

The 24th national conference of Rock Art Society of India at Bhopal, 27-29 February 2020: A report

By Ram Krishna

The 24th national conference of Rock Art Society of India, Bhopal, 2-29 February 2020 was organised jointly by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums of the Government of Madhya Pradesh and the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Corporation, Bhopal at the State Museum, Shyamla Hills, Bhopal from 27-29 February 2020. Shri Pankaj Rag, IAS, Principal Secretary, Department of Culture and Shri Faiz Ahmed Kidwai, IAS, Secretary Tourism and MD, MP Tourism Corporation, Bhopal were kind enough to extend their full support to the Conference. The year 2020 is the birth centenary year of Dr V. S. Wakankar. Hence, the event was a befitting tribute to him, the great rock art scholar and popular Indian archaeologist from the land of Madhya Pradesh. The theme of the conference was, “Developing operating standards for the sustainable management and development of rock art heritage sites in India, with special reference to Bhimbetka”

Seventy scholars participated in the conference from different disciplines such as Business Management, Heritage Management, Tourism, Rock Art Science, Anthropology, Fine Arts, Archaeological Survey of India, Museums, State Archaeology and Universities from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Orissa, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Mohali Chandigarh, Gujarat, etc.

Shri Pankaj Rag, IAS, Principal Secretary and Secretary Culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh welcomed the guests and inaugurated the conference. Shri R. S. Mohanty, Chief Secretary, Government of Madhya Pradesh gave his kind consent to be the Chief Guest of the inaugural function of the Conference on 27th February. We also invited Shri Faiz Ahmed Kidwai, IAS and Secretary Tourism, Govt. of M. P. and MD, MP Tourism Corporation, Bhopal as the special guest of the conference. But in the last moment they became engaged in some special meetings hence, could not come for the function.

Prof. R. C. Agrawal, President Rock Art Society of India also welcomed the delegates of the conference and heartily thanked Shri Pankaj Rag and Shri Faiz Ahmed Kidwai for hosting the conference by their respective departments. Prof Giriraj Kumar, Secretary General, RASI presented the Vision of Rock Art Society of India and plan for future research to conserve and promote the rock art heritage of the country in general and that of Bhimbetka in particular. It was followed by a group photo and seven academic sessions in three days.

The first academic session was Dr V. S. Wakankar Memorial Lecture was delivered by Dr Rakesh Tewari, former Director General, Archaeological Survey of India and one of the founding members of Rock Art Society of India. He presented the development of Rock Art Discipline in India, establishment of Rock Art Society of India and its journal *Purakala*, their crucial role in moulding and in the advancement of rock art research in the country and its promotion in the world. His presentation was mesmerising in lucid language. The session was chaired by Shri Pankaj Rag, IAS and Secretary Culture. Mr Ram Krishna was the rapporteur.

Academic session 02 was the Panel Discussion on the theme of the conference, ““Developing operating standards for the sustainable management and development of rock art heritage sites in

India, with special reference to Bhimbetka” was organised in the second academic session after lunch at 2:00 pm. The session was Chaired by Padmashri Dr K. K. Mohammed, former Regional Director, ASI. The panel discussion was coordinated by Prof. Giriraj Kumar and Dr S. B. Ota. Mr Ram Krishna was the rapporteur of the session. Prof. Sanjeev Swami, Head, Department of Management from Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed to be University), Prof. Sanjay Bhushana, expert in Systems application in management from the same department, Dr Rakesh Tewari, former Director General, ASI, Dr Piyush Bhatt, Dy SA, Bhopal Circle, Dr Meenakshi Dubey Pathak, Dr O. P. Mishra, Advisor to the MP Tourism Corporation, Dr Ramesh Yadav from the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Bhopal and Mr Ram Krishna, Research Scholar, Deptt. of Management, DEI, Agra were the other participants. Sh Sh Subas C Mishra, Chief Conservator Officer (former), Forest, Bubneswar sent his views by post. The ASI Officers emphasised on restructuring the management committee and re-planning the management strategy of Bhimbetka, while prof Sanjeev Swami suggested that the management strategy for Bhimbetka must have a vision to measure their actions on the scale of 0-10 and evaluate it at a certain period of time to achieve a set target. Then the standardisation of management of rock art heritage site Bhimbetka can be standardised by calculating the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) on the basis of data obtained by a questionnaire developed for the same. Prof Sanjay Bhushan emphasised on the use of advanced technology and sharing the benefits of the development of Bhimbetka Rock art Heritage site with the tribal Community living around the site. He also emphasised the need for skill development training programmes and educating the people for management and protection of the rock art heritage sites. It will also help for their socioeconomic development. He suggested for setting an economic triangle for rock art heritage sites. The programme has already been tested at Rajabarari in Betul district of Madhya Pradesh. Sh Mishra emphasised to involve the officers of the forest department and emphasised on the need for developing legislative for conservation and management of rock art heritage sites.

The academic session 03 was chaired by Prof. Parth R. Chauhan. Dr Suman Pandey was the rapporteur of the session. Six papers were presented in this session. Mr Ram Krishna emphasised the need for restructuring the management of Bhimbetka and produced a plan for the sustainable development and management of the same by involving all the stake holders. Prof. Giriraj Kumar and Robert G. Bednarik emphasised the need for immediate action for the protection of Daraki-Chattan Cave, the only rich early Palaeolithic cupule site in the world, and given a plan and strategy for developing a Stone Age museum nearby the site. Prof. Ajay Pratap highlighted the environmental degradation of the rock art heritage sites in Mirzapur district of Uttar Pradesh. Dr P. K. Bhatt underlined the problems at Chaturbhujnath nala rock art heritage site under ASI caused by the visitors and pilgrims to the temple and provided some solutions to meet the challenge. Dr Narayan Vyas presented the efforts made by him for the mass awareness about rock art heritage, its value and the public responsibility for its protection. Mr Akash Gedam discussed the geometrical engravings in the Kunghada cave in Vidharbha region.

After the session the delegates went to visit the painted rock shelters at Bhimbetka where they had the firsthand knowledge about the management strategies of Bhiombetka heritage site and issues and challenges in it. They also understood and gave suggestions for improving the management of Bhimbetka, specially by involving the local community.

Day – 3

Academic session – 5

Summary

In this academic session seven papers were presented from seven different perspectives of rock art. These are design, art, Chariots in rock art and Vedic sahitya: a study, Harappan connections, observation and exploration. The session was chaired by Prof K.K. Mohammad and Rapporteur was Mr. Ram Krishna.

Hridayshri, Associate Prof. in World University of Design, Sonapat studied some of the Stone Age compositions from Communication Design perspective and analysed the Stone Age rock art compositions are very effective in communicating a story and emphasising the narrative of the the characters by using design elements.

Prof. Ashvini Kumar Sharma from Faculty of Fine Arts, D.E.I. Dayalbagh, Agra in his joint paper with Dr Sunita Sharma presented the power of imagination in rock art.

Dr Abhimanyu in his joint paper with Dr Nandini Raghuvanshi and Prof. Giriraj Kumar presented a study of chariots in rock art and their analogy with that described in Vedic literature. Prof Sadasiba Pradhan explained the triangular symbols in Odishan rock art and concluded that the fertility cult has been continuing from the Stone Age till present. Dr Manual Josef has presented the similarities of Harrapan script with that of rock art motifs in Chambal valley and in Bihar. Dr Shambhunath Yadav and Dr Mohammed Zakir Khan presented rock art motifs from some of the newly discovered rock art sites in Chhattisgarh. In the end Dr Waseem Khan in his paper explained the use of available technology in the field for the study of rock art.

Over all the session was multidisciplinary in approach to understand and analyase rock art.

Academic session – 6

Summary

The session was Chaired by Dr Sadasiba Pradhan and Rapporteur was Ms Hridaydhri. In this academic session seven papers were presented dealing six different perspectives of rock art.

Mr. Swatantra Kumar studied the aqatic motives in the rock art and tried to understand the socio-economic life and cognitive and technological development of stone man on that basis and its continuity In the following periods of human history.

Dr R. Dehuri and Dr A. Pradhan presnted the study on Rock art of Guddha, District Panna, Madhya Pradesh.

Dr Rajesh Poojari and Dr Parth R. Chauhan presented rock art of Mandikhoh and the plan of its future scientific study.

Dr S.S. Gupta presented the old record of rock art of Jjjhari.

Ph.D. Scholar Neelam Singh presented the lernings from the training program organised by RASI in the year 2019 of scientific study of rock art.

And in the last Dr Akash Gedam presented the archaeometry study of rock art in Kunghada cave.

Day – 3

Academic session – 7

The session was Chaired by Dr S. Pradhan and Rapporteur was Ms Hridaydhri. In this session seven papers were presented mostly from peninsular India, one from central India and one from northeast Africa. Dr B.M. Reddy et al. presented the study of rock art at Ontigundu in Nallanudi forest in Telangna. Dr Bhaskar Kondreddy and Katta S. Rao presented the white rock paintings at Gandilita. Their another paper was on newly discovered rock art sites in Andhra Pradesh. Dr T. Murgeshi presented a note on on Avalakki Raare petroglyphs which shows the continuity of the tradition of petroglyphs on laterite on the western coast from Ratnagiri- Sindhudurg in Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka and going further south in Kerala. Suman Pandey in her paper presented an analytical study of Material culture of painted rock shelter at Silari, District Raisen in Madhya Pradesh indicating the technological development and inventions according to the need and challenges of the environment. Toshbanta Padhan and Feven Zemhert in their paper dealt with a newly discovered rock art site Msliin Southern highland of Eritrea in northeast Africa

Valedictory Function

It was Chaired by Dr S. B. Ota. Mr. Ram Krishna was the rapporteur of the session

The brief reports of the academic sessions were presented by the Chairs and/or the rapporteurs of the respective sessions. Prof. Giriraj Kumar presented the recommendations and resolutions passed in the general body meeting of the Rock Art Society of India.

1. That the Digital Interpretation center for Bhimbetka UNESCO Rock Art World Heritage site be developed at the earliest for educating the visitors about the significance of rock art heritage and our responsibility to preserve it for posterity.
2. That the display plan and themes in the Digital Interpretation Center and Management must be reformulated and updated regularly according to the need of the time.
3. That a Museum-cum-research Institute be established near by the interpretation center and a replica of Daraki-Chattan Cave, the early Stone Age petroglyph site in Chambal Valley be erected in the Museum.
4. That in the light of the challenges being faced, the implementation committee for the sustainable conservation and management of Bhimbetka must be reconstructed at the earliest and the plan for the sustainable conservation and management of Bhimbetka need to be reformulated at the earliest.

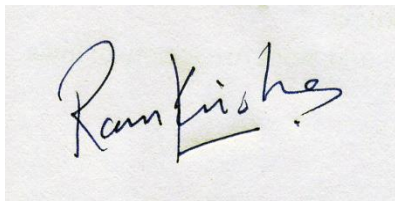
The management plan must have a measuring system of the actions taken and their impact to analyse the prose and cones, and further actions to be taken in that light.

The local communities must be involved in the management of Bhimbetka, and modern technology must be employed for making the the sustainable development of the site economically viable and coordinating and involving different stake holders.

5. That the Daraki-Chattan Cave, a protected monument of Madhya Pradesh State, must be protected immediately by erecting fencings in two courses and closing the cave for the access of general mass.
6. A site Museum-cum-research Institute should be developed nearby Daraki-Chattan Cave. It will include the palaeo-channel on the hill, petroglyph sites near by the paleo-channel and visit to the Bada Mahadev temple. It will be the center of the tourist circle including Chaturbhujnath nala rock art site, Gandhi Sagar water resrvoir, Hinglajgarh and nearby Buddhist and Vaishnavite rock cut caves caves and temples of of 8th and 10th Century AD.

The recommendations were followed by the reports of the rapporteurs of the six academic sessions already discussed. Prof. V. H. Sonawane delivered the valedictory address on decoding rock art. Prof. R.C. Agarwal expressed gratitude to the organisers of the 24th National conference of Rock Art Society of India, especially to Shri Pankaj Rag, Secretary Culture and the Commissioner Archaeology and Museums, Government of Madhya Pradesh and to Shri Faiz Ahmed Kidwai, the Secretary Tourism and MD, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Corporation. He also expressed his gratitude to the organising team and also to the delegates for making the conference a grand success.

The event came to end after the vote of thanks by Shri Prakash Paranjpe, the Deputy Director and the Curator of the State Museum on behalf of his co-coordinator Dr Ramesh Yadav and their entire team and the Department.



(Ram Krishna)

Coordinator, 24th RASI Conference, Bhopal 2020.



Figure 1. Shri Pankaj Rag, IAS, Principal Secretary and Secretary Culture, welcoming the delegates of the 24th National Conference of Rock Art Society of India (RASI) in the inaugural function on 27th February 2020. Sitting on the dais from left to right are Prof. R. C. Agrawal, President RASI, Dr Rakesh Tewari, former D.G. ASI and Prof. Giriraj Kumar, Secretary General RASI.



Figure 2. The guests on the dais releasing Purakala Volume 29, 2019, the journal of Rock Art Society of India.



Figure 3. Dr Rakesh Tewari, former D. G. ASI and one of the founding members of RASI, delivering 24th Dr V. S. Wakankar Memorial Lecture.



Figure 4. Audience of the 24th national Conference of RASI, 2020 organised in the auditorium of the State Museum, Shyamla Hills, Bhopal.



Figure 5. Group photo of the delegates of the 24th National Conference, RASI, Bhopal.



Figure 6. Panel discussion on, “Developing operating standards for sustainable development and management of rock art heritage sites.” From left to write are, Prof. Giriraj Kumar, Mr Ram Krishna, Dr Rakesh Tewari, Dr Piyush Bhatt, Dr S. B. Ota, Dr K. K. Mohammed, Prof. Sanjeev Sawmi, Prof. Sanjay Bhushan, Dr Meenakshi Dubey Pathak, Dr O. P. Mishra and Dr Ramesh Yadav.



Figure 7. Dr K. K. Mohammed presenting the gist of the panel discussion in the Valedictory function of the conference.



Figure 8. Young scholars discussing with Dr S. B. Ota about the conservation and management issues of Bhimbetka on the site.