



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Arts

ROCK ART IN ODISHA

KEY WORDS:

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ABSTRACT

Rock art as the term implies is the art on rock. But all works of art on rock is not rock art. However, it is applied to all types of artistic expression noticed on the natural rock surfaces of caves, shelters and boulders. It is also known as 'rock pictures'

ROCK ART IN ODISHA

The rock art in Odisha may be assigned to a time span ranging from the Mesolithic to the early historic through the Neolithic-Chalcolithic periods here the rock system is represented by the sedimentations of fossiliferous, purple, ferruginous sandstone, slit stone, shales and grits. The rocks are soft, medium-grained sandstones and red shale of Cuddapah group, which weathers easily. Several seasonal and perennial streams dissect sandstone hills topped by extensive plateaus with thick vegetation. In the rock art of Odisha, one notices a happy blending of engravings (petroglyphs) with paintings (pictographs), both being complimentary to each other, drawn in non-thematic and non-figurative pictorial codes - a rare phenomenon not encountered so far from any part of India. Therefore the rock-shelter paintings of Odisha are essential in evaluating the Odishan pictorial vocabulary and understanding the aesthetics of a universal language rooted in a regional context. These paintings are mostly located in the hilly tracks of Western and Northern Odisha comprising districts of Jharsuguda, Kalahandi, Mayurbhanj, Nuapara, Sambalpur, Sundargarh and Suvarnapur. There are 5775 rock pictures in 55 rock art shelters documented so far in Odisha. In Odishan rock art, engraving is a special feature. In the Odishan petroglyphs the dominant motifs are triangles resembling the female genital. The petroglyphs are entirely abstract. The other accompanying motifs are serpentines, honeycombs, rhomboids, palm, foot, entwined lines, cross hatches, cupules, dots, brackets and other decorative and intricate patterns. The deer, antler, sambar, boar, tortoise and lizard are among the animal forms. In Odishan rock shelter engravings, the incised lines are deeply cut; the forms, patterns and animal are drawn with bold outlines. There are also thin and shallow incisions in the over lying figures. The highlights in the paintings consisted of geometric and non-geometric decorative patterns and motifs, as if precisely these were done for decorating the shelters. They are drawn in the form of wavy, crisscross, zigzag, triangular, concentric circles, ovals and parallel lines within or without a geometric format of square or rectangular shape. They appear highly enigmatic and may be identified as net-pattern, saw-pattern, harpoon-pattern, blade-pattern, carpet-pattern, architectural-pattern, ladder-pattern, honeycomb pattern, rhombic-pattern, broom-pattern, etc., without any precise interpretation. The popular animal forms depicted in Odishan rock art are humped-bull, lizard, deer, antler, frog, snake and tortoise.

The paintings are executed in mineral colours; i.e. hematite and lime. Various shades of hematite in dark red, purple red, buff red, tan red, yellow are noticed along with white pigments. Paintings are both monochromatic as well as polychromatic directly drawn on the bare, undulating, rough and tough surface of the shelter walls and roofs.

1. Vikramkhola Rock Painting

In Vikramkhola there are both paintings and engravings. The

motifs are triangles, unknown animal, honeycomb, geometric pattern, palm, foot, dots, brackets and cupules. The animal figure with two disproportionate legs below the triangular female genital pattern and an oval shape designed with vertical lines raises interest and curiosity. There are also reminiscences of a host of eroded and mutilated patterns such as triangles, rhomboids, honeycombs or other intricate patterns. Vikramkhola is a pictographic inscription. It is partially incised and partially painted in two lines. The characters in Vikramkhola inscription belong to a period intermediary between the script of Mohenjo-daro and Brahmi. Some letters still written are in their original or proto-Brahmi forms. This proves the origin of Brahmi to be Indian and throws a flood of light on the history of writing, as from Brahmi the Phoenician and European scripts are derived.

2. Ulap Ushakothi Rock

We find both paintings and engravings in Ulap Ushakothi rock shelter. Here the motifs are triangles, animals, palm, foot, broom pattern, honeycomb pattern, wheel, rhombic and intricate patterns, cupules, brackets, serpentine and zigzag form. The main forms in paintings are various geometric and non-geometric designs wavy and zigzag lines, and spirals. In these paintings the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs are totally absent.

3. Gudahandi Rock

The Gudahandi rock art shelter was reported by S.N. Rajguru in 1950. This contains human figures as well as geometric patterns: squares and rectangles, both empty or filled in with straight and / or diagonal lines or with dots on the borders; circles, wheels with spokes, apsidal patterns, oval shapes with dots painted in monochrome of red, polychrome of red, blue and black. In Pakhanapathar, the painted motifs are intricate forms, circles upon circles and lizard. At Yogi matha, the painted motifs are humped cattle, human figures and geometric forms, erected humans, humped or hump less concentric circles, squares, bowl like shapes drawn one upon the other and kettledrum like shapes.

4. Rail Ushakothi

In Rail Ushakothi, which number to twelve shelters, one finds various engraved motifs of triangles, Deer, lizards, serpentine, bird, fish, boar, giraffe, ostrich, Boselaphus Tragocamelus and other geometric intricate patterns like harpoons and cupules, honeycomb, criss-cross, entwined lines and phallus.

5. Landimal Ushakothi

At Landimal, Ushakothi that ranges from I to XI sites, has only engravings of triangles, birds, lizards, Deer, antlers, sambar, fish, enigmatic bird, elephant, porcupine, serpentine honeycomb patterns, entwined lines, zigzags, crisscross lines and cupules.

6. Bhimamandali Ushakothi

Similarly at Bhimamandali Ushakothi there are also engravings like triangles, footprints, cupules, honeycomb, crisscross and rhomboids, ladder and human face. All the 25 rock shelters in this group; Rail, Landimal and Bhimamandali Ushakothi possess engravings. A single specimen of paintings could not be noticed in these groups of rock shelters. Two types of engravings are noticed. In one type, the outlines of the figures are drawn and motifs are deep incised, and in another type, a shallow depression particularly of the animal forms is scooped out of the rock surface after the outline is drawn. Triangles are the dominant motifs in these shelters. They are in different conceivable shapes and designs. Mostly they resemble female genitals. The others are geometric and non-geometric patterns and motifs with crisscross, wavy, straight and parallel lines, hoofs, strokes, dots, palm, foot and cupules.

7. Rajbahal Ushakothi

In Rajbahal Ushakothi there are both paintings and engravings. Here engravings include the host of triangles, rhomboid, honeycomb and cupules. In Rajbahal Ushakothi I, there is an elaborate panel of intricate polychromatic pattern. The major highlights in these rock shelters are the broom patterns. These are executed at random over the entire wall space. Here there is a myth among the natives that the red beaten brush marks are the menstrual blood of Sita. The rock shelter is named after her name as Sitakund.

8. Ushakupa

In Ushakupa, paintings are triangles, palm, foot, fish, turtle, honeycomb, broom pattern, heart pattern and geometric forms. Both paintings and engravings have been executed at Baurikupa rock shelters.

9. Chormoda

In Chormoda, there are only engravings. A horde of cup marks features the rock shelter. They are done at random and in alignments all over the wall. The cupules are unevenly distributed in a number of clusters. The presentation resembles the starry sky, stars and planets and other aerial bodies in constellations and isolation.

10. Jhinkamoda

In Jhinkamoda, there are only engravings. The motifs are triangles and cupules and other eroded specimens.

11. Jodabilmoda

In Jodabilmoda, engravings are triangles and cupules.

12. Imlimoda

In Imlimoda there are only engravings of triangles, cupules and female genital patterns. They are done in various shapes of oval, apsidal and triangular. In some patterns there are central lines and shallow depressions at the lower edge or in the centre.

13. Tongo

At Tongo, the engraved motifs are triangles, serpentine, rhombic and honeycomb pattern, palm and footprints and cupules. Honeycomb is the dominant decorative motif at Tongo. In some places serpentine are getting transformed to female genital patterns.

14. Manikmoda

Both paintings and engravings occupy the rock shelter at Manikmoda. Here one comes across primitive motifs like triangles, humped cattle, deer, bison, standard bearers, geometric, non-geometric patterns as well as historic paintings like draped human figures with sword, shield and musical instruments. The humped cattle charged and dragged by man standing next to a tree is the popular and dominant motif. The figure of a woman is an unusual and unconventional motif in Manikmoda.

15. Lekhamoda

At Lekhamoda, there are twelve paintings sites, which are numbered from Lekhamoda I to XII. In these rock shelters the motifs comprise deer, lizard, frog, tortoise, bird, antler, human figures, humped cattle, snake and other geometric patterns like rhombus, harpoon marks, broom styles and cusped forms. Paintings are formed in all of the Lekhamoda group of rock art sites except engravings in only two, Lekhamoda III and IV. The paintings in Lekhamoda II, IV and X are recorded, as engravings by Neumayer but the illustrations given by Neumayer in Lekhamoda II, IV and X are not engravings but paintings. The paintings include a variety of geometric and non-geometric patterns, mostly in bichrome of red and white as in Lekhamoda II and IV. A series of zigzag, wavy (Lekhamoda II), crisscross and parallel lines drawn within a square, rectangle or a circle, also without any geometric formats feature the patterns. They look like carpets, harpoons, blades, saws, nets, honeycombs etc. as in Lekhamoda II, IV, V, VIII, X and XI. Animal figures like deer, monkey, humped cattle, goat, peacock, lizard, frog, turtle and snake are also depicted. Human figures are rarely painted in Lekhamoda VI, VIII, X and XII. Triangles, foot and palm are quite dominant. There is a herding scene painted in Lekhamoda X. This is the only narrative expression. The paintings of Lekhamoda II, IV, VIII, X and XII present a rich primitive aesthetics and creativity.

16. Chandili Ushakothi

In Chandili Ushakothi, both paintings and engravings have been executed. The motifs are deer, boar, geometric motifs, feet and cupules. Mostly hosts of intricate and enigmatic geometry constituted of spiral lines, cross hatches, zigzag lines contributing to the non-figurative and non thematic expressions are seen in Odishan rock shelter paintings. The intricate motifs are the independent abstract patterns in Odishan rock art sites. Human forms are very rare, not painted in realistic style. But the animal forms are comparatively more realistic.

CONCLUSION

The Odishan print making has its instinct in the rock engravings. Art is almost as old as man. It is a form of work, and work is an activity and a language peculiar to mankind. Art is such a tool which man used to express him and to communicate with others. Rock art that comprises paintings, drawings, scribbling, engravings, reliefs and sculptures is the first recorded expression of human beings. These expressions are both communicative and artistic.

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