

The Mesolithic art is characterized by its closeness to nature, dominance of wild animal figures and hunting scenes representing a hunting-gathering way of life. Stylistically, the animal figures in these paintings are close to the realistic portrayal of nature, vigour and correct rendering of the animal body. In several cases the animal compositions are found in various moods.

The next phase of paintings is characterized by the influence of Chalcolithic pottery designs. This was obviously due to contact between rock-shelter dwellers and Chalcolithic farmers of the plains. The animal bodies are elaborately decorated by intricate designs like lattices, zigzags and wavy lines. Domestic animals also make their appearance in this phase.

Subsequent to the Chalcolithic phase, paintings belong to the historic period when urban life was well established in the plains. These paintings are very often superimposed over the older prehistoric paintings. They depict royal processions, battle scenes, and men riding caparisoned horses and elephants, wielding metal-tipped spears, bows and arrows, swords and shields, and dancing in groups with arms intertwined and to the accompaniment of the music of drums. The animal body is often disproportionate, distorted and also stylized.

Animals such as deer, bison, tiger, wild boar, elephants, monkeys, antelopes, lizards, peacocks, rhinoceros etc. have been abundantly depicted in the rock shelters. Popular religious and ritualistic symbols also occur frequently.

Other Remains

Besides the rock art, Bhimbetka is home to such remains of yesteryears like walls of a ruined citadel, monasteries, mini stupas indicating Buddhist influence in the Maurya/Sunga periods in this area. There are various inscriptions, which date back to the Sunga, Kushan and Gupta periods. Shankha script inscriptions hitherto undeciphered are also commonly seen. Some architectural members of temple belonging to the Parmara period are also noticed.

Overall, Bhimbetka with the art treasure, serves as an invaluable chronicle in the history of man. The rock paintings reveal the gradual progress and various adaptations that the early man was making in his lifestyle.

How to Reach

By Air :- Bhopal (about 45 km. from Bhimbetka) is the nearest airport connected with Mumbai, Delhi, Indore and Gwalior.

By Rail :- Bhopal, on the Delhi-Chennai and Delhi-Mumbai mainline is the most convenient railhead.

By Road :- Bhimbetka is situated on the well connected Bhopal-

Hoshangabad National Highway No. 69.

Best Season:- July to March.

Timing:- Sunrise to Sunset



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Painted Rock shelters of _____

BHIMBETKA

A World Heritage Site

Archaeological Survey of India
Bhopal Circle

Location

The rock-shelters of Bhimbetka inscribed as world heritage by UNESCO, are located about 45 km. northeast of Bhopal, the state capital of Madhya Pradesh. Situated along the Bhopal-Hoshangabad highway, these shelters bear proximity to the Bhiyapura village in Raisen district. The fringes of the ancient Vindhyachal ranges are home to the extraordinary rock shelters and paintings, its awesome rocks are fortifying the ancient treasure within. Situated amidst lush greenery of dense forests, rocky terrain and craggy cliffs, the rock shelters of Bhimbetka present a breathtaking view extended to Obaidullaganj, a small town in the vicinity of Bhimbetka.

Folklore

Bhimbetka owes its name to the characters of the longest epic in the world, the Mahabharata. As per local traditions it is believed that when the five brothers, called Pandavas, were banished from their kingdom, they came here and stayed in these caves, the massive rocks were used as a seat by the gigantic Bhima, the second Pandava. Further evidence, cited in support of this theory, is the resemblance in names of the nearby places with the names of the Pandavas. Thus, one of the village is known as Pandapur. While Bhiyapura, the nearest village, is believed to be a distortion of Bhimpura. Regarding the surrounding Lakhajuar forest, it is said that it was the Pandava's palace, Laksha griha (laksha) built of lac that was burnt down by the Kauravas. However, the veracity of these claims still remains to be corroborated with concrete evidence.

Discovery



General View

The rock shelters of Bhimbetka were discovered in 1957- 1958 by Dr. VS. Wakankar. His archaeological excavations yielded remains, serially from the Lower Palaeolithic

Age to the Early Medieval period. Over 400 painted rock-shelters are found distributed in five clusters, namely: I Bineka, II Bhonrawali, III Bhimbetka, IV Lakhajuar (east) and V Lakhajuar (west).



Mythical Binar, Rock Shelter No. 1

Painting of Drummer in Rock Shelter



Zoo Rock Painting



General View facing East

Cultural Remains:

A number of attempts have been made to excavate these rock shelters at Bhimbetka by various scholars since its first discovery to investigate cultural remains of early man. The Lower Paleolithic culture is believed to be the earliest cultural evidence at Bhimbetka. The Middle Paleolithic culture of Bhimbetka has developed out of the Acheulian culture, and is indeed a continuation of the former Lower Palaeolithic culture. The Upper Palaeolithic phase although present is not very distinct at the site. Palaeolithic culture was followed by the Mesolithic culture at Bhimbetka which is well defined. During this period maximum number of rock-shelters were occupied, clearly showing that there was a phenomenal increase in human population. The Mesolithic people buried their dead in the living areas within the rock shelters. Stone querns, rubbers, antlers, bone tools and hematite nodules were placed with the dead as grave goods. In the upper levels of the cultural deposit there is evidence of early historic pottery, iron tools and punch-marked coins. It appears that due to frequent contact with the settled agriculturist of the plains the cave dwelling hunter-gatherers not only took to metal technology but gradually abandoned hunting - gathering way of life and started settling in the plains to practice agriculture.

Rock Art

The rock painting of Bhimbetka is one of the earliest record of art in India and sources of contemporary life of different human occupations right from Mesolithic (C. 8000 -2500 BC), Chalcolithic (C. 2500- 500BC) to Historic period (C.500 BC onwards). The paintings are found depicted on the wall, ceilings and small hollows or niches of the naturally formed rock- shelters. Many times paintings are found located at considerable heights and inconvenient places. Most of the paintings are in red or white colours though occasionally paintings in lush green or yellowish colours are also seen. The colours were obtained from numerous stone nodules of different shades which are locally available. The pigment produced from these haematite and magnes nodules is mixed with water or other substances like glue as binders. Superimposition of paintings as noticed in many of the shelters is helpful in arranging the paintings into a relative chronology on the basis of their style and subject matter. The paintings were made by thin brushes, probably made of twigs.