

A Note on Painted Rock Shelters at Navtala, Chandrapur District, Maharashtra

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Abstract

This paper highlights some observations based on surface reconnaissance carried out with some objectives, during the excavation of megalithic burials, carried out during the season 2010-2011 at Hirapur, in the Chimur tahsil of Chandrapur district of Maharashtra. An extensive survey of the region reveals notable finds, in the form of painted rock shelters. The present paper would focus on the recent observations, comparison with past research and the further scope in the study of the region.

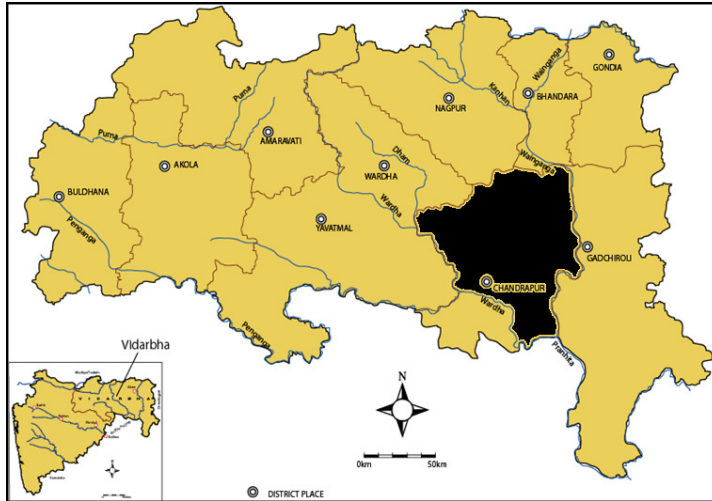
Introduction

Chandrapur district, of the Vidarbha region in Maharashtra is very well known to the scholars of Geology, Geography, Sociology and History. So far, this area is rich in mineral wealth in the form of Manganese and coal, which is famous throughout India. A single district, Chandrapur, covers 34% forest area of the Maharashtra state. The region has presented evidences of life right from the Jurassic era as represented by Dinosaur egg shells from Pisdura, Takh & Nand (IAR 1994-95). In the geological map of India, it is known as the Gondwana land, from the ancient Gond kingdoms, south of the Narmada. Investigations in other parts the world viz., South Africa, Australia and even South America have brought to light a parallel group of formations, exhibiting much the same physical as well as organic characteristics. It has made known important paleontological discoveries in the Jurassic and Cretaceous systems in India (Wadia 1994; 123).

Geology

The region is drained mainly by the Wainganga River, which originates about 12 Km from Mundara village, of Seoni district, in the southern slopes of the Satpura Range of Madhya Pradesh, and flows south through Balaghat, in Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra in a very winding course of approximately 360 miles (**Map 1**). After joining the Wardha, the united stream, known as the Pranahita, ultimately falls into the River Godavari. The river has developed extensive flood plains with sweeping, graceful meanders and low alluvial flats and meander terraces. The river has high banks, 10 to 15 m on either side. The Waingangā river receives numerous tributaries on either bank and drains the western, central and eastern

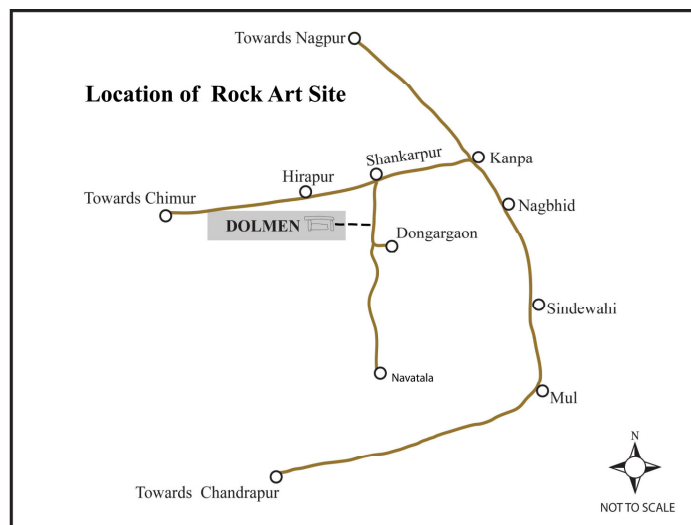
regions of the Chandrapur, Gadchiroli and Nagpur districts. The chief tributaries of the Waingangā are the Garhavi, Khobragadi, Kathani and Potphondi, on the western bank and Andhari, on the eastern bank (Deshpande 2002: 376).



Map 1:- Location of Chandrapur & Drainage pattern

Location

Navtala (41.2', E 79° 30 63.3'), is a small village situated on the foothills of the Parasgarh-Nagbhir hills, which itself is covered by dense forest. This village is approximately 14 km from the present excavated site of Hirapur, in the south-east direction, close to Chimur tahsil (Map 2).



Map 2:- Location Map of Site

The explorations at Navtala revealed significant evidences of rock-shelters with paintings on its surface and three huge mounds of Iron slag with an iron furnace in situ.

Past Research

Since the last three decades, the Chandrapur region has been subjected to research work. Numerous sites have been discovered and reported by various departments and Institutions viz., the Prehistory Branch of the Archaeological Survey of India, Nagpur, the State Archaeology Department, Maharashtra, Deccan College Post Graduate Research Institute, Pune and the Department of A.I.H.C. & Archaeology, Nagpur University.

Rock Art

Nearly 5000 painted rock shelters have been reported from the Indian Subcontinent, grouped in the central Vindhyan region, Chhota Nagpur plateau, and the southern Deccan region of India, but surprisingly not a single painted rock shelter has been reported or recorded from Maharashtra prior to 2004. For the first time, the painted rock shelters were discovered from Waghai hill in Chimur tahsil of Chandrapur District in the Vidarbha region (Mane 2004). The discovery of eight painted rock shelters at Waghai Hill, divided in two groups named as *Nagargota* and *Pandubara* respectively. The most vital issue of rock paintings is its chronology (Pandey 1984). But considering style, pigment, superimposition, patina, etc, as parameters for the chronology of rock paintings (Gordan 1936), *Nagargota* rock paintings can be ascribed from the Mesolithic to the early historical period, whereas the paintings at *Pandubara* can be fixed from the Iron Age to the Historical period (Pawar 2006). Associated material evidences like microlithic assemblage, figure of horse? Cairn circles of megalithic tradition, etc., at these rock shelters support this view to some extent.

Rock Shelters at Navtala

The rock shelters at Navtala are found 3km south-east of the present village on the top of the hill which is a part of the Parasgarh- Nagbhir hills. Sandstone formations of these hills have revealed nearly twenty eight rock shelters, divided in two rows, opposite to each other, divided by a long stream or Nullah (**Fig 1**).



Fig. 1- Rows of Rock Shelters at Navtala

The present rock shelters are 14 km away from the previously documented painted rock shelters at Waghai hill. A huge natural lake, called *Madnagarh*, is present at the foot of the hill, which is one of the major water sources in this area even today. Many domestic as well as wild animals drink water from this lake.



Fig. 2- View of Painted Rock Shelter

Most of the rock shelters at this site are closed by fallen boulders, perhaps because of a landslide. Two rows of rock shelters run parallel to both sides of the stream. Paintings have been found only in two rock shelters, on its surface (**Fig 2**). The paintings are drawn by using red ochre colour. Identification of these paintings is very difficult due to its weathered nature.

A total of four paintings are drawn into the rock shelters, out of which one is identified as a fish motif (**Fig 3**). The others seem to be geometrical figures, but their exact shape could not be traced.



Fig. 3- Depiction of Fish & Geometrical Paintings

Comparison

Comparing it with the past discoveries at Waghai hill, there seems to be less potential with subject to the rock paintings, which are statistically more in the previously mentioned site. But the location of the rock shelters at Navtala is unique in the region till date. The division of rock shelters in two rows, running parallel to each other, along the stream is significant for understanding prehistoric psychology about habitation. There could be many more rock shelters had which have been painted but due to the fallen condition of the site, it is very hard to observe any paintings inside these rock shelters. Waghai hill rock shelters and their paintings are well preserved by nature, whereas in Navtala this situation is absent.

Conclusion

It is very hard to put any time bracket for the Navtala rock paintings. But the pigment is almost alike the Waghai hill rock shelters. Due to time constraints, the author was not able to document other rock shelters. But there are great chances to find out more painted rock shelters in these Parasgarh-Nagbhir hills. The Waghai hill rock paintings were the first discoveries in the entire of Maharashtra region in 2004. Now this new discovery of Navtala

painted rock shelters increases the possibilities of getting more sites in the region, which were once absent, onto the rock art map of India. Efforts will be continued by author in the future for the systematic documentation and scientific analysis of this site.

Acknowledgement

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