolithic are also present. In Australia these have been dated to forty thousand years ago! However, our available rock art is perhaps not as old due to the friability of the Indian sandstone and wide variance of temperatures, and the lashing rains of the Indian monsoon. But the age of our prehistory is not

less than any other, and the continuance of these traditions into the contemporary present is perhaps one of the greatest miracles of this modern age!

The need of animals as food was an important requirement of all societies and also of primitive ones. We are aware that the major food sources both animal, plant and cereal was discovered by those societies in the distant past going back several thousands of years and modern so called “civilizations” had added nothing significant or new to the food list. The domestication of crops and animals was carried out by primitive societies after the last glaciation approximately fourteen or fifteen thousand years ago. In the Aurignacian rockart of Europe we find wild animals painted by the hunters and as ritual animals which had been propitiated for their plenty to a hunting society. The animal art of the Drakensberg is perhaps more recent in south-eastern Africa but the purpose of it by the Bushman artists was the same. In the rockart of Hazaribagh we find wild animals that have been painted by hunters during the Mesolithic and their purpose was the same – to make the animal the subject of magic and thereby propitiate it for plenty. These traditions had carried on when man became a sedentarized valley dwelling agriculturist living in mud houses on the walls of which animals and birds of the jungle continued to be painted. The wild animal has ever been the subject of the hunt and we cannot disassociate the Khovar and Sohrai paintings of Hazaribagh from the early art of the hunters from which they evolved to their presently more sophisticated depiction. However, the animals painted by the village artists are sometimes amazingly similar in fluency and living quality to the rock paintings in the hills of Hazaribagh. Some of the painted rock shelters of Hazaribagh have now gone into the new Chatra district in the south-west for administrative purposes but they remain on the Hazaribagh plateau and I shall continue to refer to them as the rockart of Hazaribagh. In these animal paintings such as in the Satpahar ranges are vividly painted animals like deer and sometimes others like tigers and the wild Gaur (Indian Bison). The European rockart as noted has had more favourable preservative weather conditions than India and have lasted since earlier times than our Indian rockart. On the other hand Indian rockart though more recent is as primitive since the Mesolithic continued in our jungles down to more recent times, and the primitive hunting tribes that are still with us like the Juang, Korwa, Birhor and perhaps we should mention also others like the hunting Manjhi Santal, are still living on a basically hunting tradition. In the jungles in which these tribes live the metal smelting tribes of the Chalcolithic are still preserving their traditions. So we can say that a Meso-Chalcolithic society is still alive in the jungles of Hazaribagh. Our rock shelters are of red sandstone and the dry summer and lashing monsoon rains immediately after have had an impact on the rock paintings. In many shelters the rain waters flow down over the painted rock and spoil the paintings. We have done some conservation but a lot needs to be done. Unfortunately there is almost complete neglect of rockart in India, even at the more famous sites. The rockart has never been taken seriously in India and it is reported that the famous Bhimbetka rockart appears without any sign indicating its World Heritage status. The neglect of ancient archaeological sites in India is unparalleled and one of the reasons seems the inability to distinguish the deep past from the contemporary present which for all practical intents and purposes is even as primitive. Our oldest Indian rockart generally does not exceed ten thousand years in age to the end of the Mesolithic, which is not a very long time if we consider it is only three times the age of our historical “civilization”. When we study the evolution of rockart in India we find that it changes suddenly with the arrival of agriculture and the use of the plough with humped cattle which period is about five thousand years back in the Chalcolithic when bronze implements were being made but the Neolithic polished stone implements were still in use. Suddenly the beautiful bold wild animal paintings disappeared and the art of the agriculturists begins. We find depictions of bulls with ploughs, some with deities standing on their backs and others with conventional riders, showing this time was one of a new ritual developing around the bull as well as of horse-riders which could not

have been later than the Mahabharata period (750 B.C.). The horse was new to the Gangetic valley and the bull has often been confused with it as will be seen by the appellation of the term “Ghoda” (horse) to the bull in primitive societies in central and east-central India (i.e. Chhatisgarh-Jharkhand). The bull has been sacralized because of its great value for agriculture as a plough animal and the cow was raised to the level of a deity in the new Brahmanical religion which replaced the old Vedic religion after the Mahabharata. This new cow-worshipping religion was to become by the Gupta period what we today call Hindu. These impacts were not lost on the evolving cultural atmosphere of ancient India caught between Buddhism introduced by the Buddha and modern Jainism introduced by Parasvanatha and Mahavire from the seventh millennium B.C. onwards. The old rockart came to an end.

In the rockart of the Chalcolithic a new mood seems to have taken over from the art of the hunters painted during the Mesolithic years when we find only animal paintings and a few cryptic diagrams which would continue into the contemporary motifs and also appear as far away as the Indus when the art of the central-east-central tribals was carried into the iconography of the Indus valley which was developing the foundations of the new “civilization” over there. It is now quite well established that the roots of the animals and birds painted in the Indus have their origins in this central-east-central tribal Indian complex covering the heart of India from the Satpura, Masiukal and Vindhyan ranges through the Kaimur and Jharkhand ranges to the Eastern Ghats and western hills of Orissa into Chhatisgarh. This was the theatre of the Mesolithic hunter-artists of the period 12,000 – 5,000 B.C. The entire area was undisturbed by any trade traffic or other interference and wild forests ran from the Gangetic valley to the Bay of Bengal in uninterrupted succession of hills and valleys. These lands were inhabited by the most primitive tribes whose descendants are today associated with the Tribals. While we can say that in the rockart the art of the hunters has completely disappeared we cannot say this art itself has disappeared because it is still very visible in the various artforms of the Tribals. These include the ceremonial brassware of Bastar and the *Dhankul* paintings of Orissa, the *Ittalan* of the Saoras of the Eastern Ghats, the *Khovar* and *Sobrai* paintings of Hazaribagh, and so on. These arts have drawn the attention of the western world to a great extent and in a completely sanitized Europe find a place of honour for they carry the climate and environment of the social life of our ancestors lost forever in Europe. The American Indian had carried forward similar artistic traditions from the ancient cave painters and cliff dwellers of the south-west into the painted figures on their wigwams and buffalo-skin robes. Some of these traditions still continue but the Native American has been swamped by the modern world in that continent. In India the art of the hunters or what may be called Hunter-gatherers (since exclusively living on hunting and trapping has been forcibly stopped after the enforcement of stringent wildlife laws within the past couple of decades. Here and there pockets of hunters, trappers, and forest gatherers still remain and it is in these pockets the last of the animal art of the Mesolithic age still survives – either in house wall murals or in cast bronze votary figurines, or ritual paintings. These are continuing natural traditions and hence do not have any cultivated quality as is found in all handicraft items made by modern folk societies for bazaars both in India and the west. Demarcating one from the other is an act of curating and study. Since we know the Tribal hunters have not entirely disappeared from the jungles of this sub-continent we may be equally certain that their ancient animal art must survive somewhere in the soul of their society, and this is the quest of studies by art lovers and ethnographers alike for it represents a phase of human life which was most profound and spiritually important. The Mesolithic was the last breath of primitive man. It is here we can touch the ageless understandings of our palaeolithic ancestors going back many millions of years. Some of the best animal art in Hazaribagh comes from villages in the jungles. The ancestors of these Tribals like the Manjhis, Ganjus, or Birhors who until only a few years ago lived in leaf shelters, had been the Mesolithic

hunters. It was during the shift from forest-dwelling hunters to village dwelling tribes that the art of the Mesolithic hunters moved its canvas from the sandstone walls of caves in the jungles to the mud walls of homes amid terraced fields on the highland *Pats* or agricultural river valleys of Hazaribagh and similar forested places. The art galleries of the Mesolithic hunters who had lived in the shadow of their painted caves from the archaeological evidence available were forgotten and as younger generations of the tribes carried on their daily struggles for existence ceased to have importance. That is why the painted caves lost their importance and relevance for the very societies whose ancestors painted them and became the haunt of curio collectors and foreign scholars in quest of the vanishing primitive man.

In the Hazaribagh region there are over a dozen painted rock shelters which I have helped bring to light and there are several known sites not as yet explored, and undoubtedly the vast ranges in the valley of the Damodar, the hill scarps of Chatra and Koderma, and other places shall bring to light not less than one hundred painted shelters in due course if proper searches are carried out. This is a vast living museum of living tribal life. Many of the villagers are aware of unknown rockart sites but prefer to keep quiet because these are sanctified by their secrecy and preserved as sacred sites of their ancestors by being unknown. Certain tribes like the Bhagats carry out various kinds of worship to these rockart sites through chanting and singing, exorcism and trances, and offerings of food. These are similar to Native-American Vision Quest sites. The rock shelters having animal paintings like Isco, Nautangwa, Thethangi, several shelters in the Satpahar range and others, testify to a rich art of the hunters. The region is still home to many hunting tribes including the Mundas, Oraons, Manjhis (Santal), and others who have annual hunting traditions. While the Mundas and Oraons have an agricultural connection with these annual hunts because jerked meat from animals killed in them are sown with the summer ploughing (peculiar to these two tribes), the Manjhis do not have such a tradition and the hunt is considered sacred to the forest mother *Ban Jhowra* or *Jhair Era*. The Manjhis have two hunts, the earlier summer hunt being called *Phagun Sendra* in April and *Desom Sendra* on the full moon of May when the annual Hunt Council of the Santals sits.

The Birhors one would expect as hunter-gatherers and trappers to be associated with these annual *Sendras* but they have absolutely no ritual connection with these sacred hunts whatsoever and from my enquiries it seems they look askance at ritual hunting because they hunt for a daily subsistence living. On the other hand, the Manjhis look askance at the Birhors attending their annual hunts. But I have found neighbouring tribes of the Manjhis such as the Kurmis joining the hunts with cumbersome nets with which they try to catch deer in the eroded gullies. In the rockart we find paintings of the deer and nets as well as the smaller traps and snares and hunting nets of the Nomadic Birhors. The Birhors, who I have noted up to a few years ago used to live in leaf houses called *kumba* in regular settlements (*tanda*) claim their ancestors painted the Hazaribagh rockart. I specifically tried to get one of them to come with me to a painted shelter and speak about the art but his grandmother would not let him go, saying that his ancestors would curse the entire tribe. So he refused to go. At that time the Birhors were being introduced to brick houses with cement plaster which were white-washed and the Birhor children and young boys and girls used the walls as canvas, filling them with drawings made of charcoal from the fire, and pecking them with glypts. These glypts were in the **Panaramittee Style** which I have alluded to earlier. Seeing a possibility of collecting similar drawings on art paper and cardboard I made a project which was very successful in gathering hundreds of artworks which are a record. These artworks have little to distinguish them from many of the rock paintings. It would seem that the ancestors of the Birhors painted some of the rockart of Hazaribagh. Having said that, I will like to make another observation. In the animal art of the Mesolithic we find a highly developed handling of animal forms which is lacking in the Birhor

drawings, or for that matter the drawings of very good artists from other tribes like the Oraons, Ganjús, or Mundas whose life is associated with the rockart. Certain spectacular artists from these tribes may however be singled out on a par with the animal rock painters of the Mesolithic.. From this it will seem the animals painted in the rockart which we attribute to the Mesolithic hunters belonged to a highly developed tribal society which perhaps lived partly or wholly on hunting, but was not very primitive like the Birhors. The animals of the Hazaribagh rockart are painted by a sophisticated hunting people. So we can say that the rockart may be divided into the highly sophisticated animal paintings and the more primitive drawings like those made by the Birhor. It is significant that motifs drawn by the Birhors have been found in large numbers in the Hazaribagh rockart as well as in the rockart of other neighbouring regions like Lakhamuda-II in the Sundergarh district of Orissa (where Birhors once had lived), and where the drawings depict nets made from the fibres of the wild Choape plant (*Bauhinia scandens*).

Unlike in Northern Arnhem Land and other places in Australia where the Aboriginals return to their ancestral rockart sites and paint on the rock as a ritual form of expression, such a tradition has not been found in India. There is no such living tradition of rockart painting nor any tradition other than what I could find in Hazaribagh of the Tana Bhagats (an Oraon sect) who perform an annual *puja* at a particular rockart site when over a hundred men and women gather and sing and chant, women performing vivid trance and exorcism sessions, and offerings of fruit and milk are made to the ancestors depicted in the rockart. This particular ritual I have suggested to INTACH to forward to UNESCO for its intangible heritage programme. But I also know that once note of it is taken it will no longer remain intangible --- *for the value and importance of all intangible cultural events lies in their anonymity and secrecy*. Fortunately in India rockart has not yet been drawn out of its original forest village context completely due to the lack of diligence of the scholars and so it has continued as another of the “living traditions” for which India is justly famous. We could say the negligence to rockart and its importance has preserved it. On the other hand its importance as the ancestor form of the village mural painting tradition has not been adequately taken note of by an administration and government keen on developing a different dimension – either for development for non tribal Hindu tourism, or else a source of funds to be misused by local administration in the name of development. The local villages are sometimes tribal, as in the cases of Isco and Thethangi, the former a Munda village and the latter a Tana Bhagat village. In both these rockart sites the local villagers have now come to accept the importance of the rockart and continue traditions associated with the painted shelter. At Isco this was done through an annual fair being held every 26th of February (also India’s Republic Day); and at Thethangi the Tana Bhagats revived the old tradition of the Puja to the rockart in the first week of February. Thus a tribal continuing tradition has been re-established



Tana Bhagats performing puja to the rockart of Thethangi in the North Karanpura Valley

The village mural paintings which we have seen is derived from the rock paintings, is a wholly and exclusively matriarchal art. The women of the tribes or scheduled castes (who were officially de-tribalized) carry on an annual wall-painting tradition on two specific occasions. During the marriage season beginning with the spring festival of Basanth in February and ending with the onset of the rainy season the married women paint the walls of houses to celebrate marriages in the home and village, and young unmarried girls are apprenticed at this time to learn the technique. The walls are covered with black mud (Krishna) and over this a layer of white mud (*charki-matti, dudhi-matti*) representing the mother goddess (Devi) is applied. The white mud is cut with broken pieces of comb to reveal the black ground in a variety of symbolic patterns both sacred and secular, many corresponding with the rockart, and all in view of promoting fertility, keeping away evil, and bringing happiness to the houses and those who dwell in them. After the monsoon rains are over and the houses have been repaired by October, they are decorated to celebrate the coming harvest festival of Sohrai a fortnight after the *Dussehra*, with vivid coloured paintings in red, black and white, with motifs of the bull and the spotted animals, Pashupati the master of animals standing on the back of the bull, and various designs reminiscent of the paintings on the ancient pottery of the Indus valley and the Indus seals themselves. This tradition is very ancient and has been practiced by all the lower castes in other places such as in Bengal and Nepal, in Smardha in Bhopal, and by the poorer classes along the Nile. *There is reason to believe that this art may have even decorated the walls of houses in the Indus, and the iconic tradition which it represents is a key to study the evolution of the art of central-east-central India outward to Egypt and Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean.*

April is the time when the great summer hunts begin after the tribal spring festival of Sarhul, when the sickly-sweet scented flowers of the Saal trees (*Shorea robusta*) have made the central Indian forests creamy-white, and the fowls of the bush and birds of the trees, the wild deer and other animals are in their mating season, and the grey nightingale (*Koel*) has mutated to jet-black. It must have been during this season that the animal paintings on the rock surfaces would have been drawn, and it reminds us of the connection between the animals painted on the walls of the tribal homes and those painted on the walls of caves in the forest, and which are being hunted in this month by the descendants of the rock-painters even today. Perhaps we will never know for certain whether the animal paintings in the rockart were painted exclusively by women or men, but it is my guess that it was painted by both and that as agriculture developed as a matriarchal tradition worshipping the mother goddess women would have taken to the painting of animals on the walls of their homes as a memory of the days of the forest hunt, and filled their mudden walls with all sorts of female symbols that the men feared and which makes the tribal art a field of sorcery even in modern times. That both Khovar and Sohrai are exclusively female artforms is quite established, and only where the traditions have been modernized does this change. We have found men painting in the Maithili Ramayana tradition of Madhubani Painting, and we find men painting in the Patua tradition of Bengal and the similar tradition in Puri. The sacred art has become secularized for as long as it was an exclusively matriarchal tradition it belonged to the domain of the women.

Ever since I became involved with the Hazaribagh rockart and found the connection with the village paintings almost two decades back I saw a new side of the tribal mind, one which I had not been aware of before --- a subtlety of vision and a deftness of expression through the written medium, a kind of "copperplate" writing the European tradition prizes as a hall-mark of scholarship. *As I studied both the rockart and the village art more closely I found more than I dreamed. I found a certain magic both of inner expression in outer form, as well as a cursive decidedness in executing form. This was for me a new language of expression, a tangible thought process, having its own peculiar rationale,*

objective, and from which meanings could be deduced and distilled by a perceptive searcher who set aside his biases. This was essential to give value to the rockart one found in secluded caves high up on the hillsides and having no companion for the thousands of years since they were painted except the insects that built nests in the rock-face or the birds and animals that took shelter in the cave's recesses or projections. The dull documentation of the drawings and ascribing to them a provenance was not for me the complete unveiling of their ultimate significance or meaning. Their meaning had to be understood and divined somehow and this meaning applied to time past, present and future, for here were messages left by man at the height of his evolution at that particular moment or point of time when they were painted. That was when I knew that it called for a complete dedication to trying to understand the drawings and their significance for those who painted them, for ourselves, and for those who would come after us. It was an interesting field for discovery and interpretation and as I entered it I felt like walking toward the sun as it rises for a huge unknown lay before me and the shining secrets which the images contained. I was to begin trying to understand the Pre-Historic Mind. I have never regretted it. More and more I have realized that the form or sign, symbol or motif before us is a particular thing only to a particular type of understanding. It is not "all things to all people." It was also this state of mind which had to be entered into in order to understand it.

These were the thoughts which led to my formative years as visionary in a domain I least of all understood. Finding more rockart and incessantly studying different kinds of Khovar and Sohrai village paintings took me on a long journey into the world of tribal village women. Whatever there was for me to learn was in their inherited wisdom. If anyone knew – or felt – the essence of the forms which appeared so magically on cave walls and again on the walls of mudden homes painted by women who had not even heard of let alone seen the rockart, then it was these women. The meanings were written in their DNA. It was again this state of mind which had to be entered into. It was this search which led to the setting up of the tribal art project which would bring onto paper thousands of complete paintings by these women, and which project led to my forming in 1993 the now famous TRIBAL WOMEN ARTISTS COOPERATIVE formed by me a group of tribal women artists of Hazaribagh jungle villages. This experience grew into my personal search for meanings of forms –both in the rockart, as well as in the ever-growing circle of village artforms – through the tribal women who created these beautiful paintings on paper and later on cloth, and embroidered their pictures of the mind with coloured threads into quilts. The expression of this experience grew into dozens of art exhibitions around the world, and the calling of the art into witness before the world in defence of the cultural traditions and human rights of these women and their families and the rockart of their ancestors that was being so brutally destroyed in the name of development by the government. On a personal level one of the misfortunes of my life and success itself is that it removes us from the deeper foundations of our work. Months that could have been spent on research were wasted in exhibitions. Not that it did not open new vistas. Increased exposure at the national and international level led to a fresh vision – I was prepared to see the rockart with new unblinkered eyes and without any preconceived notions or indoctrination. No bias must drive my thesis. It is now quite plainly clear to me that the pre-historic animal painters worked from their imagination with no visual object to guide them, and their accuracy in their drawings must be an expression of their intimacy with the animals. I have further, learned from some great women artists that they see the form before they paint it, and in fact they see the whole composition before they approach the workspace. This means that they must have a terrific visual imagination. Time and again I see them work, drawing on a regular 20x30 inch paper, or even on an 8x6 feet cloth opr wall, and they go straight to work, no fuss or planning, laying the image exactly as they have seen it in their mind's-eye. Sometimes one is struck by the utter realism of an animal or bird which upon anatomical analysis may be faulted, but which as an

artwork is perfect. *This is because these artists invariably give a fresh expression to form.* This fresh expression is made possible by their artistic gifts, in the same manner that the Upper Palaeolithic animal painters of France and Spain have left us the greatest expressions of animal art more profoundly realistic than anything painted by Picasso or Lautrec or Landseer. This is because their realism is beyond form itself. What I am left wondering at is the imagination of a simple unlettered jungle village woman who can stand above the modern masters with the uniqueness and simplicity of her – I refer to the tribal Sohrai women artists of Hazaribagh now world famous. As an example I give the illustration of a deer and fawn by Philomina Tirkey, the outline painted in natural manganese black on mud ochre treated handmade paper. Works by great contemporary women animal artists of Hazaribagh can stand comparison with the rockart painted by pre-historic man.



Deer & fawn by Philomina Tirkey-

Perhaps this is not saying a small thing for the art of the animal hunters of the Mesolithic in Hazaribagh – as elsewhere in India -- is the greatest animal art in the world in any time. These are supreme triumphs of the human spirit. It is to my great disappointment and eternal shame as an Indian that the government is now in Jharkhand in the process of wiping out the natural environment where both the rockart and these tribal societies and their art exist. Both will be destroyed for ever in the name of development. As for the art, the government with its handful of bureaucrats is promoting tribal handicrafts and these type of handicrafts *sans provenance* or context are becoming colourful ethnic chic in the big cities under guidance of projects of indiscriminate curators. So the great art of tribal India, both pre-historic and contemporary faces annihilation. Certainly the tribal art of Jharkhand descended from ancient traditions must be seen as one of the glories of India and its loss has to be seen as one of the most indiscriminate acts of the authority which is supposed to protect our heritage.

Threats

Threats to the rock-art sites surveyed in this book are mostly man-made-industrial development and mining which have come right upto their doorsteps. Some are threatened by dams which will submerge the landscape in which they are set, displacing the village people to whom they have relevance. Railway lines have caused blasting right under the sites, causing cracks, and huge coal mines are steadily creeping upto the rockart covering their surface with a heavy coating of grime due to atmospheric pollution. Since I bought the rock-art of Hazaribagh to light several sites have suffered from “visitor-manifestation”, which means people have been writing or scratching their names or messages over their surfaces. In some sites there has been witnessed state-sponsored mis-handling of the cultural and archaeological environment by cementing the

floor of the shelters containing the record of the past, and building incongruous constructions next in close proximity to the rock-art, violating not only the aesthetic purity and sacred nature of the site, but also such Charters as the Vienna Convention (1965). In view of these threats it is incumbent upon the departments concerned to display greater caution and restraint in developing these sites in view of their nomination to UNESCO as cultural heritage sites of world importance. INTACH filed the first nominations as far back as 1993.

It is now important to consider the adverse impact of tourism to these sites since the cultural heritage of the primitive world is not easily reconciled with the tourism of the modern world unless expert advice is entertained by the state authorities.

Lastly, in view of the massive mining projects in the upper Damodar Valley in North Karanpura and its environs, we are facing a massive wave of destruction of the landscape through opencast coal mines, big dams, super thermal power stations and other industrial developments. There is a distinct danger of ever greater mining of other minerals and ores in the forested hills. Along with the disappearance of hundreds of villages the village art-forms of Khovar and Sohrai directly descended from the rock-art are destined to disappear also, and as pollution chokes the air the rock-art is also destined to become relics poised over huge mines which have uprooted the landscape and all which it held that was sacred to the rock-painters and their descendants.

Threats to rockart from opencast coal mining

One of the major threats to the rockart of Hazaribagh and Chatra is from the opencast mines of the North Karanpura Coalfields. The mines cause atmospheric pollution which coat the painted surface with a film of dust and seep into the rock pores. The blasting from the mines and ancillary developments like railways, Etc. cause cracks in the sandstone painted surface and even cause portions to collapse. Great threats await great rockart sites like Isco which is located in the Rautpara mine block.

Animals in the Rockart of Hazaribagh

Animals found in the rockart of central India many of which are found in Hazaribagh rockart include the following:

Horse, Tiger, Bear, Gaur or Indian Bison, Wild ass, Leopard, Cheetah, Crocodile, Hyaena, Jackal, Wild Dog, Domestic dog, Elephant, Jackal, Wild Boar, domestic Buffalo, wild buffalo Indian Water Buffalo, domestic cattle, wild cattle *Bos primagenus*, Antelope (i.e. Chinkara, Blackbuck, Nilgai, etc.) , Deer (i.e. Sambhur elk, Spotted deer, Swamp deer, Barasingha or Hungul, Barking deer, Hog deer, Mouse deer or Chevrotain, etc.), Great Indian one-horned Rhinoceros, etc. Smaller animals include: Porcupine, Hare, Squirrel, Tortoise, Lizard, Frog, Leech, Centipede, Bee, Butterfly, , Scorpion, Beetle, Etc. Birds include: Eagle, Vulture, Crane, Stork, Snipe, Spoonbill, Stilt, Peacock, Crow, Jungle-fowl, Etc.

Those who dwell in urban environments where wildlife other than insects or small creatures like lizards or birds only are found must find the vast amphitheatre of wild animals found in rockart quite strange, a kind of ancient zoo. That such animals still exist is perhaps a reminder of national parks only. Urban societies live with only domesticated animals will find the story of wild animals unfamiliar terrain because it deals with a wide range of wild creatures with which

modern society has lost contact. It is only the more recent rockart that allows us to find familiar animals like plough cattle and dogs, although dogs are a feature of the rockart of the Mesolithic hunters also, and were the first domesticated animals. That the dog is different to the Wild Dog has been proved by the number of molars in the latter.

Our story however begins with the Mesolithic rockart of our remotest tribal ancestors who are similar to the tribals still living in the forested areas. With half of India's forests destroyed in the past half century both the numbers of forest dwelling tribes and forests have been halved and many of the wild animals which lived in them may only be found in these rock paintings. Modern man's destruction of the rain-forests has also been terrible and it is estimated that half the world's rain-forests have been cut down for commercial harvesting during the past fifty years and in another half century the rain-forests will have completely disappeared. These facts of modern life have to be accepted as part of the modern world which has been created by European societies after the Second World War. It has been in the quest for economic development giving the white man ever greater power over control and harvest of what had hitherto been in the control of non white indigenous societies. The rape and plunder of the world's last natural resources is now entering its final stages and we are entering a world devoid of animal life and forest life as it was known since the beginning of the world. These facts have not to be disputed any more.

In central Indian rockart we find some prehistoric animals such as Przewalski's Horse which is now extinct in India and is only found in Central Asia. Also we find in the rockart the earliest wild cattle, *Bos primagenus*, a form of short-backed Southeast Asian cattle which are ancestors of India's cattle which are different from the Zebu long-horned cattle from West Asia. The wild Bison or Indian Gaur as it is technically known is a common animal in the rockart of Hazaribagh along with wild cattle, and they must have long back roamed together on the grassy plains of the Damodar. The cattle had long back been domesticated but the Gaur is still untamed continues to roam in the forests of Palamau to the west, and in the southern jungles of the state in Palamau.. In these grasslands also roamed the rhinoceros which had crossed south of the Ganges near Bhagalpur over two thousand years ago and a petroglyph of which still survives in the rockart at Isco. The rhinoceros is no longer found south of the Ganges and it appears it had come from Assam via Bengal. The horse has nowhere been found in the rockart of Jharkhand, Orissa or Chhatisgarh either in its pre-historic form or as the modern animal ridden by man except for recent post-contact examples found after the Scythian -Mahabharat era (1100—700 B.C.) in one site in Gumla (Palkot), and in some examples of the contact period (700 B.C.) in the Kaimur hills rockart. The wild ass also has not been reported from the central Indian rockart, although Wakankar mentions Przewalski's horse.

It seems that the earliest milk-yielding animal domesticated after the goat was the Indian Water Buffalo which is the symbol of the tribals of Central India, the Bison-horn Maria of Chhatisgarh and their congeners. The absence of the goat in our central Indian jungles and the rockart of the eastern-central region like Jharkhand and Orissa points to this animal's entry into the region later, perhaps from the grasslands across the Ganges to the north. This will identify the time of the arrival of the nomadic goat herders who have been associated with the Brahui speakers or Kurrukh (Oraons and Maler-Pahariya) whose connection with Baluchistan, the southern Sind valley and Pre-Harappan Indus Civilization has now been established. In the Hazaribagh and Chatra rockart we have no portrayals of domesticated cattle or buffalos and they are always shown being hunted along with other wild animals like Gaur, Tiger, Nilgai, Wild Boar, etc. The Jackal has never been shown as being hunted in rockart although the custom has appeared in modern times among Ghasi tribals. The Central Indian rockart such as Bhimbetka portrays

domesticated cattle under the yoke of the plough although there is pre-agricultural rockart in the same region/panel proving a continuous rockart tradition from the pre-agricultural Mesolithic into the plough-agricultural period. In Jharkhand we find only wild cattle in the rockart and when cattle were caught and domesticated during the chalcolithic those precise scenes may still have to be deciphered from the rockart, but what is evidenced in the rockart is the tradition of celebrating the cattle during the harvest festival (*Sohrai*) with the spotting of the animals and the welcome floor paintings made with milk and rice gruel (*Aripan*).i.e.Isco). Similar spotting of animals and drawing of Aripan on the floor to the cowshed are made during Sohrai, while on the mud walls of the houses are painted huge murals of spotted cattle (found in Isco) and standing on the backs of the bulls is Pashupati the father of animals (associated in local myth with Rama). This festival of Sohrai comes the day after Divali, the festival of lights, which celebrates Rama's return to Ayodhya from his fourteen years of forest exile. It is believed by our tribals that he returned with the cattle of the forest. The day after Sohrai a mock bull-fight takes place called *Khuta-Bandhan* which is to mark this event. I have noted the importance of the bull-fight as the source of a great cattle cult which began in central east India and carried forward to the Indus valley and beyond to Egypt, Sumeria, Crete and Spain. (*B.Imam, Cult of the Bull, 2005 B-274/13; The Mother Goddess and the Sacred Bull, B-269/4; Buffalo, Bull and Cow B-269/5; Bandhana of the Santals B-275/10; The Bison-horn Flute B-274/6; Sacrifice of the Buffalo in the Khond Porho Jatra B-1; Cult of the Cow B-277/10; Search for the Antlered-Horned Deity B-247/ ; South Silk Road and Early Tribal Migrations from Northeast to Southwest and West Asia*). The tradition of the paintings is called *Khovar* which is associated both with the harvest and marriage paintings and still continues in the villages neighboring the rockart in Hazaribagh and Chatra. The caves in which the rock paintings across India are called *khovar* or *kohbara*. Thus we find in the rockart a continuing tradition coming down from pre-agricultural hunting societies and moving into the agricultural period documented in the rockart which has to be treated as a historical record earlier than the Indus Valley Civilization. It comes as no surprise that we have brought to light in these rockart sites a Proto-Indus script which was carried to the Indus perhaps by the goat-herders or Kurruks whose Brahui-Kurrukh language of the North Dravidian Branch of the Brahui language has been shown by linguists to have been the language in which alone the Indus Script may be read (Asko Parpola, Decipherment of the Indus Script, Oxford, 1994/2000, pp. 160-178). We are able to deduce more accurately the possible time frame upto when the hunters of the Mesolithic continued their tradition of rock painting coming down from antiquity. This ancient tradition from pre-deluvian times stopped with the Isco rock painting of symbols during the pre plough-agricultural phase it would seem. As far as we are aware plough agriculture arrived in Jharkhand some time during the first millennium B.C. when the Mundas and Oraons were in possession of the plateau and some time after the powerful iron-smelting culture of the Asurs of the Chalcolithic had receded. That the hunting traditions of the tribals continued upto the present times may be seen around us with the annual seasonal hunts of the various tribes like the Santals and Mundas still being carried on, and the trapping and food-gathering by the nomadic Birhors still continuing into the twenty-first century. In the southern part of the state the leaf dwelling Juangs of Keonjhar once called "the people of the leaves" are slowly being Sanskritized by the Hindu hierarchy that is vociferous in the government.

Of deep interest and very great importance for us is the fact that the cattle festival of Sohrai performed to celebrate the winter harvest in October being linked to the rock paintings in the shadows of which the Khovar and Sohrai villages continue from their remote past into the uncertain future of modern India. It is in the interests of better understanding this immemorial tradition and for through this understanding returning to the Tribal his lost place in Indian civilization that all my endeavours upto date have been centrally directed, and will continue until my last breath because it is a vision and cause greater than myself. As I had said the interesting

thing about the Sohrai harvest and cattle festival where these plough and milk-yielding animals are celebrated, both cows and buffaloes, as the harvest is ripening with the beginning of winter is the link with the rock paintings in the jungles. In the temples of the region we find the worship of Shiva-Bhairav or the forest god with his two dogs (the direct parallel of Dharmes with his two dogs Bhula and Bhuli) and the dog appears in the Sohrai harvest art with the tree of life on its back which places it on a par with the bull which is amazing. The tribes of the region practicing this specific art of the painted Sohrai are the Kurmis and Ghatwals of eastern Hazaribagh under Bishungarh and Jhumra blocks. The interesting thing with the rockart continuing in the Sohrai paintings in such motifs as crossed diagonals and reticulated triangles (*Chouk*) in the art of the Mesolithic hunters who painted wild animals is that this would mean a Mesolithic connection between the present village paintings and the rockart. The present tribals are rice cultivators with a relationship with the forests about them upon which they depend partly for food in a subsistence lifestyle.

The tiger features along with the leopard in the rockart of Hazaribagh but not the Hunting Leopard (Cheetah) which has been reported by Wakankar in the rockart of Central India (V.S., Wakankar and R.R. Brooks, *Stoneage Painting in India*, Taraporevala 1976, Mumbai, 4). The prehistoric horse which was once found in India as Prezawalski's Horse is not found in the rockart, and in Jharkhand we do not find any horse and rider from the contact phase except in one rockart (Palkot) in Gumla in South Jharkhand, and these would appear of Scythian origin. There are no woolly mammoth elephants or prehistoric bison as in Europe. Hazaribagh has wild elephants (as distinct from ridden elephants) which are absent in the Central India rockart.

The deer and antelope family are a popular form of illustration in all rockart primarily due to close contact with man as a source of food and protein. Among the deer we include the antelope which are the Nilgai or Bluebull, and the graceful Chinkara of the plain, also called the Four-Horned antelope, and the Blackbuck which is a shy gazelle of the North Bihar plains and not found anywhere in Jharkhand. Among the deer are the Spotted Deer or Cheetal and the Sambhur which is a form of elk, and the smaller deer such as the Barking Deer and the rare Mouse deer or Chevrotain. The Swamp deer, sometimes called Barasingha which was so common in Central India and now extinct there, and the Hungul of Kashmir are not found in Jharkhand, although sometimes the tribals refer to a large Sambhur as "Barasingha" (Twelve horn-tipa, six on either side). The most common animal painted in our rockart is the Spotted Deer or Cheetal, shown in rows some times. This animal was also a favourite subject of the Central Indian prehistoric rock painters. The Hog Deer is a small animal which is rarely seen but identified with the Central Indian rock paintings but though our jungles contain these animals still none have been identified in the rock paintings. Nor has the tiny Mouse deer or Chevrotain, one of which I was fortunate to see in the wild many years ago in the Angul district of Orissa on the north bank of the Mahanadi river, but which may be seen in a Zoo.

While the Gaur or Indian Bison has been mentioned there is no evidence of a cross with the domestic cattle which is found in the Northeast of India and called Mithun. I have held that the Mithun is a separate sub-species and a paper to such effect had been published in the Bombay Natural History Journal (B.Imam, *The Gaur, Gayal and Mithun in India*, Hornbill, 1988(1), pp.10-14). The Mithun is found only in the Northeast where the Gaur live in close proximity with the Banteng or Tsaine in Burma which is a wild form of cattle in Southeast Asia. Among the smaller animals in our rockart is the wild pig or Wild Boar, and the Wild Dog which are unrelated animals although they may have had a common ancestor, and the domestic dog is not directly descended from the wild animal because the domestic dog has three molars on either side, whereas in the wild animal has two molars on either side, and according to evolutionary science

a tooth may be lost but never gained in the evolution of a species (D.Brandner, *Wild Animals in Central India*, Edward Arnold & Co, London 1923, p.26). This is interesting as well as important to prove that the dog has been an integral part of prehistoric Indian society and not some imported northern Spitz breed brought by the Europeans. I have written about this little red hunting dog of the autochthonous societies all over India, and which a film was made about in 2005 by the National Geographic with me titled *In Search of the First Dog*. The dog has been DNA tested to belong to the Indo-Polynesian breed and is an ancient indigenous species of South Asia. (Peter Savolainen, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden, 2003) (B.Imam, *The Santal Hound, 2003/Manjhi Santals of Hazaribagh, 2007*). The dog has been found in central Indian rockart but as yet has not been found in the Hazaribagh rockart. It is a subject in the continuing Khovar and Sohrai traditions of painting descended from the prehistoric rockart. The Jackal has been found in the rockart of the Satpahar range in company with the tiger. The smaller animals found in central Indian rockart such as the porcupine, hare, squirrel, etc. have not been found as yet in the Hazaribagh rockart. The smallest creatures such as the leech, centipede, bee have not been found in our rockart, but the scorpion, butterfly, lizard frog, have been found. This occurrence of the butterfly in the Khander shelter is unique in Indian rockart and was brought to light by rockart specialist Erwin Neumayer who visited the shelter with me and my son Justin in 1993. Unique also, in a nearby site now called Saraiya found by Neumayer and Justin, are therianthropes (human-animal forms, plant-human forms, which are of shamanistic origin and trance drawings portraying a super-natural world). The shelter is poised on the edge of a vertical three hundred feet drop overlooking the Damodar valley above the little hamlet of Saraiya where the new railway has come and a significant remains of Kushan period and Asur fortifications of the iron age buried under the railway excavation in spite of our appeal to the coal company. In 1993 Neumayer and archaeologists of the Bihar Archaeology Department had made the coal company promise not to destroy the site but this promise was forgotten as soon as our backs were turned. It is of note that no drawings of bears have been found in central Indian rockart in spite of their being a common animal particularly living in caves where their presence would have been conspicuous to the rock painters.

Now that we have made a brief over-view at the animal world in rockart let us look at the birds. While central Indian rockart has larger number of overall rockart sites having a number of birds like eagle, vulture, crane, stork, snipe, spoonbill, stilt, peacock, crow, jungle-fowl, etc. the rockart of Hazaribagh has only come up with one peacock which was recently found by my wife Philomina in an extension of the Sidpa painted shelter on the north face of Satpahar range.

Animals in the Rockart of Hazaribagh

The rockart presents drawings of animals and a few birds which are found drawn in a similar manner in the village paintings. The nomadic Birhors, a group of trappers who until recently lived in leaf dwellings until they were moved by the government to brick housing, believe their ancestors painted the rockart. In their leaf house settlements called *tanda* they were found to make sand drawings, and they made drawings on the brick walls of their new housing, including hunting scenes and abstract forms similar to rockart. Their drawings were brought to paper through an Intach project.

=====
 ==

Trilobites

How these creatures which are millions of years old could be found in the contemporary village paintings is incredible unless we explain it by saying the tribal artists are following an old tradition observed in the fossil record. The Trilobite with its ovoid form and eight ribs is found in the art of the Ganjus and other forest dwelling tribes of southern Hazaribagh. (illustration)

Cell

Another interesting prehistoric motif is the cell. The five armed cell appears quite commonly in the village Khovar paintings, and it is found in the rockart in Isco in the bottom right hand corner of the central panel.

In the middle of the Nautangwa Pahar rockart is a large deer facing to the left-hand side with a five pointed cell painted in its stomach, perhaps later.

Crab

In the same panel at Isco a crab is seen at the top between a leaping deer and wild buffalo (*Bubalis bubalis*)

Tiger

It has been held by wildlife experts that the tiger (*Panthera tigris*) is a late-comer to India having been preceded by the Lion which is depicted in the Asoka pillar (3rd. cent BC). The tiger appears once, in Satpahar II rockart, where a pair of tigers moves from right to left. The tigress precedes as is the case in nature, and the tiger stands back waiting to follow. The animals are not striped but the tiger to the right has two vertical lines forming a band, which in contemporary village paintings has a ritual significance. Above the two animals is the tiger's favourite food the tusked wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) with the long hairs on the withers raised in apprehension, while ahead go two sows. In front is the jackal (*Canis aurens*) the common scavenger which follows the tiger. The question is how could the tiger be depicted in Mesolithic rockart if it is not so old -- so obviously the tiger is an inhabitant of the Indian forests from over five thousand years ago.

Wild Boar

The commonest animal of the jungles is the wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) which has been described above in Satpahar II. It appears only in this panel of Satpahar II and the depiction of the male with its sharp tusks and raised mane on the back is excellent. It is presented in typical fashion with the female leading as is common.

At the bottom of the Nautangwa Pahar panel we find a beautifully drawn wild sow painted in red haematite from the Mesolithic. It is facing from right to left. In front of it two hunters with bows drawn have been painted in white in stick figure form, apparently of a later period.

Jackal

We have seen the jackal (*Canis aurens*) appear only once in the Satpahar II rockart panel described above.

Fish

Fish forms are common in Isco in similar upright images as in other rockart. One fish found engraved in a slate slab in the Isco river is of the typical Indus type (illustrate)

Wheeled spotted animal

In Isco we find this figure which is identical to the wheeled spotted animals called *ghoda* by the Kurmis who paint it in their annual ritual harvest festival (Sohrai) murals.

Rhinoceros

In the first panel of Isco at the left side we find an engraved rhinoceros. It is believed that rhinoceros did exist in the Ganges and Brahmaputra valleys and their grasslands during Mauryan times) 3rd. cent B.C.)and this is an example of the animal straying over into the Jharkhand area of the Damodar river. This petroglyph is complemented by another at the extreme right end of the long thirty metre panel where there is a petroglyph of a Yakshi with fly-whisk of the same period. Rhinoceros has also been found in many sites in central India. In the Satpahar II rockart in Satpahar we also find the rhinoceros with two hunters with bows in its stomach which could indicate their being killed by it.

Deer

These animals have been found in many of the rockart sites of Hazaribagh and Chatra, and mainly represent the Spotted Deer or Cheetal (*Axis axis*) and Sambhur (*Cervus unicolor*), Barking deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*), and the Nilgai () which is an antelope. In Isco at the easternmost end of the valley we find a few forms of deer painted in white at the left side of the panel, and on the right top of the central panel the form of a leaping deer or bull. On the bottom of the panel after it we find the wheeled spotted deer mentioned earlier. At the western end of the North Karanpura valley there are a series of densely forested ranges running from east to west called Mahoudi and Satpahar. In the rockart in the sandstone shelters of the Satpahar range we find many panels of deer. In the Nautangwa Pahar hills which are a continuation of the Mahoudi range we also find many deer. These drawings are of the Mesolithic period. In Satpahar I (12 feet x 6 feet) on the top of the range we find a line of four animals going from right to left. One of them is a Gaur or Indian Bison in x-ray with small horns and stockinged legs. The other three are deer, one having its body divided in sections, which in contemporary village paintings is a form of ritual decoration denoting an animal sacred. This type of division has been found in the deer and bovines of central Indian rockart also. The animals are drawn in a naturalistic manner. The drawings are well preserved by the overhanging shelter.

In Satpahar III (10'x7') we find two rows of Spotted Deer, one above the other, running in the most animated manner from left to right. Above is a cross of the same type as found at Ghazi Shah in the Indus Valley. Here from a small central circle radiate four lines in four directions forming the arms of the cross, with the circle at the centre. The upper arm of the cross is in the form of an inverted semi triangular "head". This would be a proto-Indus motif.

In the adjacent Satpahar V shelter only a couple of deer heads are available due to the shelter being exposed to the open and weathering has affected them.

On the south side of the Satpahar range is the Thethangi rockart at the head of a gorge on the side of the hill overlooking the village of Thethangi. Here about a dozen deer forms are found, four deer being painted in a row, the spots of one visible in rows. The deer seem to have been painted at different periods as there is some stylistic difference. In the shelter above the main one we find the remains of a few deer which have faded due to weathering.

In Nautangwa Pahar () we find many drawings of deer in different styles. At the extreme left top we find a deer with its body divided in sections similar to the deer described from Satpahar I described above. Under the bison at the top left side is a large deer with a *chouk* (rectangle with

crossed diagonals) in its stomach which may have been drawn later. In the middle is a fine large drawing of a deer with a cell form drawn in its stomach. To the right of it is a leaping Spotted Deer with the stick figure in white of a hunter with bow aiming at it.

Frogs

Several frog forms are found in the rockart, especially in Thethangi (15'x ___) and Nautangwa Pahar. In Thethangi the frogs are clearly naturalistic in execution. But in Nautangwa Pahar many of the frogs have an anthropomorphic form as if they represent part-human creatures. One such form resembles the human figure of the central panel in Isco, and resembling the chalcolithic celts of the Ganga-Jumna Dhoab.

Indian Bison or Gaur

In Satpahar II (14 feet x 4 feet) we again find the Gaur (*Bos gaurus*) or Indian Bison with x-ray at the extreme left side of the panel, with a few faded forms which could have been more of these animals behind it. At the extreme right end of the panel are two more Gaur, the one to the right being a fully grown cow with stubby horns and a calf in front of it (partly erased), standing in alerted position, and the one in front of it, a young bull, bounding forward. In all three forms the prominent dorsal ridge of this animal is visible.

In the middle of the panel we find the tigers described earlier. Satpahar II presents a perfect scene of animal life in the jungle and the artists knew very well the animals that they painted because the forms are so accurately and realistically drawn.

In Nautangwa Pahar we find a large bison at the top left hand side drawn above a deer. It has white painted stick figures in its stomach area indicating it may have killed them, but which may have been painted later.

Bluebull or Nilgai

A pair of Nilgai (*Bosephalus tragocamelus*) are found in Satpahar II in between the bison on the right side and the two tigers described.

Buffalo / Cow

On the top of the central panel of Isco we find a leaping deer or bull. At the top of the Satpahar II panel described above we find a form which has a slight hump resembling a bull but which could be a buffalo. In either case these are drawings of wild cattle during the Mesolithic when they had not been domesticated. In the central part of the panel we see a bull and cow about eight inches in size facing from left to right. To the left side and on an open wall overhead is the indistinct form of a horned bull leaping from right to left.

In Nautangwa Pahar on the right hand side top (above a crudely drawn deer) we find a humped bull, the figure drawn in haematite, with the hump painted in white perhaps added later.

Langur Monkey (Cheetah)

In the middle of the panel Satpahar II above described are two large forms standing on four legs with long tails which I see as langurs (*Presbytus entellus*). The one on the right is being attacked by two bow-hunters while one hunter is depicted in the stomach showing that it has been killed. These animals could conversely be seen as the Hunting Cheetah which was common in eastern India in earlier times, due to the small head and long tail. They are however, not spotted. What seems like a monkey has been noted in the top right-hand central panel in Isco also.

The Setting

The Cave shelters where we find animal paintings are relics of times when man was a forest dwelling animal himself and when his food came only from the forest and his only shelter was under the roof of caves or trees and when he wore no spun or woven cloth but covered himself with barks or skins of animals. These times were not so very long ago nor perhaps also as recent as may seem, but are described with lucidity in the old epics like the Ramayana where we find the forest dwellers living as monkeys and when the more civilized people moving about the forest like Rama and his companions wore animal skins and barks to cover themselves, because that is how people in the forest lived in those times. It is agreed that even in those days there were highly developed centres of urbanization and city dwelling but life in the forests then as of now had its own culture. So man in the jungle as a cave dweller was a primitive creature little removed from the animals who were his companions. There was an important development that brought the forest dwellers out into the open fields and that was plough agriculture as opposed to the (a) "forest gardens" where wild fruits and tubers could be collected and (b) primitive forms of forest cultivation through "jhoom" or pick agriculture as is still practiced in the Eastern Ghats of Orissa by the Langa Savara tribals. The time at which the cave dwellers of central and eastern central India came out into the open could have been quite recently, or about the time of the iron age when the iron shod plough pulled by bulls developed which would have been some time during the beginning of the first millennium BC when the war between the Kurus and Pandavas had not as yet taken place. Slowly these people moved from living in caves to forms of settled housing building with wattle and daub, that is wood logs and mud walls, before the advent of brick making. It would have been during this time that the hunters separated from the nomadic trappers, tribes like the Birhors. Both would remain forest food gatherers for the next three thousand years until the advent of an industrialized market economy came crashing down upon them. Artisan groups became distinct such as the different tribal groups which specialized in particular social crafts such as oil-expressing, basket-weaving, iron-smithy, carpentry, pottery, cloth-weaving, etc. All these people practiced some form of agriculture and depended partly upon the forests for their food, fuel, fibre, fencing, medicinal plants, building and forest-produce requirements. They were far from a time when some centralized agency would take their forests and lands and turn them into products which they would have to buy. There was a practical exchange economy and egalitarian governance. There was no economic system like we have today which has commodified everything. Before education was free, medicine was free, leisure could be obtained freely. Now one has to buy these things from the market. Happiness itself today is the product of money. India is fortunate to still have its villages which are models of ancient village societies. It is fortunate in still having food-groups whose lives are governed by their own ancient systems of survival and not by the market. Perhaps these things have been damaged, but they have not yet been destroyed. It will be difficult, if not impossible to destroy Indian village culture within a democratic system. This is because the people genuinely like the old way of life.

When I see the way the Birhors of Hazaribagh, a small nomadic group of trappers and foragers with no resource except the jungles, I see a miraculous pattern of managing the environment. These trappers move from place to place depending upon the strain which they are placing upon the carrying-capacity of a particular region. Their association is always on the ground when they study their economic resources necessary in procuring things which they do not produce and have to buy such as kerosene oil and cooking oil or rice, wheat flour, or clothing. They have no need for education until now when they are being forced into a market economy and their

own vast cultural heritage suffices for giving a complete education to their children in history, language, cultural heritage, and life-survival skills. Skills such as ethnobotany or the medicinal properties of plants which they sell, the art of rope-making by braiding the fibres of the Chope plant (*Bauhinia scandens*) which gives a marketable product, and the ability to trap small fowls and animals which they sell to the villagers give enough cash to buy oil, rice and flour. The Birhor has no need for doctors and their prescriptions. Having no lands he has no need for lawyers or bribing the police. Wearing only the scantiest of clothing he has little expense on clothes. Building his own leaf houses he has no building expenses. For recreation he has the vast outdoors and his great traditions of oral history reciting, singing, games and dancing. Ask any modern town dweller and he will tell you that his three major expenses are education, medicine, food, clothing, rental for housing, and legal expenses. The Birhor has none of these problems faced by the town-dweller. For anyone wishing to enter the mind-set of the prehistoric rock artists should study the life-way of the Birhors and tribes like them. Such people are the nomadic Uthlu Birhors of the jungles of the Hazaribagh plateau who live in leaf houses and may be seen wandering with their nets on their shoulders from forest to forest, followed by their women and children who carry baskets loaded with the trapper's and gatherer's spoils—the rich lode of small animals and birds, even rodents, roots, tubers, yams and mushroom; all kinds of roots and barks for medicine-making which they sell. This is a self-sufficient, self-contained little band, who depends upon no-one but themselves. The moment the school-teacher comes, or the missionary comes to their encampment with promises of offering a better life naturally these people are wary. They know nothing of the entrapment of the Native Indians of the Great Plains of North America wiped out of the first pages of that nation's history, but they are blessed with the same awareness. Such primitive people carry within themselves the awareness that inspired and painted the great rockart of India, the first historical document of the sub-continent. The Birhors are still great honey collectors, and their drawings are full of scenes of honey-collecting. How they climb the high branches and smoke the little bees out of their nests are known only to them. I have yet to see one of them with a bee sting. Their honey is the sweet-sour lantana honey of Hazaribagh which is bought eagerly by the town-people. What can modern education give to such a people? Nothing, unless their complete way of life is destroyed to its roots and a completely new religion and culture is forced upon them and they are made wholly dependant on and slaves of the unscrupulous, soulless, sycophantic market economy.

These people claim that their ancestors painted the rocks in the little caves high up in the forested hills. They are the last remaining example of a Mesolithic lifestyle. For man, *Homo sapiens sapiens* is indistinguishable except for his lifestyle. There is no difference between humans except their lifestyle. All humans are biologically the same, and this cannot be changed without drugs, steroids, or surgery. What distinguishes people is their lifeways, their mindset, their culture, and these things come from out of the great bourne of experience both individual and collective and it is linked with a a complex unknown phenomenon within consciousness itself. This alone makes differences between humans. The Pygmy in the Congo, the Lapp and the Brahmin, beat with the same heartbeat, but the mind of each has been shaped in the crucible of the past and is connected to the future through a different wiring. The whiteman's idea of racial domination and homogenization in accordance with an idea of centralized leadership is contrary to the way of human evolution. It has been the cause of the human massacres of the twentieth century and the ecocide facing the twentyfirst century. In these times and in this place, standing on the soil of Chotanagpore – now called Jharkhand (forest-land) – I observe wryly these small Birhors, perhaps one of the last examples of true Mesolithic man on the planet, passing by me. The Bushman has changed in the Kalahari, the Hadzabe has changed in Tanzania, the Tureg have been challenged in their deserts and the bush-living Aboriginal has been westernized in Australia. Everywhere the coloured man's heart beats with the same heart-rhythm as the

whiteman in consonance with the heartbeat of the universe, a cosmic wholeness that life should continue, but within each rises and falls the resonance of a different urge for his family, his tomorrow, and the future of his people in the years to come. This independent wildness in the heart of man searches out for others who have walked this path of knowing with himself. When it faces a threat it withdraws as one who knows the danger of a foreign power to his survival as he knew himself. For in order to know oneself one has to follow the pathways laid before us by our elders, our mothers and fathers who have gone before us. To lose these knowledges will mean death to the people. These things the Birhor knows and understands but is powerless to put his thoughts and knowledge into action when his movements have been tied down and his children are taught a new knowledge and he himself is forced to live by a new spirit.

As I have said, the Birhor are perhaps among the last remaining examples of Mesolithic man who are completely in tune with their natural wild environment. Their lives are closely bound with the forests in which they hunt and trap and forage. They know every cave and spring and the ways and habits and the hiding places of the animals and birds they hunt and trap in nets and snares –this involvement with the quarry gives them a unique understanding of its movements and the way in which it moves, and this appears in their drawings. As I have worked now closely for nearly two decades with tribal artists I have found their mental imagery is like a screen onto which they project images and when they want to reproduce them they draw directly from this image in front of them. They have the same kind of imagination in making maps of the landscape which they move over, it is a visual imagery built on direct experience, one that is visual. Their thought processes are also visual rather than intellectual. Their drawings of wild animals may be called primitive in a derogatory way implying they are non realistic but it must be remembered these drawings have a unique energy of their own, one which great Modern artists of the primitive mind like Picasso understood. In the drawings are centred that energy which defies form, or which out of form creates energy defying form. These drawings have an energy that can only come to those knowing the animals intimately. From this we learn that truly great drawing is not about realism but about energy, and that energy lies in the form given by the artist. These people can be best compared with the Aboriginal of Australia and the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert in Namibia whose ancestors painted the animal rockart of the Drakensberg Ranges, and the Hadzabe of Tanzania, the Pygmy of the Congo. Each of these tribes and live in small leaf shelters, the wurley of the Australian Aboriginal, the lean-to of the Bushmen and Pygmy, the conical. So close is the resemblance between the lifeways of these last Mesolithic people of the world that one would think of them as a single people though separated by vast spaces. Such hunting peoples are sensitive to sound, scent, and spoor. An echo tells them of a natural depression, animals are scented from a distance, a small mark on the ground reveals everything about the animal or bird which made it. It would have been the ancestors of such tribes who painted the world's rockart. The Bushmen's art in the Drakensberg in southeastern Africa are in caves commanding the wide sweep of the high ranges first inhabited 120,000 years ago where a wide variety of stone tools of the Late Stone Age thirty thousand years ago up to a mere century ago when the influx of White settlers drove the Bushmen inward to the Kalahari in Namibia and Botswana. Very similar in many ways to the Birhor their paintings are connected with hunting magic, shamanism, and feature similar therianthropes and anthropomorphs. They still believe in hunting magic in their drawings. Their art on paper is highly prized in the western world. The Birhors have similarly moved away from their caves but the evidence of their forebears remain in chipped stone tools still found in these shelters and the surrounding areas. The great rockart could not have been painted by a primitive people and it is to be stressed that the art of the Birhor today evidences a people which is sophisticated in its knowledge and ability as hunters, medicine-men, and tradition-keepers. Even as we admire the genius behind the art so must we also review our opinion of the tribals who have made them. Their ways may not be

our ways and their thoughts may not be our thoughts but the quality of their thoughts and simple lives, the high art which they are capable of producing, points to a highly cultured elite of the human family. Civilization requires redefinition. Gone are the days when civilization was marked by technological superiority. In the times we live in civilization demands to be marked by civilized behaviour. This is a lesson which the simple tribals can teach us. Today the Birhors have been incarcerated in housing built by the government where they have been forced to give up much of their old way of life, and they are not familiar with agriculture so their only source of survival is coolly labour. If we look at the division of races we find a clear divide between those which chose to live on in the manner of their ancestors and those who chose a modern lifestyle.

In order to appreciate the rock art one has to approach it in its undisturbed natural setting with the same undisturbed consciousness in which it was conceived and executed. The uniqueness of its location and the unique manifestation of its art is to be appreciated in the fullest sense. Every cave where rock paintings have been found commands a breathtaking view and no doubt this is connected with the shamanism implicit in the art itself. I sometimes think that the rock art can only be fully appreciated by those who painted it or are closest to the original artists, and such people are the primitive tribes themselves and not their modern urban cousins who like to pass off as tribals. The difference between the primitive aboriginal consciousness and the development of the modern is a wide unbridgeable gulf. The old ways of thinking and feeling are being to undervalue themselves and become extinct. Today in confronting primitive societies like the nomadic Birhors we are standing before the last vestiges of the palaeolithic mind. This must not be seen as backward as is the present case in modern erstwhile colonized countries where a stigma attaches to everything connected with the past, these societies and the ancient cultural heritage which they represent must be seen and appreciated in the particular form in which they represent human genius. They represent a particular kind of human knowledge and a special kind of human intelligence which modern man has long since lost. Our greatest artists and poets are humbled before the art or myth of the past which is expressed in the art of primitive societies. We stand naked when we confront the primitive consciousness in all its defenceless force and energy based upon truth. This is the domain of seers and visionaries, of sages and Pathfinders. The Old soothsayers of the Native Americans spoke through a consciousness of the past and a direct paranormal search with the realities of the present to discover new "medicine" to deal with any human situation. Cunning and lying and the profit motive was unknown to them. Thus were they easily tricked and destroyed by mercenaries eager for profit. We are still living through such times ourselves in developing countries like India.

As they sit around their camp-fires in the darkness of the night, or sing and dance in the light of the glowing flames, these simple tribals become one with their natural environment. As the natural environment around them is destroyed and polluted the song goes out of their heart and their stories die in the smoke of factories and there are no more tracks of the wild animals to be read and interpreted in the dust of industrialization. As the environment dies so too is destroyed the unique consciousness of these people. The link between the natural environment and these natural societies is unique. The Aboriginal in Australia was exterminated as much by guns as through environmental and cultural genocide. The same happened wherever the whiteman encountered the tribal in the world, particularly with the pride of an Aryan superiority. The destruction entire societies in the continent of Africa continued through European colonization. The tragedy had long before been enacted in the Americas, and continued across Asia and the Pacific. The same will happen to our tribals in India. To all these ancient societies art was not merely a display of virtuosity but an experiencing of the life force which their spirits gave to the life forms they painted or which their songs and stories gave life. That is why Late Stone Age

paintings have been painted over again and again, both in the Drakensberg in South Africa, and in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia and elsewhere, including in India, professing the spiritual message of the art to the present and future. The sites where the rockart was painted did not change because they had been specially chosen –in many ways including acoustic reflection or echo, or some other powerful factor as found in the rockart of the Dordogne valley, Lot, Viennes and other major rockart sites in France. The art of these prehistoric animal painters was grounded in communication between the artist and the animal, and is witnessed in this unique experience of acoustic reflection. The chanting to the rockart by the Tana Bhagats which I have witnessed is a similar story of the sound reverberating with the painted animal figures and thereby creating a symbiosis of sound and form. To try and intellectually interpret or understand the intangible is not the same thing as experiencing it, and it has to be experienced in order to be realized.

I have stood speechless before animal art made with charcoal from a wood fire, drawn on the white-washed walls of the houses the Birhors were forced to live in. They needed some magic to live with and these drawings represented their bird and animal spirits, their father and mother deities Bhutaha and Burhi Ma pecked out in strong glypts. The secret power of all the greatest animal painters is the creation of more than a realistic likeness but to make drawings which capture the magic of the animals themselves which makes good hunting medicine. This secret power of these drawings and glypts gave them strength to survive in a new environment against their wish. That was at the Matak dura *tanda* on the road to the Damodar valley. Their leaf houses or *kumbas* had steadily died back as the brick buildings came up. I kept the tradition of building the leaf kumba alive for some years by paying a couple to live in one. I wonder where they have gone, where their children are? They were my family and I was accepted as their friend. Our relationship was beyond money. That was over fifteen years ago. Then I began to study the tribe's ethnobotany and became apprenticed to Kamli Birhorni in the Demotand *tanda* whom we had known ever since 1993. She took me under her wing and trained me in the identification of medicinal plants in the scrub jungle. Here too I watched in stupefied unbelief as the new brick houses were built using the Birhors as coolly labour. I did not believe it could happen, but I saw the leaf *kumbas* die at the edge of the clearing by the scrub jungle. Then again in 1996 I was witness to the death of the great Sultana *tanda* (which is named after the big Muslim village not far away). I had seen this same *tanda* in Salgah when the men and women were strong and their oiled bodies burned brown by the sun in their crisply washed loincloths and sleek hair. Now these proud hunters fell prey to the disease of civilization and succumbed with their *kumbas* and folklore and pride to the mercy of the heavy booted government officers and their disciplined cohorts who planned to *civilize* the tribe. I sometimes wonder how bureaucrats can ever understand the intangible because the intangible can only be known from direct experience, and these people do not possess the souls to experience it.

The animal art of the hunters is the depiction of the quarry with its magic inside it. In the great painted caves of France it is believed that the painted panels with their huge animal forms were directly related with the acoustics. For example by the light of a flame the clicking of stones would create a galloping herd of animals come to life as the echo of hoofbeats were recreated. In our rockart too the principle of sound reflection must have been used. If one stands in the narrow valley before the Thethangi rockart and clap your hands or call out it is echoed back from the painted shelter itself. In the *puja* which is performed by the Tana Bhagat the use of clapping and clanging of brass cymbals accompanies the monotonous chanting creating its own world of sound there high up on the hillside. It is sometimes only pierced by the shrill shrieks of the women undergoing shamanic paroxysms which as far as I could know have not been

stimulated by drugs of any kind except the drug of spiritual fervour. Normal experience has been suspended and replaced by the paranormal.

In any way altering such sites will forever destroy their purpose and meaning. As I had described the women who have been fasting enter trances and throw themselves about like dervishes. The same shamanistic trances have been practiced by the Bushmen in their rockart sites in the Drakensberg. The trance dance was performed by those within the tribe supposed to have magical healing powers and can draw out sickness. In the trance dance of the Bushmen done about a fire they experience an altered state of consciousness through hyperventilation and physical exertion and not through the use of hallucinogens. A similar effect may be achieved by the Tana Bhagats in their *puja*. The *shamans* (the name *bhagat* incidentally means a *shaman*) experience an altered state of consciousness through the physical process but their own perceptions may be altered by their knowledge and belief traditions. Without these the effects would not be the same. Their ancient consciousness presents a particular manner of understanding – seeing and feeling, which makes them different. That the Bhagats gather in their hundreds from faraway places to partake in these rockart séances, particularly the women, is significant in understanding that these sites are places associated with Dreamtime occurrences of the ancestors. They are much more than galleries to display Mesolithic paintings, they are places where the great Mesolithic experience is enacted. That this should happen in our midst in the twentyfirst century is a magical experience in itself, and one to be cherished.

THE ART OF PALAEOOLITHIC MAN

The roots of our Indian culture and tradition may be traced through the evolution of Indian art right back to the cave paintings of palaeolithic societies which developed through the Mesolithic and chalcolithic ages, even as settlements began appearing and the rock painting tradition was carried into the village mural paintings. Man had begun making microliths over twentyfive thousand years ago and as the large old hand axes disappeared and a new stone age started to begin with smaller and more sophisticated tools like ground-edge axes and celts during the late Mesolithic period (7000 B.C.) this technology carried on through the bronze age or chalcolithic period right down to the iron age (1100 B.C.). In fact we still use a variety of stone tools and implements in the Indian kitchen that are traceable to the stone age and we are still in living bronze-age in which articles of kitchen and temple use are still made in the villages through the lost-wax (*cere-perdue*) method. From these continuing institutions and traditions we can make certain deductions, that our modern traditions have very ancient roots, and that they have only remained unchanged *in situ* so long because of Central India's peninsular disconnection from the general inter-continental traffic and trade.

The spiritual awakening in modern man has been traced back to the Neanderthal period thirty thousand years ago, when in western Asia we have seen the case of ritualized burials (Shanidar, Iraq), and incised icons of bone, stone, and clay of the female fertility goddess more popularly called the Earth Mother, sometimes found in fired clay or terracotta. If we are to gauge the artistic excellence of these Neanderthal period creations in contrast to those of the Mesolithic hunter we may tend to believe that palaeolithic man may have had a more highly developed approach to painting, sculpture and modeling of natural forms than the meso-chalcolithic man whose art had begun to move away from realism to abstract designs and awkwardly realistic folk forms by the third millennium B.C. when the Mesolithic rock painting was coming to an end. Perhaps the finest animal art in the world comes from western Europe in the northern foothills of the Pyrenees and southwestern France in the Dordogne region where Altamira and Lascaux

caves are found, and Chauvet and Cosquer's Grotto with their grand galleries of wild horses and bison, mammoth elephants and saber-toothed tigers. These were painted from fifteen to thirty thousand years ago by the famous Aurignacian (Neanderthal or Cro-Magnon) artists, and the famous coloured ("painted" would be the right word) animal art of western Europe, was a fascinating display of realism never again equaled. Perhaps during the cold snow-bound months these artists had more time to devote to their great animal paintings. By contrast we find the rock paintings of animals drawn on sandstone by the Bushmen, the unknown artists of the Tassili-N'ajjer in the Sahara, the Indian hunters, and the Aboriginal nomads of Australia, belong to a quite different genre of simple, realistic line drawings, sometimes quite crudely drawn, with a decided attempt at reproducing shamanistic or super-natural figures. But the realism displayed in the animal art is no less wonderful. It would seem the artists of the southern hemisphere had to work longer and harder periods and suffer more energy loss due to the warmer climate which makes their art so different from that of Europe. Humans were throughout this period (30-10,000 B.C.) full-time survival hunters living in caves or under the shelter of trees and their knowledge of the wild was endowed with a deep observation born from experience and it would seem this is the reason for the animal art in the caves belonging to this time being the finest seen in the world.

In Aboriginal rockart in Australia we find a palaeolithic tradition exists. While that may also be said of some Indian rock painting, it may not be said of the more recent rockart of the cattle-herders of the Tassili N'ajjer or Bushmen whose art is more recent. The animal art still to be found in Australia is much older than anything we have in India although man in India is far older than man in Australia. Man in Australia is believed to be at most 140 thousand years B.P., while man in India is 400 thousand B.P. Besides this, the Indian rockart has proven more friable and nothing over 20,000 provenance is found whereas Australian rockart is dated back to 45,000 B.P. (Northern Territory) But it is to be believed man in India also was painting forty thousand years ago. The age of art is not only dependant on dates but on the state of development of societies. The anthropomorph, therianthorpe, zoomorph, etc. are found with ehumanization of plant and animal forms in the rockart of Hazaribagh, a tradition which despite the modern influences is still carried on in the village mural paintings today. We find the animals and birds painted in the ritual Khovar and Sohrai mural art similarly drawn with x-ray or in interplay with plant forms similar to the rock paintings in many striking ways including silhouette style, side elevation and framing. In the more recently touched panels geometrical figures appear showing the arrival of a sedentarized folk element and a symbol culture that would soon evolve into picture writing and then script. Tribal art in its original forms is devoid of abstraction and metaphor or highly ritualized context. It is essentially practical and realistic in form and depicts animals and birds in a direct informal manner. In the development of this simple art into the folk idiom certain highly noticeable stylistics occur such as

1. Animal attacking prey from behind
2. Bird on animal's back
3. Animal looking backward (discovered recently in Satpahar IV rockart)
4. Plume on bird or animal's neck, a sign of spiritual significance
5. Double-headed bird, Etc.

This art may be compared with rock-art and people's art from all over the world, in form and feeling. It points to an early time in our race's pre-history when these forms developed in different places world-wide either independently or through culture contacts, and one of our measures of identifying meaning through them is that their range depicts their antiquity and their profusion in any place identifies their centres of maximum occurrence or origin. The similarities between the South African (Bushmen), South Asian (Tribal), and Australian (Aboriginal) rockart is obvious and speaks of a largely similar *proto- homo australis* (i. man of the southern hemisphere)

race having negroid, bantu, proto-dravidian, mongoloid, and australoid connections, sometimes called Australoid or Proto-Australoid, and to which the Mundaic tribes belong, and from which the Proto-Dravidian should not be excluded. There is a basic similarity of expressive forms, similar geometrical markings and symbols, a similar intent both sacred and secular.

The spotted animal on wheels found in the ritual painted harvest art of the Sohrai festival in our villages in Hazaribagh has been found in the rockart of our region (Isco). The images which we find of the horned harvest god Pashupathi (Lord of Animals) standing on the back of the bull in the contemporary village murals at Sohrai during the Harvest festival in Hazaribagh have also been found in central Indian chalcolithic rockart. There is no doubt that the contemporary ritual village wall paintings are a continuation of the earlier rock painting traditions. This horned deity surrounded by animals has also been found in Mohenjo Daro with three faces, and which Sir John Marshall identified as a proto-Indian deity called An. The horned human form has been found in our rockart in Saraiya and is identical with the horned bison-horned Maria tribal dancers in Bastar in Chhatisgarh, which reminds us of the horned human god Cerunnos of the Celts which also appeared with three faces. Pashupati in Hazaribagh is sometimes called Shiva-Pashupati, bringing to us the common identity of the lord of animals and the great forest god of the pre-Hindu tribes. Shiva is associated with the tree as the forest god, and is also known locally as the Tree God. He is worshipped as a source of fertility and village women give him various offerings like the rice curds which Sujata had taken for him from the village of Senani in what is now Bodhgaya only to find in his place the Buddha to whom she offered the rice-curds. In the popular imagination the image of Shiva is associated with the forest and fecundity, and answering the prayers of women for offspring. That Shiva is associated with Pashupati is not so strange as even Lord Ram is associated with the deity as the women who paint the murals say that it was he who on the festival of Deepavali (Divali) brought home the cattle from the forest to Ayodhya on his return from his long forest sojourn. This village tradition exists that the first domestication of cattle is associated with Lord Ram. The figure on the back of the bull at Sohrai is sometimes a human and sometimes a tree, which represents the deity Shiva. Generally the tree or human figure has a triangular head, the triangle being associated with the *yoni* or female organ. The triangle is with horns on either side as is associated with a super-normal being. We are aware of the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms in the village paintings and this is a further expression of this. I have also found a dog painted with a tree on its back in the Sohrai wall murals of the Ghatwals of eastern Hazaribagh, and once a dog with a tree on its back appeared in a village embroidered quilt (*ledra*) from Bhelwara in the same area. It is of note that a Bhairav cult exists in the region, Shiv-Bhairav being represented by the forest god Shiva with two dogs. In a temple near Bishungarh not far from Bhelwara there is an ancient stone image in a temple beside a river of the god with two dogs. We may remember that Shiv-Bhairav was the deity worshipped by the Chandelas who built the Khajuraho temples in the thirteenth century. In my discussions with the women artists I have come to learn that the triangular head of the deity in the paintings is a masked form of the female *yoni* or generative organ. The triangle is a popular motif in the rock paintings of the region.

In the rockart of Isco the spotted bull is shown on wheels from the chalcolithic period and it is strikingly similar to the bulls painted in the Sohrai murals. The continuity of the tradition is established, although we have not found in the Hazaribagh rockart the bull with the figure of Pashupati on the back which might go to show that this form was to develop only later when the villagers came in contact with horse riders around the beginning of the first millennium B.C.

With regard to the *yoni* being used as the head either of the human figure or tree, it is pertinent to note that in the Bison-Horn dance of the Maria dancers in Bastar during the Dusshera

festival in Jagdalpur the head-dress has strings of Cowrie shells hanging which cover the dancer's face, and which represent the female *yoni* or vulva, being a form of de-sacralization or showing a strong matriarchal authority. This tradition continues on in contemporary marriage ceremonies when the groom's face is covered with strings of white frangipani or similar flowers. These are the marks of the mother goddess

Wild cattle appear in the rockart of Hazaribagh but no images of ploughing or cattle-catching as have been found in central Indian rockart. This further goes to show that the domestication of cattle in the region might have only come at a quite late date to the region when the rockart painting tradition was slowly coming to an end which could have been as late as the Mahabharata period (7th cent.B.C.) The tradition of painting animals associate with cattle are more particularly with tribal groups living more generally on rice agriculture such as the semi-Hinduized tribes such as the Kurmis, Ghatwals and Prajapatis etc., while the images painted by the groups relying more closely on the jungle for produce largely paint wild animals. The Ganjus are a partly agricultural tribe who paint the Sohrai art in the style of the rockart close to which they live on the southern scarps of the Hazaribagh plateau overlooking the North Karanpura valley with a strong tradition of wildlife forms. Great agriculturists though they are the Mundas and Oraons do not paint cattle on their house walls but draw iconic forms closely allied to the rock paintings, while the Bhuiyas who are subsistence farmers follow similar traditional forms. The Manjhi Santals of eastern Hazaribagh who live in forest villages and practice agriculture are great hunters, but do not paint any pictures on their walls. They just make a few magical black forms beside the entrance doorway to ward off evil spirits, and in the winter decorate their doorways during Sohrai.

Perhaps the most interesting are the once wild trapper, the leaf dwelling nomadic Uthlu Birhor of Hazaribagh whose centire life was upto recently completely centred about the forests. These people claim that their ancestors painted the rockart in the shelters. Their own drawing tradition only came to light when they were forcibly moved by the government into white-washed brick housing on the walls of which their drawings made with charcoal began to appear. I noted this immediately and found close parallels with the art of the Mesolithic cave artists. Their subject matter was exclusively centred about the catching of wild animals and gathering honey. The small noose traps called *kbuji* and nets called *tur-jhali* which appear in much of the rockart of the Orissa-Chhatisgarh-Jharkhand complex were prominent in these wall paintings. I at once gave them paper and brought to this about two hundred completed drawing sheets which stand as a record of the art of the Birhor, noted for the first time since even S.C.Roy had not mentioned its existence in his classic monograph on the tribe in the first quarter of the last century. There is no doubt that the Birhors represent the last glimpse of the palaeolithic knowledge, whether in ethnobotany, trapping, or survival lifestyle continuing in Jharkhand.

APPENDIX- IV

Paper presented at
the International Rock Art Conference, 7th to 13th December, 2012
at IGNCA, New Delhi

The Art of Contemporary and Pre-historic Societies

Introduction

A recent examination of early remains in the immediate vicinity of the cave paintings of Hazaribagh in the hill ranges flanking the Damodar valley has provided further evidence of the fact that hunters and food gatherers were the earliest people known to have existed on Indian soil. Moreover, their presence is attested not only by their stone tools and other implements, but also, after a given date, by their rock paintings and rock engravings. Historians and linguists are shy to call these writing or the documents which give body to history and so the people who made them are relegated to prehistory. But this is unfair since the paintings of animals would have been having names and formed part of the speech of the people who made these drawings, hence giving them meaning, and therefore historical place. Similarly for the engravings and forms other than of animals such as geometrical forms and designs, plants and animals. These paintings to me are a firm historical document and the first historical statement made by man in India. At the same time each picture is a valuable document on the earliest manifestation of Indian art.

The majority of these rock art sites are to be found from Central India, such as Chhatisgarh, eastwards through the rock paintings of Jharkhand and Orissa. To the west they are connected to the rock paintings of the Vindhyaas such as Bhimbetka, and Raisen and then through Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and other states where the Mesolithic hunters left their markings on stone. These sites depict wild animals painted by these hunters and the bows and axes used by them, as well as their traps and snares, and in the rock art of the Damodar valley south of the Hazaribagh plateau in North Jharkhand we find such paintings in large numbers. The difference with other similar sites is that no domestic animals have been painted in the rock art which clearly shows a pre-agricultural phase, and where geometrical designs do appear (which would be in the agricultural) there also no domestic animals are found. This shows the art to be of a purely hunting stage when man was still living a nomadic life and living in caves or leaf shelters, the latter being a form of housing used upto very recently by the nomadic Birhor tribals of Hazaribagh. These tribals claim the rock art in the caves were painted by their ancestors. They still make drawings on enforced government housing, where the drawings are directly comparable with the rock caves. Bird traps and hunting nets, sticks and wild animals in flight, and other smaller birds and animals are all depicted in a familiar resemblance to the rock paintings in the jungles alongside the open spaces where they make their leaf dwellings called Kumba. These encampments are called Tandas. They still hunt with the same long nets called Jhali and small noose traps called Phandi. Their drawings were brought by me to paper from the mid 1990s and a considerable collection is in my archive. In the rock art of Hazaribagh and the new district of Chatra recently carved out of it the typical hunting scenes such as animals at rest or flight, and some times in confrontation with the hunters during the hunt. These hunters are shown armed with bows which is of interest since the Birhors, being trappers, do not use bows, although they do use a short axe called *Kulbari*, to kill trapped game. The interesting thing is the forms of unidentifiable objects in flowery exuberance or meaningless

abstractions in their paintings which are comparable with the rock paintings. (*fig.1*) Unlike the rock art of Central India the Hazaribagh rock art has no depiction of domesticated animals or plough animals in yoke or men carrying things in baskets (Bhangi), or religious practices related to the sedentarized agricultural period. There are no dancers adorned with horns and feathers or masks, or engaged with fighting animals or offering them worship as has been found in other rock art sites in India. Further, I will later deal with the special attribute of the Hazaribagh rock art being its connection with a living village mural painting tradition in the villages in the jungles directly beside these painted shelters. (*fig.2*)

The Mesolithic rock art of Hazaribagh is a definite stage in the evolution of early Indian society because the agricultural society's practices seems unrelated with the rock paintings, the agricultural practices not being portrayed, pointing out a stage of sedentarized society at a point when rock painting by the Mesolithic hunters had ended. Yet there is another interesting development in the connection between the post Mesolithic rockart motifs and in particular symbols and forms connected with the sedentarized period appearing and having direct counterpart in the harvest wall paintings of the villagers today. We find the form of a wheeled and spotted animal to the right of the central panel of Isco rockart. Similar wheeled and spotted animals are painted on the walls of the village houses during the Sohrai harvest festival during October. (*fig.3*) In several of the painted shelters we find the strings of circles representing hoof-prints of cattle which are still painted during the harvest festival of Sohrai to welcome the cattle. At the same time the walls of the mudden village houses are painted with huge murals of the spotted cattle (called Ghoda) which are mounted by a horned deity called Pashupati (Lord of Animals). The link between the rock art and the village paintings is thus unmistakable. (*fig.4*)

That the nomadic Birhor survived in all his primitiveness into the twentyfirst century is also a wonder, and important because these people are non agricultural except for a very tiny number who had long back settled and are known as Jagghis. The Birhor could have been the painters of the rock art upto fairly recent times, even if some of the earlier rock paintings done by the hunters were done thousands of years back by their ancestors who were Mesolithic hunters, and the more recent diagrammatic and ritual paintings done by the ancestors of the villagers who live in the open fields beside their encampments. The practice of rock painting by any of the other tribes would have definitely not lasted later than the iron age which would mean it did not reach the Jain or Buddhist *sravaks* or disciples, otherwise we should have found images of their saints.

Much may be learned from closely observing the rock paintings in the so far discovered fourteen painted shelters. For example the white stockings on the deer in the Satpahar ranges points to an ice age which affected the region perhaps more than ten thousand years back. The scratched glypt of a rhinoceros on the left end of the Isco panel and the Yakshi with fly-whip a hundred feet distant at the other end of the long panel, clearly points to the Mauryan period over two thousand years ago when rhinoceros was found in the grasslands of the Damodar, and Yakshis used fly-whisks in the Mauryan court in Patliputra three hundred kilometers to the north! (*fig.5, 6*). Strangely no peafowl have been found in the rock art, nor jungle fowl of any kind. Peafowl are common in Central Indian rock paintings. One butterfly has been found in Khandar. Animals found include the wild buffalo, tiger, deer of various kinds, Nilgai and Four-horned antelope (*Chowsingha*), hyaena, jackal, wild boar.

It will seem the Mesolithic rock paintings are preceded by an even earlier level of voodoo art which has queer looking anthropomorphs and zoomorphs many of which appear today in the Birhor drawings, and point to the distinction between the hunter-gatherer and Mesolithic hunter

,since the ancestors of the hunter-gatherer may have been a parallel advanced society living in leaf huts while the even more primitive hunters roamed in the jungles and lived in caves. These people may have had bows which had replaced stone tools used in hunting. If the animal art is in fact preceded by these half animal, half human, half plant drawings such as found in the rock art of Saraiya we shall have an interesting field before us indeed! Such zoomorphs and anthropomorphs appear in very primitive rock art in Australia and which during the 1980s Lesley Maynard identified and applied the nomenclature **Panaramittee Style**. This style consists of simple silhouette forms and primary motifs (no outline) including bird-tracks and animal tracks. It is of note that this silhouette art has been found all over the world showing how ancient it is, and in greatest density in regions where it is believed to have started – such as the Australian continent – and perhaps now we may say in primitive India ! The style is silhouette in form and corresponds closely to the Saraiya rock art motifs and also to the black sgraffito motifs which are comb cut in Khovar village murals in Hazaribagh, also shown to have descended from the rock paintings of the region. In the Damodar valley the cut such motifs with broken pieces of comb out of the white earth coating laid wet on the black coated house walls. Khovar means the marriage room, and the rock art caves are also called *Khovar*. Anyone having studied Panaramittee Style in Aboriginal Australia would find the *Khovar* of great interest !

The rock art of Hazaribagh has brought to us a wide variety of geometrical motifs and over a hundred symbols which have been compared by researchers with the Indus script which I first brought to light after an observation by my son Justin in 1992. It has now become a bone of contention among scholars and a wide field of research also. These geometrical motifs are found here among earlier layers of Mesolithic art. The circle, square and cross , the earliest human markings, of an even perhaps earlier level than the Mesolithic are also present. In Australia these have been dated to forty thousand years ago! However, our available rock art is perhaps not as old due to the friability of the Indian sandstone and wide variance of temperatures, and the lashing rains of the Indian monsoon. But the age of our prehistory is not less than any other, and the continuance of these traditions into the contemporary present is perhaps one of the greatest miracles of this modern age!

The need of animals as food was an important requirement of all societies and also of primitive ones. We are aware that the major food sources both animal, plant and cereal was discovered by those societies in the distant past going back several thousands of years and modern so called “civilizations” had added nothing significant or new to the food list. The domestication of crops and animals was carried out by primitive societies after the last glaciation approximately fourteen or fifteen thousand years ago. In the Aurignacian rockart of Europe we find wild animals painted by the hunters and as ritual animals which had been propitiated for their plenty to a hunting society. The animal art of the Drakensberg is perhaps more recent in south-eastern Africa but the purpose of it by the Bushman artists was the same. In the rockart of Hazaribagh we find wild animals that have been painted by hunters during the Mesolithic and their purpose was the same – to make the animal the subject of magic and thereby propitiate it for plenty. These traditions had carried on when man became a sedentarized valley dwelling agriculturist living in mudden houses on the walls of which animals and birds of the jungle continued to be painted. The wild animal has ever been the subject of the hunt and we cannot disassociate the Khovar and Sohrai paintings of Hazaribagh from the early art of the hunters from which they evolved to their presently more sophisticated depiction. However, the animals painted by the village artists are sometimes amazingly similar in fluency and living quality to the rock paintings in the hills of Hazaribagh. Some of the painted rock shelters of Hazaribagh have now gone into the new Chatra district in the south=west for administrative purposes but they remain on the Hazaribagh plateau and I shall continue to refer to them as the rockart of Hazaribagh. In these animal

paintings such as in the Satpahar ranges are vividly painted animals like deer and sometimes others like tigers and the wild Gaur (Indian Bison). The European rockart as noted has had more favourable preservative weather conditions than India and have lasted since earlier times than our Indian rockart. On the other hand Indian rockart though more recent is as primitive since the Mesolithic continued in our jungles down to more recent times, and the primitive hunting tribes that are still with us like the Juang, Korwa, Birhor and perhaps we should mention also others like the hunting Manjhi Santal, are still living on a basically hunting tradition. In the jungles in which these tribes live the metal smelting tribes of the Chalcolithic are still preserving their traditions. So we can say that a Meso-Chalcolithic society is still alive in the jungles of Hazaribagh. Our rock shelters are of red sandstone and the dry summer and lashing monsoon rains immediately after have had an impact on the rock paintings. In many shelters the rain waters flow down over the painted rock and spoil the paintings. We have done some conservation but a lot needs to be done. Unfortunately there is almost complete neglect of rockart in India, even at the more famous sites. The rockart has never been taken seriously in India and it is reported that the famous Bhimbetka rockart appears without any sign indicating its World Heritage status. The neglect of ancient archaeological sites in India is unparalleled and one of the reasons seems the inability to distinguish the deep past from the contemporary present which for all practical intents and purposes is even as primitive. Our oldest Indian rockart generally does not exceed ten thousand years in age to the end of the Mesolithic, which is not a very long time if we consider it is only three times the age of our historical "civilization". When we study the evolution of rockart in India we find that it changes suddenly with the arrival of agriculture and the use of the plough with humped cattle which period is about five thousand years back in the Chalcolithic when bronze implements were being made but the Neolithic polished stone implements were still in use. Suddenly the beautiful bold wild animal paintings disappeared and the art of the agriculturists begins. We find depictions of bulls with ploughs, some with deities standing on their backs and others with conventional riders, showing this time was one of a new ritual developing around the bull as well as of horse-riders which could not have been later than the Mahabharata period (750 B.C.). The horse was new to the Gangetic valley and the bull has often been confused with it as will be seen by the appellation of the term "Ghoda" (horse) to the bull in primitive societies in central and east-central India (i.e. Chhatisgarh-Jharkhand). The bull has been sacralized because of its great value for agriculture as a plough animal and the cow was raised to the level of a deity in the new Brahmanical religion which replaced the old Vedic religion after the Mahabharata. This new cow-worshipping religion was to become by the Gupta period what we today call Hindu. These impacts were not lost on the evolving cultural atmosphere of ancient India caught between Buddhism introduced by the Buddha and modern Jainism introduced by Parasvanatha and Mahavira from the seventh millennium B.C. onwards. The old rockart came to an end.

In the rockart of the Chalcolithic a new mood seems to have taken over from the art of the hunters painted during the Mesolithic years when we find only animal paintings and a few cryptic diagrams which would continue into the contemporary motifs and also appear as far away as the Indus when the art of the central-east-central tribals was carried into the iconography of the Indus valley which was developing the foundations of the new "civilization" over there. It is now quite well established that the roots of the animals and birds painted in the Indus have their origins in this central-east-central tribal Indian complex covering the heart of India from the Satpura, Masiukal and Vindhyan ranges through the Kaimur and Jharkhand ranges to the Eastern Ghats and western hills of Orissa into Chhatisgarh. This was the theatre of the Mesolithic hunter-artists of the period 12,000 – 5,000 B.C. The entire area was undisturbed by any trade traffic or other interference and wild forests ran from the Gangetic valley to the Bay of Bengal in uninterrupted succession of hills and valleys. These lands were

inhabited by the most primitive tribes whose descendants are today associated with the Tribals. While we can say that in the rockart the art of the hunters has completely disappeared we cannot say this art itself has disappeared because it is still very visible in the various artforms of the Tribals. These include the ceremonial brassware of Bastar and the *Dhankul* paintings of Orissa, the *Ittalan* of the Saoras of the Eastern Ghats, the *Khovar* and *Sobrai* paintings of Hazaribagh, and so on. These arts have drawn the attention of the western world to a great extent and in a completely sanitized Europe find a place of honour for they carry the climate and environment of the social life of our ancestors lost forever in Europe. The American Indian had carried forward similar artistic traditions from the ancient cave painters and cliff dwellers of the south-west into the painted figures on their wigwams and buffalo-skin robes. Some of these traditions still continue but the Native American has been swamped by the modern world in that continent. In India the art of the hunters or what may be called Hunter-gatherers (since exclusively living on hunting and trapping has been forcibly stopped after the enforcement of stringent wildlife laws within the past couple of decades. Here and there pockets of hunters, trappers, and forest gatherers still remain and it is in these pockets the last of the animal art of the Mesolithic age still survives – either in house wall murals or in cast bronze votary figurines, or ritual paintings. These are continuing natural traditions and hence do not have any cultivated quality as is found in all handicraft items made by modern folk societies for bazaars both in India and the west. Demarcating one from the other is an act of curating and study. Since we know the Tribal hunters have not entirely disappeared from the jungles of this sub-continent we may be equally certain that their ancient animal art must survive somewhere in the soul of their society, and this is the quest of studies by art lovers and ethnographers alike for it represents a phase of human life which was most profound and spiritually important. The Mesolithic was the last breath of primitive man. It is here we can touch the ageless understandings of our palaeolithic ancestors going back many millions of years. Some of the best animal art in Hazaribagh comes from villages in the jungles. The ancestors of these Tribals like the Manjhis, Ganjus, or Birhors who until only a few years ago lived in leaf shelters, had been the Mesolithic hunters. It was during the shift from forest-dwelling hunters to village dwelling tribes that the art of the Mesolithic hunters moved its canvas from the sandstone walls of caves in the jungles to the mud walls of homes amid terraced fields on the highland *Pats* or agricultural river valleys of Hazaribagh and similar forested places. The art galleries of the Mesolithic hunters who had lived in the shadow of their painted caves from the archaeological evidence available were forgotten and as younger generations of the tribes carried on their daily struggles for existence ceased to have importance. That is why the painted caves lost their importance and relevance for the very societies whose ancestors painted them and became the haunt of curio collectors and foreign scholars in quest of the vanishing primitive man.

In the Hazaribagh region there are over a dozen painted rock shelters which I have helped bring to light and there are several known sites not as yet explored, and undoubtedly the vast ranges in the valley of the Damodar, the hill scarps of Chatra and Koderma, and other places shall bring to light not less than one hundred painted shelters in due course if proper searches are carried out. This is a vast living museum of living tribal life. Many of the villagers are aware of unknown rockart sites but prefer to keep quiet because these are sanctified by their secrecy and preserved as sacred sites of their ancestors by being unknown. Certain tribes like the Bhagats carry out various kinds of worship to these rockart sites through chanting and singing, exorcism and trances, and offerings of food. These are similar to Native-American Vision Quest sites. The rock shelters having animal paintings like Isco, Nautangwa, Thethangi, several shelters in the Satpahar range and others, testify to a rich art of the hunters. The region is still home to many hunting tribes including the Mundas, Oraons, Manjhis (Santal), and others who have annual hunting traditions. While the Mundas and Oraons have an agricultural connection with these

annual hunts because jerked meat from animals killed in them are sown with the summer ploughing (peculiar to these two tribes), the Manjhis do not have such a tradition and the hunt is considered sacred to the forest mother *Ban Jhowra* or *Jhair Era*. The Manjhis have two hunts, the earlier summer hunt being called *Phagun Sendra* in April and *Desom Sendra* on the full moon of May when the annual Hunt Council of the Santals sits. The Birhors one would expect as hunter-gatherers and trappers to be associated with these annual *Sendras* but they have absolutely no ritual connection with these sacred hunts whatsoever and from my enquiries it seems they look askance at ritual hunting because they hunt for a daily subsistence living. On the other hand, the Manjhis look askance at the Birhors attending their annual hunts. But I have found neighbouring tribes of the Manjhis such as the Kurmis joining the hunts with cumbersome nets with which they try to catch deer in the eroded gullies. In the rockart we find paintings of the deer and nets as well as the smaller traps and snares and hunting nets of the Nomadic Birhors. The Birhors, who I have noted upto a few years ago used to live in leaf houses called *kumba* in regular settlements (*tanda*) claim their ancestors painted the Hazaribagh rockart. I specifically tried to get one of them to come with me to a painted shelter and speak about the art but his grandmother would not let him go, saying that his ancestors would curse the entire tribe. So he refused to go. At that time the Birhors were being introduced to brick houses with cement plaster which were white-washed and the Birhor children and young boys and girls used the walls as canvas, filling them with drawings made of charcoal from the fire, and pecking them with glypts. These glypts were in the **Panaramittee Style** (*Illustration: Lesley Maynard's Chart from Josephine Flood's ROCKART OF THE DREAMTIME*) which I have alluded to earlier. Seeing a possibility of collecting similar drawings on art paper and cardboard I made a project which was very successful in gathering hundreds of artworks which are a record. These artworks have little to distinguish them from many of the rock paintings. It would seem that the ancestors of the Birhors painted some of the rockart of Hazaribagh. Having said that, I will like to make another observation. In the animal art of the Mesolithic we find a highly developed handling of animal forms which is lacking in the Birhor drawings, or for that matter the drawings of very good artists from other tribes like the Oraons, Ganjús, or Mundas whose life is associated with the rockart. Certain spectacular artists from these tribes may however be singled out on a par with the animal rock painters of the Mesolithic. From this it will seem the animals painted in the rockart which we attribute to the Mesolithic hunters belonged to a highly developed tribal society which perhaps lived partly or wholly on hunting, but was not very primitive like the Birhors. The animals of the Hazaribagh rockart are painted by a sophisticated hunting people. So we can say that the rockart may be divided into the highly sophisticated animal paintings and the more primitive drawings like those made by the Birhor. It is significant that motifs drawn by the Birhors have been found in large numbers in the Hazaribagh rockart as well as in the rockart of other neighbouring regions like Lakhamuda-II in the Sundergarh district of Orissa (where Birhors once had lived), and where the drawings depict nets made from the fibres of the wild Chope plant (*Bauhinia scandens*).

Unlike in Northern Arnhem Land and other places in Australia where the Aboriginals return to their ancestral rockart sites and paint on the rock as a ritual form of expression, such a tradition has not been found in India. There is no such living tradition of rockart painting nor any tradition other than what I could find in Hazaribagh of the Tana Bhagats (an Oraon sect) who perform an annual *puja* at a particular rockart site when over a hundred men and women gather and sing and chant, women performing vivid trance and exorcism sessions, and offerings of fruit and milk are made to the ancestors depicted in the rockart. This particular ritual I have suggested to INTACH to forward to UNESCO for its intangible heritage programme. But I also know that once note of it is taken it will no longer remain intangible --- *for the value and importance of all intangible cultural events lies in their anonymity and secrecy*. Fortunately in India rockart has not yet been

drawn out of its original forest village context completely due to the lack of diligence of the scholars and so it has continued as another of the “living traditions” for which India is justly famous. We could say the negligence to rockart and its importance has preserved it. On the other hand its importance as the ancestor form of the village mural painting tradition has not been adequately taken note of by an administration and government keen on developing a different dimension – either for development for non tribal Hindu tourism, or else a source of funds to be misused by local administration in the name of development. The local villages are sometimes tribal, as in the cases of Isco and Thethangi, the former a Munda village and the latter a Tana Bhagat village. In both these rockart sites the local villagers have now come to accept the importance of the rockart and continue traditions associated with the painted shelter. At Isco this was done through an annual fair being held every 26th of February (also India’s Republic Day); and at Thethangi the Tana Bhagats revived the old tradition of the Puja to the rockart in the first week of February. Thus a tribal continuing tradition has been re-established

The village mural paintings which we have seen is derived from the rock paintings, is a wholly and exclusively matriarchal art. The women of the tribes or scheduled castes (who were officially de-tribalized) carry on an annual wall-painting tradition on two specific occasions. During the marriage season beginning with the spring festival of Basanth in February and ending with the onset of the rainy season the married women paint the walls of houses to celebrate marriages in the home and village, and young unmarried girls are apprenticed at this time to learn the technique. The walls are covered with black mud (Krishna) and over this a layer of white mud (*charki-matti, dudhi-matti*) representing the mother goddess (Devi) is applied. The white mud is cut with broken pieces of comb to reveal the black ground in a variety of symbolic patterns both sacred and secular, many corresponding with the rockart, and all in view of promoting fertility, keeping away evil, and bringing happiness to the houses and those who dwell in them. After the monsoon rains are over and the houses have been repaired by October, they are decorated to celebrate the coming harvest festival of Sohrai a fortnight after the *Dussehra*, with vivid coloured paintings in red, black and white, with motifs of the bull and the spotted animals, Pashupati the master of animals standing on the back of the bull, and various designs reminiscent of the paintings on the ancient pottery of the Indus valley and the Indus seals themselves. This tradition is very ancient and has been practiced by all the lower castes in other places such as in Bengal and Nepal, in Smardha in Bhopal, and by the poorer classes along the Nile. *There is reason to believe that this art may have even decorated the walls of houses in the Indus, and the iconic tradition which it represents is a key to study the evolution of the art of central-east-central India outward to Egypt and Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean.*

April is the time when the great summer hunts begin after the tribal spring festival of Sarhul, when the sickly-sweet scented flowers of the Saal trees (*Shorea robusta*) have made the central Indian forests creamy-white, and the fowls of the bush and birds of the trees, the wild deer and other animals are in their mating season, and the grey nightingale (*Koel*) has mutated to jet-black. It must have been during this season that the animal paintings on the rock surfaces would have been drawn, and it reminds us of the connection between the animals painted on the walls of the tribal homes and those painted on the walls of caves in the forest, and which are being hunted in this month by the descendants of the rock-painters even today. Perhaps we will never know for certain whether the animal paintings in the rockart were painted exclusively by women or men, but it is my guess that it was painted by both and that as agriculture developed as a matriarchal tradition worshipping the mother goddess women would have taken to the painting of animals on the walls of their homes as a memory of the days of the forest hunt, and filled their mudden walls with all sorts of female symbols that the men feared and which makes the tribal art a field of sorcery even in modern times. That both Khovar and Sohrai are exclusively female artforms

is quite established, and only where the traditions have been modernized does this change. We have found men painting in the Maithili Ramayana tradition of Madhubani Painting, and we find men painting in the Patua tradition of Bengal and the similar tradition in Puri. The sacred art has become secularized for as long as it was an exclusively matriarchal tradition it belonged to the domain of the women.

Ever since I became involved with the Hazaribagh rockart and found the connection with the village paintings almost two decades back I saw a new side of the tribal mind, one which I had not been aware of before --- a subtlety of vision and a deftness of expression through the written medium, a kind of “copperplate” writing the European tradition prizes as a hall-mark of scholarship. *As I studied both the rockart and the village art more closely I found more than I dreamed. I found a certain magic both of inner expression in outer form, as well as a cursive decidedness in executing form. This was for me a new language of expression, a tangible thought process, having its own peculiar rationale, objective, and from which meanings could be deduced and distilled by a perceptive searcher who set aside his biases.* This was essential to give value to the rockart one found in secluded caves high up on the hillsides and having no companion for the thousands of years since they were painted except the insects that built nests in the rock-face or the birds and animals that took shelter in the cave’s recesses or projections. The dull documentation of the drawings and ascribing to them a provenance was not for me the complete unveiling of their ultimate significance or meaning. Their meaning had to be understood and divined somehow and this meaning applied to time past, present and future, for here were messages left by man at the height of his evolution at that particular moment or point of time when they were painted. That was when I knew that it called for a complete dedication to trying to understand the drawings and their significance for those who painted them, for ourselves, and for those who would come after us. It was an interesting field for discovery and interpretation and as I entered it I felt like walking toward the sun as it rises for a huge unknown lay before me and the shining secrets which the images contained. I was to begin trying to understand the Pre-Historic Mind. I have never regretted it. More and more I have realized that the form or sign, symbol or motif before us is a particular thing only to a particular type of understanding. It is not “all things to all people.” It was also this state of mind which had to be entered into in order to understand it.

These were the thoughts which led to my formative years as visionary in a domain I least of all understood. Finding more rockart and incessantly studying different kinds of Khovar and Sohrai village paintings took me on a long journey into the world of tribal village women. Whatever there was for me to learn was in their inherited wisdom. If anyone knew – or felt – the essence of the forms which appeared so magically on cave walls and again on the walls of mudden homes painted by women who had not even heard of let alone seen the rockart, then it was these women. The meanings were written in their DNA. It was again this state of mind which had to be entered into. It was this search which led to the setting up of the tribal art project which would bring onto paper thousands of complete paintings by these women, and which project led to my forming in 1993 the now famous **TRIBAL WOMEN ARTISTS COOPERATIVE**, an unregistered body of tribal women of Hazaribagh. This experience grew into my personal search for meanings of forms –both in the rockart, as well as in the ever-growing circle of village artforms – through the tribal women who created these beautiful paintings on paper and later on cloth, and embroidered their pictures of the mind with coloured threads into quilts. The expression of this experience grew into dozens of art exhibitions around the world, and the calling of the art into witness before the world in defence of the cultural traditions and human rights of these women and their families and the rockart of their ancestors that was being so brutally destroyed in the name of development by the government. On a personal level one of the misfortunes of my life and success itself is that it removes us

from the deeper foundations of our work. Months that could have been spent on research were wasted in exhibitions. Not that it did not open new vistas. Increased exposure at the national and international level led to a fresh vision – I was prepared to see the rockart with new unblinkered eyes and without any preconceived notions or indoctrination. No bias must drive my thesis. It is now quite plainly clear to me that the pre-historic animal painters worked from their imagination with no visual object to guide them, and their accuracy in their drawings must be an expression of their intimacy with the animals. I have further, learned from some great women artists that they see the form before they paint it, and in fact they see the whole composition before they approach the workspace. This means that they must have a terrific visual imagination. Time and again I see them work, drawing on a regular 20x30 inch paper, or even on an 8x6 feet cloth opr wall, and they go straight to work, no fuss or planning, laying the image exactly as they have seen it in their mind's-eye. Sometimes one is struck by the utter realism of an animal or bird which upon anatomical analysis may be faulted, but which as an artwork is perfect. ***This is because these artists invariably give a fresh expression to form.*** This fresh expression is made possible by their artistic gifts, in the same manner that the Upper Palaeolithic animal painters of France and Spain have left us the greatest expressions of animal art more profoundly realistic than anything painted by Picasso or Lautrec or Landseer. This is because their realism is beyond form itself. What I am left wondering at is the imagination of a simple unlettered jungle village woman who can stand above the modern masters with the uniqueness and simplicity of her art ! Works by great women animal artists of Hazaribagh can stand comparison with the rockart painted by pre-historic man. (ILLUSTRATION: Philo's deer) Perhaps this is not saying a small thing for the art of the animal hunters of the Mesolithic in Hazaribagh – as elsewhere in India -- is the greatest animal art in the world in any time. These are supreme triumphs of the human spirit. It is to my great disappointment and eternal shame as an Indian that the government is now in Jharkhand in the process of wiping out the natural environment where both the rockart and these tribal societies and their art exist. Both will be destroyed for ever in the name of development. As for the art, the government with its handful of bureaucrats is promoting tribal handicrafts and these type of handicrafts *sans provenance* or context are becoming colourful ethnic chic in the big cities under guidance of projects of indiscriminate curators. So the great art of tribal India, both pre-historic and contemporary faces annihilation. Certainly the tribal art of Jharkhand descended from ancient traditions must be seen as one of the glories of India and its loss has to be seen as one of the most indiscriminate acts of the authority which is supposed to protect our heritage.

THE ART OF PALAEOLOGIC MAN- The roots of our Indian culture and tradition may be traced through the evolution of Indian art right back to the cave paintings of palaeolithic societies which developed through the Mesolithic and chalcolithic ages, even as settlements began appearing and the rock painting tradition was carried into the village mural paintings. Man had begun making microliths over twentyfive thousand years ago and as the large old hand axes disappeared and a new stone age started to begin with smaller and more sophisticated tools like ground-edge axes and celts during the late Mesolithic period (7000 B.C.) this technology carried on through the bronze age or chalcolithic period right down to the iron age (1100 B.C.). In fact we still use a variety of stone tools and implements in the Indian kitchen that are traceable to the stone age and we are still in living bronze-age in which articles of kitchen and temple use are still made in the villages through the lost-wax (*cere-perdue*) method. From these continuing institutions and traditions we can make certain deductions, that our modern traditions have very ancient roots, and that they have only remained unchanged *in situ* so long because of Central India's peninsular disconnection from the general inter-continental traffic and trade.

The spiritual awakening in modern man has been traced back to the Neanderthal period thirty thousand years ago, when in western Asia we have seen the case of ritualized burials (Shanidar, Iraq), and incised icons of bone, stone, and clay of the female fertility goddess more popularly called the Earth Mother, sometimes found in fired clay or terracotta. If we are to gauge the artistic excellence of these Neanderthal period creations in contrast to those of the Mesolithic hunter we may tend to believe that palaeolithic man may have had a more highly developed approach to painting, sculpture and modeling of natural forms than the meso-chalcolithic man whose art had begun to move away from realism to abstract designs and awkwardly realistic folk forms by the third millennium B.C. when the Mesolithic rock painting was coming to an end. Perhaps the finest animal art in the world comes from western Europe in the northern foothills of the Pyrenees and southwestern France in the Dordogne region where Altamira and Lascaux caves are found, and Chauvet and Cosquer's Grotto with their grand galleries of wild horses and bison, mammoth elephants and saber-toothed tigers. These were painted from fifteen to thirty thousand years ago by the famous Aurignacian (Neanderthal or Cro-Magnon) artists, and the famous coloured ("painted" would be the right word) animal art of western Europe, was a fascinating display of realism never again equaled. Perhaps during the cold snow-bound months these artists had more time to devote to their great animal paintings. By contrast we find the rock paintings of animals drawn on sandstone by the Bushmen, the unknown artists of the Tassili-N'ajjer in the Sahara, the Indian hunters, and the Aboriginal nomads of Australia, belong to a quite different genre of simple, realistic line drawings, sometimes quite crudely drawn, with a decided attempt at reproducing shamanistic or super-natural figures. But the realism displayed in the animal art is no less wonderful. It would seem the artists of the southern hemisphere had to work longer and harder periods and suffer more energy loss due to the warmer climate which makes their art so different from that of Europe. Humans were throughout this period (30-10,000 B.C.) full-time survival hunters living in caves or under the shelter of trees and their knowledge of the wild was endowed with a deep observation born from experience and it would seem this is the reason for the animal art in the caves belonging to this time being the finest seen in the world.

In Aboriginal rock art in Australia we find a palaeolithic tradition exists. While that may also be said of some Indian rock painting, it may not be said of the more recent rock art of the cattle-herders of the Tassili N'ajjer or Bushmen whose art is more recent. The animal art still to be found in Australia is much older than anything we have in India although man in India is far older than man in Australia. Man in Australia is believed to be at most 140 thousand years B.P., while man in India is 400 thousand B.P. Besides this, the Indian rock art has proven more friable and nothing over 20,000 provenance is found whereas Australian rock art is dated back to 45,000 B.P. (Northern Territory) But it is to be believed man in India also was painting forty thousand years ago. The age of art is not only dependant on dates but on the state of development of societies. The anthropomorph, therianthorpe, zoomorph, etc. are found with ehumanization of plant and animal forms in the rock art of Hazaribagh, a tradition which despite the modern influences is still carried on in the village mural paintings today. We find the animals and birds painted in the ritual Khovar and Sohrai mural art similarly drawn with x-ray or in interplay with plant forms similar to the rock paintings in many striking ways including silhouette style, side elevation and framing. In the more recently touched panels geometrical figures appear showing the arrival of a sedentarized folk element and a symbol culture that would soon evolve into picture writing and then script. Tribal art in its original forms is devoid of abstraction and metaphor or highly ritualized context. It is essentially practical and realistic in form and depicts animals and birds in a direct informal manner. In the development of this simple art into the folk idiom certain highly noticeable stylistics occur such as

1. Animal attacking prey from behind, 2. Bird on animal's back, 3. Animal looking backward (discovered recently in Satpahar IV rockart), 4. Plume on bird or animal's neck, a sign of spiritual significance, 5. Double-headed bird, Etc.

This art may be compared with rock-art and people's art from all over the world, in form and feeling. It points to an early time in our race's pre-history when these forms developed in different places world-wide either independently or through culture contacts, and one of our measures of identifying meaning through them is that their range depicts their antiquity and their profusion in any place identifies their centres of maximum occurrence or origin. The similarities between the South African (Bushmen), South Asian (Tribal), and Australian (Aboriginal) rockart is obvious and speaks of a largely similar *proto-homo australis* (i. man of the southern hemisphere) race having negroid, bantu, proto-dravidian, mongoloid, and australoid connections, sometimes called Australoid or Proto-Australoid, and to which the Mundaic tribes belong, and from which the Proto-Dravidian should not be excluded. There is a basic similarity of expressive forms, similar geometrical markings and symbols, a similar intent both sacred and secular.

The spotted animal on wheels found in the ritual painted harvest art of the Sohrai festival in our villages in Hazaribagh has been found in the rockart of our region (Isco). The images which we find of the horned harvest god Pashupati (Lord of Animals) standing on the back of the bull in the contemporary village murals at Sohrai during the Harvest festival in Hazaribagh have also been found in central Indian chalcolithic rockart. There is no doubt that the contemporary ritual village wall paintings are a continuation of the earlier rock painting traditions. This horned deity surrounded by animals has also been found in Mohenjo Daro with three faces, and which Sir John Marshall identified as a proto-Indian deity called An. The horned human form has been found in our rockart in Saraiya and is identical with the horned bison-horned Maria tribal dancers in Bastar in Chhatisgarh, which reminds us of the horned human god Cerunnos of the Celts which also appeared with three faces. Pashupati in Hazaribagh is sometimes called Shiva-Pashupati, bringing to us the common identity of the lord of animals and the great forest god of the pre-Hindu tribes. Shiva is associated with the tree as the forest god, and is also known locally as the Tree God. He is worshipped as a source of fertility and village women give him various offerings like the rice curds which Sujata had taken for him from the village of Senani in what is now Bodhgaya only to find in his place the Buddha to whom she offered the rice-curds. In the popular imagination the image of Shiva is associated with the forest and fecundity, and answering the prayers of women for offspring. That Shiva is associated with Pashupati is not so strange as even Lord Ram is associated with the deity as the women who paint the murals say that it was he who on the festival of Deepavali (Divali) brought home the cattle from the forest to Ayodhya on his return from his long forest sojourn. This village tradition exists that the first domestication of cattle is associated with Lord Ram. The figure on the back of the bull at Sohrai is sometimes a human and sometimes a tree, which represents the deity Shiva. Generally the tree or human figure has a triangular head, the triangle being associated with the *yoni* or female organ. The triangle is with horns on either side as is associated with a super-normal being. We are aware of the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms in the village paintings and this is a further expression of this. I have also found a dog painted with a tree on its back in the Sohrai wall murals of the Ghatwals of eastern Hazaribagh, and once a dog with a tree on its back appeared in a village embroidered quilt (*ledra*) from Bhelwara in the same area. It is of note that a Bhairav cult exists in the region, Shiv-Bhairav being represented by the forest god Shiva with two dogs. In a temple near Bishungarh not far from Bhelwara there is an ancient stone image in a temple beside a river of the god with two dogs. We may remember that Shiv-Bhairav was the deity worshipped by the Chandelas who built the Khajuraho temples in the thirteenth century. In my discussions with the women artists I have come to learn that the triangular head of the

deity in the paintings is a masked form of the female *yoni* or generative organ. The triangle is a popular motif in the rock paintings of the region.

In the rockart of Isco the spotted bull is shown on wheels from the chalcolithic period and it is strikingly similar to the bulls painted in the Sohrai murals. The continuity of the tradition is established, although we have not found in the Hazaribagh rockart the bull with the figure of Pashupati on the back which might go to show that this form was to develop only later when the villagers came in contact with horse riders around the beginning of the first millennium B.C.

With regard to the *yoni* being used as the head either of the human figure or tree, it is pertinent to note that in the Bison-Horn dance of the Maria dancers in Bastar during the Dusshera festival in Jagdalpur the head-dress has strings of Cowrie shells hanging which cover the dancer's face, and which represent the female *yoni* or vulva, being a form of de-sacralization or showing a strong matriarchal authority. This tradition continues on in contemporary marriage ceremonies when the groom's face is covered with strings of white frangipani or similar flowers. These are the marks of the mother goddess

Wild cattle appear in the rockart of Hazaribagh but no images of ploughing or cattle-catching as have been found in central Indian rockart. This further goes to show that the domestication of cattle in the region might have only come at a quite late date to the region when the rockart painting tradition was slowly coming to an end which could have been as late as the Mahabharata period (7th cent.B.C.) The tradition of painting animals associate with cattle are more particularly with tribal groups living more generally on rice agriculture such as the semi-Hinduized tribes such as the Kurmis, Ghatwals and Prajapatis etc., while the images painted by the groups relying more closely on the jungle for produce largely paint wild animals. The Ganjus are a partly agricultural tribe who paint the Sohrai art in the style of the rockart close to which they live on the southern scarps of the Hazaribagh plateau overlooking the North Karanpura valley with a strong tradition of wildlife forms. Great agriculturists though they are the Mundas and Oraons do not paint cattle on their house walls but draw iconic forms closely allied to the rock paintings, while the Bhuiyas who are subsistence farmers follow similar traditional forms. The Manjhi Santals of eastern Hazaribagh who live in forest villages and practice agriculture are great hunters, but do not paint any pictures on their walls. They just make a few magical black forms beside the entrance doorway to ward of evil spirits, and in the winter decorate their doorways during Sohrai.

Perhaps the most interesting are the once wild trapper, the leaf dwelling nomadic Uthlu Birhor of Hazaribagh whose centire life was uptil recently completely centred about the forests. These people claim that their ancestors painted the roickart in the shelters. Their own drawing tradition only came to light when they were forcibly moved by the government into white-washed brick housing on the walls of which their drawings made with charcoal began to appear. I noted this immediately and found close parallels with the art of the Mesolithic cave artists. Their subject matter was exclusively centred about the catching of wild animals and gathering honey. The small noose traps called *kehuji* and nets called *tur-jhali* which appear in much of the rockart of the Orissa-Chhatisgarh-Jharkhand complex were prominent in these wall paintings. I at once gave them paper and brought to this about two hundred completed drawing sheets which stand as a record of the art of the Birhor, noted for the first time since even S.C.Roy had not mentioned its existence in his classic monograph on the tribe in the first quarter of the last century. There is no doubt that the Birhors represent the last glimpse of the palaeolithic knowledge, whether in ethnobotany, trapping, or survival lifestyle continuing in Jharkhand.

APPENDIX- V

Paper presented for a Seminar at Univ. of Burgos, Spain
on “*Intellectual and Spiritual Expressions of Pre-Literate Societies*”
from 1-7 September 2014,

The Intellectual and spiritual expressions of a Nomadic Tribe: The Birhor (of Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, eastern India)

By Bulu Imam

Synopsis

Changing Intellectual and Spiritual expressions of the Nomadic Birhor in Jharkhand

How did the earliest primitive expressions from the palaeolithic peoples begin with marks which would eventually evolve into complex spiritual and intellectual foundations and form the very basis of modern religious and emotional experience? How would changing circumstances in primitive societies grow into modern forms of thought and physical expression of the Sacred? For these answers we must go to the last primitive societies left on the planet struggling to adapt to ecological and industrial change being forced upon them through the new globalization which is leaving no place untouched.

My personal involvement for over the past four decades with the most primitive hunting and gathering nomadic tribe of the leaf-dwelling Birhors of the scrub forest lands of the Hazaribagh plateau in the state of Jharkhand in eastern India heightened with my discovery of over fourteen Mesolithic painted caves which these people claim were decorated with haematite and lignite by their ancestors and whose forms appear in their earth drawings. Today, the Birhors are a leaf dwelling tribe in about sixty food groups scattered across the plateau living in small circular leaf dwellings called Kumba (meaning up-turned pot) made of branches of leaves of the saal or Shorea robusta tree comprising the main type of our dry deciduous forests. In the middle of each circular leaf house is a fire pit around which the family with their dogs and nets and snares sleep on the bare earth which is smooth with use and warmed by the fire. The Kumba never leaks even during the heaviest rain. It does not fly away even in the severest storm. It is a part of the earth which it is built on and through it its inhabitants are always in contact with Dharti Ma the earth mother. These people of short stature and protoaustraloid Mundaric speech using a click are the masters of the ways of the creatures of the forest floor from insect larvae to birds and animals which they trap, collect, use, exchange and have intimate knowledge of for food and medicine along with the yams, roots, tubers, creepers and epiphytes which form the basis of their unique ethnobotany and economy. My researches have included their songs and folklore, sacred belief system and art and social organization. In my view this tribe as it stands between the old forest India and new industrial India is poised in a moment of momentous change and gives us a last chance to understand fast disappearing intellectual and spiritual consciousness of a palaeolithic mind and how it is forced to adapt to a modern environment and consciousness even as these simple people are being forced into government cement housing to mainstream them. Uptil now their lives have continued undisturbed for millennia in the scrub forests they live in and depend upon for subsistence.

The oldest human consciousness in its first form is in these palaeolithic looking people. I have recorded their songs and stories, studied their dances, ethnobotany, ways of hunting, and collected as much of their ideas of what the sacred constitutes for them as possible. Their unique relationship with the changing environment they have all along depended upon and now being ruthlessly destroyed in a fast industrializing India new traces begin to appear in song and worship and lifestyle. New elements have begun entering their forest songs, new objects of worship have appeared... for example I found them worshipping big nuts and bolts and pieces of metal picked up on the side of

*the beg national highway built through their territory! Earlier they only worshipped small logs of wood tied together. Vermilion red which was never used earlier appeared as sacralization of the objects. In their songs the sacred springs were now connected with hand-pumps and tube-wells. When forced to abandon their leaf houses and enter the new government brick and cement shanties with flimsy tin roofs they carried their leaf houses inside along with all their hunting equipment, pet birds and animals including the ubiquitous Indian Pariah dog which is their constant companion. They began to sleep around the fire again to keep warm and hung up their clothes and hunting nets around them. The children started making mudden toys such as trucks and filling them with gravel and pulling them around with strings. The Birbor women finding their forest creeper Chope (*Bauhinia scandens*) disappearing started to unravel the strings of the cement bags and worked them into the fine string used for making the hunting net Kulay Jhali. The ethnobotany of the tribe is mainly centred about the old women who have a unique knowledge of the forest floor medicinal plants, many animal and bird parts have sacred significances, and there is much magic involved in their use and application in treating sicknesses. I have made a thorough study of their ethnobotany. On the walls of the new government housing the Birbor children began drawing their world with charcoal sticks from the fire and created a visual record of a new world alongside the hidden sacred figures which only those who know will recognize as the sacred. I was reminded of Australian Aboriginal art and Albert Namatjira and the idea of de-sacralization of art for a secular audience. Bird and animal tracks, dots and circles were absorbed within ordinary forms. The worship places or Bonga-Sthan (place of the Bonga or deity) stands a small distance from the settlement with its wood, nuts and bolts, and vermilion daubs, in the midst of lantana (*Lantana camera*) bushes where none can ever find it without searching. The modern was being absorbed into the timeless to be de-toxified within the ancient seminal spiritual consciousness of a disappearing people -- our own ancestors, in our own time, the passing of the palaeolithic mind and way of life in a crazy modern world.....*

BULU IMAM

27th February, 2014

The Intellectual and spiritual expressions of a Nomadic Tribe: The Birhor

The Birhors are the most primitive tribe in India. Interestingly, they associate themselves with Lord Rama and his sojourn in the forest (Ramayana), and I have recorded their version of the epic. Their physical aspect is primitive” long arms and bent bow-shaped short legs prominent in the men, and less in the women. Older men and women have a pronounced stoop probably due to carrying heavy hunting nets and string bags of forest produce on their daily trapping and foraging expeditions. H.Paddington compared them to the Orang-Hutan ape of the Malay peninsula (Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal vol.xxxiv,1855; p.207-210). The name Birhor comes from the mundaric words *Bir* for forest and *Hor* for man.

I have personally made a long and fairly deep study of the primitive art of this tribe and find in it forms remarkably similar to our region’s Mesolithic rock art. (Frogs, nets, magical human figures, animals and birds but no fish; trees with monkeys, enigmatic symbols such as concentric circles, land and plant forms in iconic capsules; etc) The Birhors claim their ancestors painted our region’s rock art. Today they draw in the dust of the earth with sticks, or with charcoal on the walls of white-washed government housing. They believe the frog or toad has magical powers and it is recorded that people having connections with toads have an unusual power over animals. That his remarkable jungle people are still living a stone-age lifestyle in the jungles of Hazaribagh is a unique opportunity to study them and their beliefs, which I have done in a monograph on their lifestyle, sacred beliefs, hunting and gathering techniques, art and songs, dances, and an in-depth study of their ethnobotany which is based on the roots of plants on the forest floor, barks and epiphytes, charms and medicines from ground bones of certain small

animals and birds, and significance of black and white fowls for sacrifice by a medicine man (*mati*).

They worship land-forms. There is a recumbent landscape figure (RLF) in the form of a female lying on the back in the hill of Sitagarha called Jul-jul by the Birhors not far from Hazaribagh town, a settlement once surrounded by forests. Jul-jul means to light a fire, and in certain times of the year like the spring during April when they gather for worship to it. Birhor worship has very little ritual. On the south side of this hill in which the figure reclines due east to due west with the head in the west, on the south side of what would be the stomach or abdomen there is a seventy-foot tall stone distinctly resembling a male human face which they worship as Mahadeva or Shiva. Once I met one of the old medicine women of a nearby Birhor settlement under whom I was for many years studying their ethnobotany. It was in the afternoon and there was no one else in the jungle road when she folded her hands and pointed to this stone face solemn in the light of the evening sun and told me with a voice full of awe “Mahadeva”, as if the stone would come to life. During the first full moon of the month of May the Buddha-Purnima is celebrated by the Santals and other non Buddhist tribes, and at this time the local people at the foot of the hill go to the top of this stone head and offer rice-milk to the rising moon. This is a forest through which the Buddha passed and Buddhist relics are to be found in every part of the hill. The memory of the forest god Shiva Mahadeva and the Buddha merge.

Today the Birhor are increasingly exposed to highways being built through their forested territory. A couple of years ago I visited a settlement (*tanda*) not far from the highway where government was trying to resettle them in cement huses. Looking about the settlement for the “worship” site I found it in a small cleared space amidst the dense lantana bushes (*lantana camera*) and to my great surprise in the centre of this cleared patch was a huge nut and bolt smeared with red vermilion! Upon my questioning one of the men told me they had found it on the side of the highway and had brought it to worship it. An unknown power is a god!

I am fortunate in having spent most of my life on and off in intimacy with this tribe of which I am very fond for their great knowledge of animal and bird ways and forest plants, and whose songs which I have recorded are among the simplest and most direct examples of expression. The Birhor sleeps on the bare earth in his leaf hut or *Kumba* as it is called. Their visual perspective is always from the ground up and in the middle of the circle is a pit where a fire is always burning, the family including the dogs and may be a goat or pet forest animal sleeping around it. Most Kumbas contain a bamboo cage with a parrot or a partridge used to decoy other partridges when trapping.

When a Birhor child is born the afterbirth is taken out of the Kumba from a hole in the rear, and the same when a man or woman dies. There is no clear idea of belief in rebirth but it strikes someone now and then if a child is born about the time an old man dies that the old man’s spirit has entered the child, but there is no set religious belief in these matters. They believe that life is breath and that when breath ceases life ceases but that wherever the breath goes life goes with it and this is shown in the creation legend in which the first man and woman are made by the creator Singbonga (sun god) out of clay and he blows breath into their faces and so they become alive and continue to raise progeny ! This first man and woman were Nanga Baiga and Nanga Baigin. Nanga means naked, and Baiga is a term used for a medicine man, also a well known tribe of central India, but above all it means “man”.

The Birhors are not particularly given to decorative bodily tattoos which are an expensive luxury their more affluent agricultural neighbours indulge in conspicuously, but the belief exists among

these people that the tattoo can identify a person in the after-life which means they must have some concept of an astral life. I think this is very important, because the idea of an astral life is an advanced Hindu idea, and very likely they heard about it from their Hindu neighbours. The Birhors do believe that there is life and soul in all things, in plants, trees, water etc and that in the stone lies the eternal, the deity all must worship. The worship of the spring flowers at the Sarjom festival (Sarhul) and the bathing in the sacred springs where a stream starts, and the deep caves where some markings of the Ancestors may be found are for them places of worship. And who would not worship here ?

Their knowledge of ethnobotany is vast and I spent twenty years to understand its principles in a rudimentary manner, but I could make out certain principles such as the sickness and the shape of the root or the nature of the bird or animal whose bone or hair was used in the treatment having an esoteric connection. The black or white birds sacrificed, the number of peppercorns or quantity of rock sugar added might have been mere indulgences. But there is some connection physically in its shape or substance between sickness and medicine -- for example anti venom roots are snakelike; medicine of hydrocile are yams resembling testicles; the root for arthritis is arthritic in shape, and so on. But the fact of the medicines working is proved by the large number of clients a Birhor medicine man or medicine-woman has in the marketplace where they sell their dried roots on market days.

I have not found a common tradition between the soul and a bird such as between the soul and the peacock among the Marias of Chhatisgarh. They make no memorials to their dead. They cremate if possible, when not possible they bury. There is no hard and fast rule. No memorials are erected. I do not think they believe in an individual soul. These people live a very hard subsistence forager life and have absolutely no luxuries except shade from sun and rain, food, warm clothing, and clean drinking water. Their lives are elemental, so elemental that the sacred itself can be considered a luxury. And here we come to the bottom line of man's existence from earliest times and the urgency to sustain life itself the most urgent duty, and from which all later civilized social manners, customs and beliefs followed.

Because of the very rareness of such primitive societies vulnerable to the sweeping industrialization and changed environment we are on the point of losing one of the last living indicators about the past of our race. With regard to transmigration of the soul not a single western authority to my knowledge has commented on it in such primitive tribes. There is lack of mention of transmigration of the soul beliefs in primitive societies by western theosophists of the nineteenth and twentieth century with regard to primitive Indian tribes, nor is there any mention of the religions of these people which are basically forms of Animism, Ancestor and Nature worship. Their beliefs have been suppressed under the tide of vedic and brahmanical religious teachings which allows no place for tribal beliefs. However in Buddhism did not deny the primitive tribal beliefs which lie at the roots of Buddha's teachings. Although denying the existence of the personal soul or Ego the belief in Karma was seen as an existential human phenomenon of the race rather than the individual in the Buddha's own words. This has been altered and adapted by the different schools which appeared in Buddhism. There is a story of the Buddha one day when as a wild hare he met a hungry Brahmin to whom he offered his body as food, saying "Collect wood and light a fire and I will roast myself and you may eat me." Does this then not bring to mind the old Birhor tradition of an old dying Birhor offering his body as food to his hungry family. Once when I was speaking to an old Birhor medicine man (*mati*) I brought up the matter of this old tradition which the Birhors still remember and I told him the above story about the Buddha to which he replied "Then what is wrong in it ? Mahadeva understood the ways of animal and man and that the body has to one day die and it will make no

difference". The jungle in which we were speaking was not far from the great centre of Bodhgaya where the Buddha experienced his realization or Nirvana. As I have noted earlier the Birhors call Buddha Mahadeva . The teaching of the Buddha that there is no personal soul and that it is but a part of the world soul which is the animate force of Nature . The songs which I recorded of the Birhors in Hazaribagh includes a ritual mortuary song sung when a person dies which tells of the return of the soul to the over-soul,

“Without It I cannot live,
“ Without It I have to die;
“Both of us are one - Body and Breath,
“In life It is in me, in death with It I fly.”

The foundations of the Indian spiritual culture have their sources in the primitive societies of the subcontinent. Buddhism and perhaps Jainism of all India's religious sects have drawn most heavily upon these original sources of Indian culture. Buddhist spiritual culture was moulded on the nomadic system of seasonal settlements or shifting of abodes of the monks carried on in the Sramana tradition of wandering mendicants. Attachment to material things even the body was denied as a requirement for finding the truth, self was denied and the life of the mind was idealized. All attachments were rejected as untruth. This view of the world and the natural events of a mortal existence were accepted.

The intellectual and spiritual expressions of pre-literate societies express these truths in their recorded traditions and their way of life is the highest expression of adherence to these fundamental beliefs. The idea of Karma or reward or punishment for personal actions among the Birhor is not related to rebirth, but is expressed in the idea of the good or evil that will affect the tribe as a whole because of their actions. This is the highest teaching of Buddha and he could only have found it among these simple people. With regard to their idea of life I will recount a talk I had now over thirtyfive years ago with a wise old medicine man named Babulal who was teaching me their ethnobotany. Babulal Birhor told me that the breath we inhale and exhale mixes with the breeze that mixes with all the winds of the world and gives life to everything which lives. He said that when breathing ceases in death it returns to the great soul of the world (*anima mundi*) the whirlwind which the Birhors call *baliman*. This idea of the wind being the soul prompted me to ask this wise old man what connection there might be between the breath of life which he so eloquently spoke of and the breath which forms itself into words through which we express our thoughts. He told me that as the breath flows in the spring season from the throats of songbirds in the mating season or of young animals seeking their mothers or of mothers seeking their lost offspring, they were all natural expulsions of breath through emotional sounds and that in this way first did people hearing the animals and birds begin to use words and those sounds they left as signs. Later they learned to make signs which the eyes could see and so they began making marks on the earth or on stone which they associated with expressions of their feelings, and these developed into what we now call rock art so that others seeing them could understand what had been spoken. Rock art is spoken visual sound. This observation for me was to be taken literally since the Birhors like the Bushmen associate rock art with the works of their ancestors. They place great significance on markings, be they the tracks of creatures or their own markings and this is important to note in a people who still do not read or write. These words of Babulal Birhor made me wonder at his deep understanding of the development of speech into physically visible forms in rock art or elsewhere made by primitive people. We know the importance of rock art in conveying to us even thousands of years after the breath of the artist ceased what he was trying to express.