

RESEARCH PAPER

Rock Art in the Aihole-Badami-kutakanakeri Series of the Malaprabha River Basin: Some Distinctive Features

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The present author explored and studied 32 rock art sites, in Kaladgi basin, North Karnataka, among them 19 of which 67 localities are new discoveries in the Aihole-Badami-Kutakanakeri Series. This paper reviews of rock art of the series, a potential area of the Malaprabha river basin. The rock art includes both petroglyphs and pictograms in the form of cupules, geometrical lines, rhombus, human figures, historical paintings and many other motifs.

Keywords: Kaladgi basins; Master ceiling; Pictogram; Petroglyph

Introduction

Rock art plays a vital role in the study of human beliefs and practices of the past people. In fact it is a global phenomenon through the ages. The art continues even at present. India has the credit of being one of the countries in the world having the richest treasures of rock art (Bednarik 1990; Chakravarty et al. 1997; Nirdip 1991). It is widely considered that rock art represents and communicates certain ritualistic ideas on a global platform. It is therefore a vital source of information for our understanding of some aspects of past human being that can't be known from the other sources. In the global context, India, including Karnataka, has to its credit the discovery and appreciation of rock art. Initial investigation began around 1842 by Capt. Newbold in and around Kapagallu. However no pictures were attached with this report (Foote 1916). It was Fawcett who reported rock art evidences, of Bellary region around 1892 (Fawcett 1892).

Karnataka is one of the richest rock art zones in India (Gordon et al. 1995; Raymond et al. 1994–95; Paddayya 1976; Sundara 1968, 1974, 1978, 1984, 1994, 2006, 2009, Mohana 2013, 2015). It is also immensely rich in prehistoric and protohistoric sites (Allchin 1960, 1963; Joshi 1955, 1956; Korisettar 1979; Korisettar et al. 1993; Nagaraja Rao 1966; Paddayya 1968, 1971, 1976, 1998, 2010, 2011; Sundara 1969, Mohana 2014a).

Previous explorers have discovered and interpreted some of the rock art sites in this series. Wakankar and Brooks (1976); Neumayer (1983, 1993, and 2010) has exclusively carried out field survey of rock art sites in Ranganathana gudda, Hire gudda, Are gudda and Thimmappa gudda, Katapura. Sundara (1974, 1982, 1994, and 2006) focused

on the adjacent valley of Malaprabha. He discovered and reinterpreted a number of pictogram sites at North-eastern hill of Badami, Hosa Mahakuta, Aihole, Sidla Phadi and Sitidone. In early 2013, the present author has discovered some more sites giving further notice of pictogram and petroglyphs from known sites since 2012 (Mohana 2014, 2015, 2017; Mohana and Dalavi 2015).

The rock art sites of Malaprabha basin have been studied individually by different scholars (see Mohana 2015, 2017a). The present paper deals with some important features the series as mentioned below. Rock-art displays predominantly geometric designs, animals and human figures.

Geology

Initial investigation of systematic and detailed geological study of the Kaladgi basin began by Robert Bruce Foote in 1876 (Pappu et al. 1994). Viswanathiah (1983) recognised a new group of rock series of Post-Kaladgi sedimentation which he designated the “Badami Group”. It is an irregularly shaped basin running in East-West direction. The basin lies between the Deccan Trap in the North and the Dharawar and granite gneisses in the South. The Kaladgi formation consists of basalt conglomerates, quartzite, sandstone, chert breccias and limestones.

Rock Art Sites in the Aihole-Badami-Kutakanakeri Series

The present exploration reveals few known paintings in this series. There are 32 rock art sites (**Figure 1; Table 1**) out of which only few in the Aihole-Badami-Kutakanakeri series are discussed here.

Aihole (AHL)

The site is located 1 km southeast of Aihole, on Pattadakallu-Aihole road. In the vicinity of the Jaina cave (locally known as “*Minu Basadi*”), there are four rock shel-

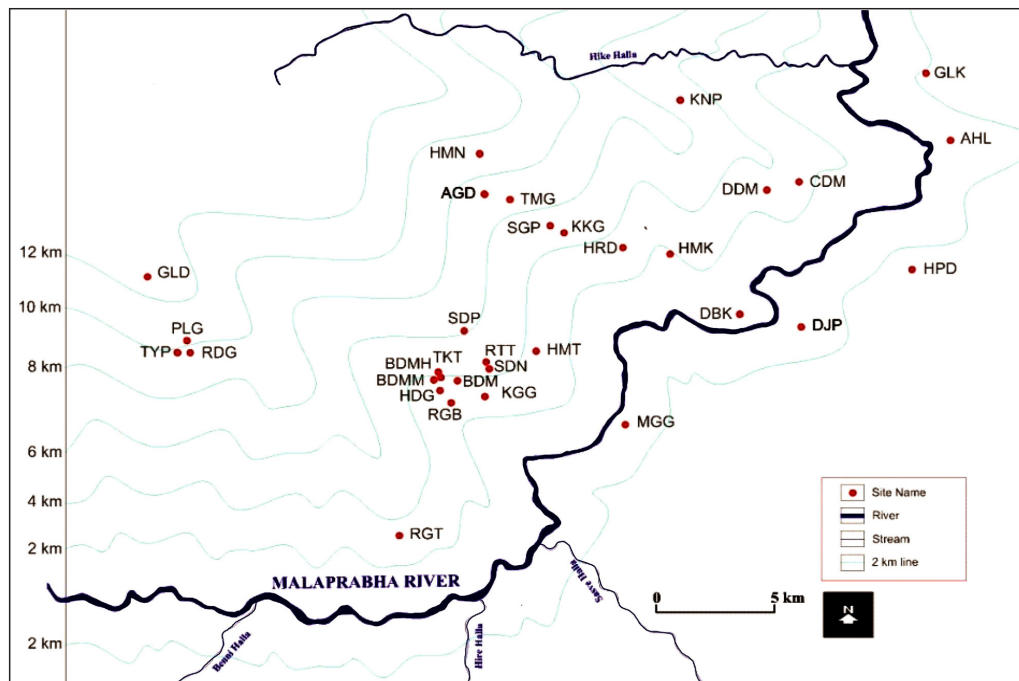


Figure 1: Distribution of the Rock Art Sites In the Aihole-Badami-Kutakanakeri series (After Mohana 2015).

Table 1: Rock art sites in the Lower Malaprabha river basin (see map).

Sl. No.	Rock Art Sites	Abbreviation's
1.	Googladi	GLD
2.	Pillugundu	PLG
3.	Tayavva Phadi	TYP
4.	Ramdevrugundu	RDG
5.	Ranganātha Gudda-Taminhal	RGT
6.	Ranganātha Gudda-Bādāmi	RGB
7.	Horagina Durgamma Gudi	HDG
8.	Bādāmi	BDM
9.	Tatakoti	TKT
10.	Bādāmi ASI Museum Complex	BDMM
11.	Bādāmi North-eastern hill	BDMH
12.	Sidla Phadi	SDP
13.	Rāmathirtha	RTT
14.	Siti Done	SDN
15.	Kannergavi Gudda	KGG
16.	Hosa Mahakuta	HMT
17.	Manglur Gudda	MGG
18.	Dodda Joger Phadi	DJP
19.	Dabbkal	DBK
20.	Huligemma Kolla	HMK
21.	Hire Gudda	HRD
22.	Kendur Kere Gondi	KKG
23.	Surgi Phadi	SGP
24.	Thimmappa Gudda	TMG
25.	Are Gudda	AGD
26.	Hamsanur	HMN
27.	Khanāpura	KNP
28.	Dodda Damali	DDM
29.	Chikka Damali	CDM
30.	Huli Phadi	HPD
31.	Gooli Katte	GLK
32.	Aihole	AHL

ters with rock paintings and petroglyphs There are many cupules in the monument complex viz. Ravala phadi, “Rāchi” temple and other monuments.

Badami (BDM)

Bādāmi was the capital city of the Chalukyas during 6th to 8th century CE. It is outstanding for its rock cut caves. There are cupules and paintings within the caves and the nearby hills on the right side of the *Agasthya Thirthā* tank (Figure 2).

Are Gudda (AGD)

The site (Figure 3) is located 2 km north of Kutakanakeri village beside Badami and Guledagudda main road. It is 9 km north of Badami. This hill is formed like a semi-circular. It was discovered by Mathpal and Neumayer in 1978 (Mathpal et al. 1981). Later Sundara (1994) noticed some more paintings. The present author further noticed many rock shelters with paintings in this area, locally known as *Ane Phadi, Jumjum Phadi, Padiyammana Phadi, Bagu Phadi, Andar Phadi and Parivala Phadi*.

Hamsanur (HMN)

It is a hamlet, 15 km southeast of Badami town. The site is located about 3 km southwest of the Hamsanur village and 1.5 km south from the Hanapura Tanda. There are many rock shelters but paintings are found only in two rock shelters in red-ochre and cupules, locally known as *Andhar Phadi or Padiyyamana Phadi*.

Very interestingly, the rock shelters of Hamsanur and the rock shelter Andhar Phadi in Aregudda series are present on either sides of the hill; northwest and southeast respectively at about 1.2 km distance from each other.

Sitidone (SDN)

Sitidone, a perennial spring, rock paintings site is located in the inter-section of the Badami-Mahakuta road, 3 km northeast of Badami town and 300 m towards East of Siti-



Figure 2: Panoramic view of the Badami.



Figure 3: Panoramic view of the Are Gudda.

done. It is surrounded by agricultural lands and forest. There are many rock shelters, but only on the ceiling of one of them have paintings. It is one of the biggest and tallest rock shelters with paintings in red-ochre. It was discovered by Wakankar in 1974 (Wakankar and Brooks 1976).

The shelter is facing north, it measures 46.5 m in length, 7.5 m breadth and 5.2 m height. The painted panel is 1080 cm long and 700 cm high on the ceiling. Most probably it is one the biggest painted panel in India. The rock shelter has grandiose painting on the ceiling that may be labeled as 'master ceiling' because of its vastness. It has superimposed wild animal scene with geometric designs (Figure 4).

Kendur Kere Gondi (KKG)

The rock shelter site is locally known as *Kendur Kere Gondi* (Figure 5), situated 2.5 km northeast of Kendur and 13 km northeast of Badami. Among the seven shelters only two of them, contains paintings in red-ochre. Among the painted pictures the deer in outline is depicted in the early naturalistic style. Interestingly there is a depiction of human figure i.e. 'Prehistoric Badami style of human figure', generally not met with in most of the painted rock shelters in the country (Mohana 2015, 2017).

Kannergavi Gudda (KGG)

It is located 2.5 km northwest side of Nagarhal village, 2 km north of Banashankari and 5 km southeast of Badami. Some paintings were previously noticed by Neu-

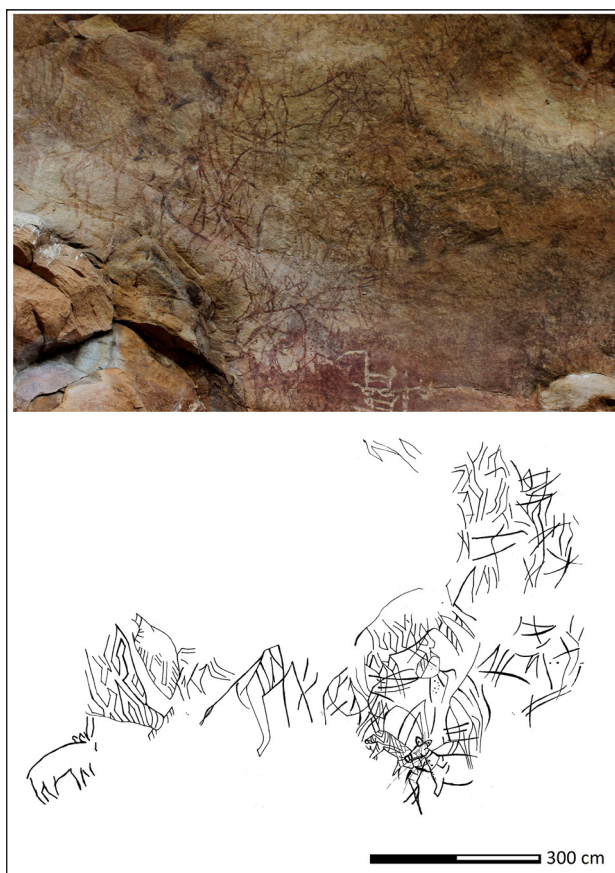


Figure 4: Siti Done: Master Painted Ceiling with palaeoart.

mayer (1993, Fig. 130). The author has found here pictogram and petroglyphs, not noticed earlier. In one of the shelters are many bruising (Figure 6) of cattle and human figure which are very similar to Piklihal pictures of Neolithic period (Allchin 1960).

Ramthirtha (RTT)

There are many rock shelters. The rock shelter is facing south, situated around 0.5 km in front of perennial spring locally known as the Sitidone, 3 km northeast of Badami town.

Tatakoti (TKT) and North-eastern Hill of Badami (BDMH)

Tatakoti rock art site is located to the east of Badami town, nearby the Museum of the Archaeological Survey of India. Some of the paintings of the Early Chalukyan period (Sundara 1978, 1994) and in classical style (tempera technique) of North-eastern hill of Badami were discovered by Sundara (1978). Further explorations in the area revealed some more important petroglyphs as well as pictograms.

Features of Rock-art in the Aihole-Badami-Kutakanakeri Series

In this general survey undertaken by the author some salient features of the rock art have emerged as listed below:

- In the basin, so far 35 rock art sites have been discovered, among which 21 have been discovered by the author.
- The pictograms are on the bare uneven rough rock surface of the shelters and caves in sandstone hill ranges.
- Most of these pictograms are drawn in red-ochre (e.g. Are Gudda, Hire Gudda, Ranganatha Gudda). Remaining pictograms are in dull whitish colour (Shidla Phadi), in ivory black in bi-chrome (North-eastern hill of Badami), in black (Tatakoti, Katapura, and Are gudda), and in white (Tatakoti, Hulligemmana Kolla, Sidla Phadi, Katapura, Maaglur gudda, Surgi Phadi, ASI Museum complex at Badami, Kannergavi gudda, Ramthirtha and Huli Phadi).
- **Figure 7** the subject-matter of most of the paintings are animals, human figures, geometric designs (geometrical lines and rhombus) and historical paintings represented individually or in groups scattered haphazardly all over of the area of the shelters in different sizes, in silhouette or in solid form.



Figure 5: Panoramic view of the Kendur Kere Gondi.



Figure 6: Kannergavi Gudda: Cattle and a human figure in bruising.



Figure 7: Are Gudda: A unique painted panel with three layers of superimposing.



Figure 8: Ranganatha Gudda: wild boars in a group.



Figure 9: Dodda Joger Phadi: Miniature paintings of human figures enclosed within a circle.

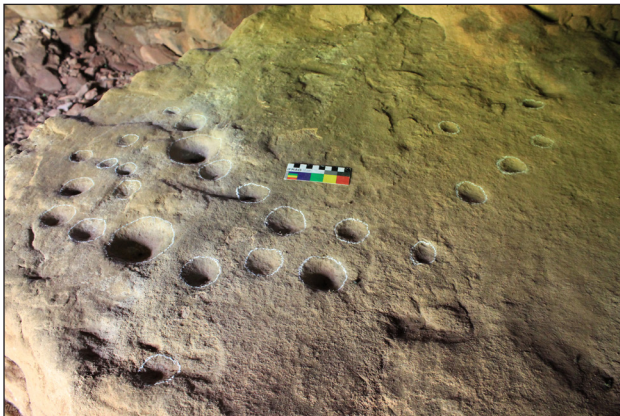


Figure 10: Tatakoti: Cupules.

- Naturalistic depictions are of the realistic objects and natural environment. Such depictions are common in cave and shelter arts across the world. Within the corpus of art of the region, different species of fauna are depicted naturally, stylistically and schematically. Identified animal species (both wild and domestic) such as cattle (*Bos Indicus*), deer (*Cervid*), wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) at Ranganatha Gudda very interesting (**Figure 8**), wild dog (*Cuon alpinus*), crocodile (*Crocodylus sp*), horse (*Equus caballus*), elephant (*Elephas maximus*), ostrich (*Struthio camelus*), porcupine etc.
- The miniature paintings have been found at Dodda Joger Phadi (**Figure 9**).
- The pictograms are usually executed on the wall, ceilings and cliffs of rock shelters.
- Cupules are found in many sites of the series i.e. Are gudda, Tatakoti (**Figure 10**), Sidla phadi, Badami, ASI museum complex, Kannergavigudda etc.
- Caves with rock art are completely absent in this region.
- This region is not only rich in prehistoric sites but also pretty well known for Early Chalukyan rock-cut caves and structural temples of varied architectural forms.

Conclusion

The importance of the sites lies in their pictograms, which are generally thought to be confined to the Vindhyan sandstone formations in Central India. In Karnataka, the Malaprabha river basin is now found to have pictogram and petroglyphs executed on the rough surfaces of the isolated sandstone, granite and quartzite boulders, as well as on the walls and ceilings of the rock shelters. In the Krishna and Vedavathi (Hagari) basin such engravings and bruising are associated with the Neolithic cattle-keepers living in terraces of the granite hills. Therefore some of the series cattle are similar to these rock art. There are designs with maze patterns and fish from Huli Phadi, Are Gudda and ASI museum complex. 'Prehistoric Badami styles of human figures' i.e. exaggerated human figures are drawn at Ranganathana gudda (**Figure 11a**) and Hamsanur (**Figure 11b**). Geometrical designs and rhombus are also

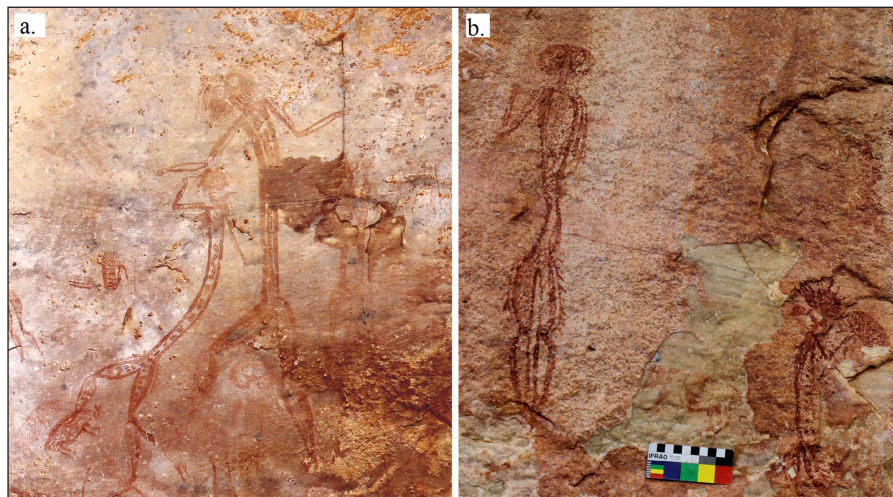


Figure 11: a. Ranganatha Gudda; b. Hamsanur: Prehistoric 'Badami Style of Human Figures'.

very prominent in the Kaladgi basin at Kendur, Tatakoti, Hulligemmana Kolla, Hire gudda, Huli Phadi, Aihole, Hamsanur and Aregudda. They are found both in pictogram and petroglyph.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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