

Prehistoric Rock Paintings

Events occurring before the invention of paper or language or the written word are considered the domain of prehistory. In this period, neither books nor written documents are found. The early development of humans in this period is commonly known as the Old Stone Age or the Palaeolithic Age.

- Prehistoric Rock Paintings were the oldest art forms to express themselves, and humans used cave walls as their canvas. This made their homes more beautiful and colorful.
- The prehistoric period is further divided into three types on the basis of geological age, type and technology of stone tools, and subsistence base: Palaeolithic Age, Mesolithic Age, and Neolithic Age.

Prehistoric Rock Paintings in Palaeolithic Age (Old Stone Age)

There is no idea about the Art objects in the Lower Palaeolithic Age. By the Upper Palaeolithic Age around the world, cave walls were covered with finely carved and painted pictures of hunted animals by cave dwellers, human figures, human activities, geometric designs, and symbols. In India also, the earliest paintings have been reported from the Upper Palaeolithic Age.

- First discovery of Prehistoric Rock Paintings in India was made by Archibold Carlleyle (archaeologist) in 1867-68, 12 years before the discovery of Altamira in Spain.
- There were other early archaeologists also who discovered a large number of sites in India.
- Sites of Prehistoric Rock Paintings: several districts of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar, Kumaon hills in Uttarakhand, banks of the River Suyal at Lakhudiyar (about 20 km on the Almora-Barechina road, Uttarakhand).
- One of the interesting scenes depicted at Lakhudiyar (literally means one lakh caves) is of hand-linked dancing human figures. The Prehistoric Rock Paintings here can be divided into three categories:
 1. Man: Humans are represented in stick-like forms.
 2. Animal: A long-snouted animal, a fox, and a multiple-legged lizard are the main animal motifs.
 3. Geometric patterns in white, black, and red ochre: Wavy lines, rectangle-filled geometric designs, and groups of dots.
- There is some superimposition of Prehistoric Rock Paintings. The earliest are in black; over these are red ochre paintings, and the last group comprises white paintings.

- From other sites, various other pieces of evidence are found from Kashmir, two slabs with engravings have been reported, and from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, granite rocks (suitable canvases for the Neolithic man for his paintings) are found.
- Three types of paintings have been reported from Kupgallu (late historical period), Piklihal (early historical period), and Tekkalkota (Neolithic period) like paintings in white, red ochre over a white background, and red ochre, respectively.
- Depicted subjects are bulls, elephants, sambhars, gazelles, sheep, goats, horses, stylized humans, tridents, and a few vegetal motifs.

Bhimbetka Paintings

The richest Prehistoric Rock Paintings are reported from the Vindhyan ranges of Madhya Pradesh and their Kaimurean extensions into Uttar Pradesh, which are full of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic remains.

- The largest rock shelter located in the Vindhyan range is Bhimbetka, which has 800 rock shelters, out of which 500 bear paintings.
- At Bhimbetka, there are 20 layers of paintings, one on top of another.
- Bhimbetka caves were discovered by V.S. Wakankar (archaeologist) in 1957-58.
- Themes of Bhimbetka paintings: daily life events, sacred and royal images like hunting, dancing, music, horse and elephant riders, animal fighting, honey collection, decoration of bodies, and other household scenes.
- Rock art at Bhimbetka has been classified into various groups:

Prehistoric Rock Paintings in Upper Palaeolithic Period

Linear representations in green and dark red colors of animals like bison, tigers, elephants, rhinos, and boars; stick-like human figures.

- Few paintings either were wash paintings or filled with geometric designs.
- Green paintings are of dancers, and red ones are of hunters.

Prehistoric Rock Paintings in Mesolithic Age

The largest number of paintings in this period and loved to paint animals in naturalistic styles. Humans were depicted in a stylistic manner.

- In many of the rock shelters, hand-prints, first prints, and dots are made by fingertips.
- More thematic paintings but small in size.
- The theme of paintings was mostly hunting scenes – people hunting in groups with barbed spears, arrows, bows, and pointed sticks. Some scenes depict animals chasing humans and vice-versa.
- Primitive men were shown with traps and snares to catch animals.
- Hunters wear simple ornaments and clothes; some men wear headdresses and painted masks. Women have been shown both clothed and in the nude.

- Young and old people were also depicted. Children are seen running, playing, and jumping. Some scenes depict family life and community dance as a common theme.
- Depicted Animals: elephants, bison, bears, tigers, deer, antelopes, leopards, panthers, rhinos, frogs, lizards, fish, squirrels, and birds.

Prehistoric Rock Paintings in Chalcolithic Period

Paintings indicate an association, contact, and mutual exchange of requirements of these cave-dwellers with the agricultural communities settled at Malwa plains.

- Ceramics and Rock paintings themes in this period: Cross-hatched squares, lattices, pottery, and metal tools.
- Colours used in Bhimbetka paintings – white, yellow, orange, red ochre, purple, brown, green, and black. The most common colors – are white and red.
- Red obtained from haematite (geru); green from chalcedony; white probably from limestone. It is believed that colors have remained intact because of the chemical reaction of the oxide present on the surface of the rocks.
- Brushes were made from plant fiber.
- Prehistoric Rock Paintings in Chalcolithic Period can be seen in caves, walls, and ceilings of the rock shelters that were used as dwelling places, and also in caves that had some other purpose, perhaps religious.

