

## A BRIEF REPORT ON THE NATIONAL SEMINAR AND 14TH CONGRESS OF ROCK ART SOCIETY OF INDIA, REWA-2009

The 14th Congress of the Rock Art Society of India was hosted by the department of A.I.H.C. & Archaeology APS University, Rewa-486003. M.P. in collaboration with the Commissioner Archaeology, Archives and Museums, Government of Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal, from 18th to 20th Dec. 2009. This meeting coincided with the National Seminar on Cognitive and Cultural Development of hominins in the perspective of Rock Art organized by the A.P.S. University. It was the first time that the RASI seminar was held in the A.P.S. University, Rewa.

The registration of the delegates started at 7 a.m. on 18th December 2009, in the Dept. of AIH, Culture and Archaeology of the A.P.S. University which continued till 11 a.m. in the University Auditorium where the inaugural function was held. Seated on the dais were the Registrar of the University Dr. Magan Singh Awasya, Secretary, Rock Art Society of India Dr. G.L. Badam, President, Rock Art Society of India Dr. R.C. Agrawal, representative of the V.C. Prof. R.N. Shukla ( Prof Shivnarayan Yadav, the Vice Chancellor of the A.P.S. University could not attend the inaugural function as he had to go out of station for some urgent meeting), Chief Guest, Shri Erwin Neumeyer, and local Organising Secretary, Dr. Mahesh C. Srivastava.



1. Inaugural Function of the 14th Congress of the Rock Art Society of India: Guests on the dais

The meeting started with Sarswati Vandana followed by lighting of the traditional lamp, guests were welcomed by presentation of bouquets, garlands, badges etc., and release of the Journal of the Rock Art Society of India Purakala volume 19, 2009. Dr. M.C. Srivastava, the local Organising Secretary, welcomed the guests and other delegates and officers of the University who had toiled hard to make the function a success. He outlined the various stages that culminated in organization of the meeting and thanked the various agencies, A.P. University, the Archaeological Survey of India, the Commissioner of Archaeology, Archive and Museums, M.P., members of the University, office bearers of the Rock Art Society of India and others involved in the preparations for making it possible to hold the meeting at Rewa. The Registrar Dr. Awasya talked about the various components that were responsible in organizing the seminar at Rewa and expressed happiness that the RASI had agreed to hold its meeting at Rewa, the neighbourhood of which was dotted with several painted rock shelters.

Dr. Badam, the Secretary of RASI, welcomed all the guests, scholars and students to the 14th Congress of the RASI and gave a brief account of the



2. Mr Erwin Neumeyer, the Chief Guest of the Congress, offering prayer to the Goddess Saraswati.



3. Guests releasing the Journal of RASI, Purakala, Volume 19, 2009.

achievements of RASI since its establishment in 1990 and how it promoted scientific rock art research since then incorporating studies like the rate of weathering, taphonomy and palaeoecology, art site management, conservation, preservation and dating of rock art. He talked about the E.I.P. Project (Early Indian Petroglyphs) undertaken by RASI and IFRAO (International Federation of Rock Art Organisations) involving Indian and foreign scholars and the progress made in dating the pigments used in rock art. He expressed the hope that in the coming years RASI would play a leading role in promoting the Rock Art discipline at the global level. Dr. R.C.Agrawal, the President of RASI, mentioned about the contributions of late Padmashri Dr. V.S.Wakankar in discovering numerous sites in India and abroad and making the Rock Art studies a dynamic discipline. He said that after the sad demise of Dr. Wakankar, when the studies of Rock Art appeared to be directionless, his friends, colleagues and students worked hard in taking the



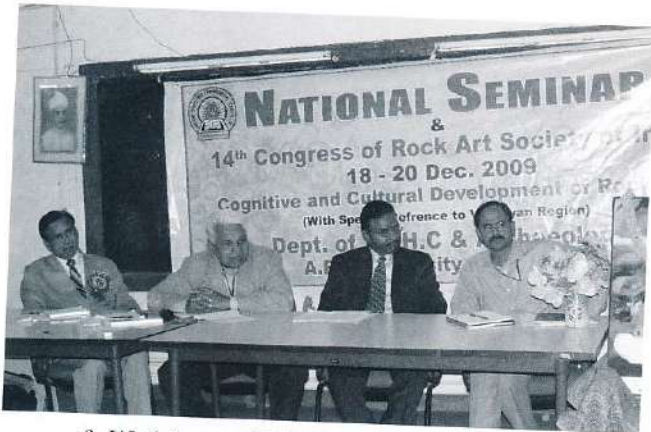
6. Prof V.H. Sonawane delivering the Keynote Address of the Congress.



5. Prof V.D. Mishra delivering Dr V.S.Wakankar Memorial Lecture.

discipline forward with new resources and applications. Dr. Agrawal talked about the contributions of other scholars who subsequently came forward to hold the fort. He mentioned that the excavations at Daraki- Chattan in M.P. revealed an undisturbed stratigraphy of the sediments, palaeoclimatic situations and scientific dates for different levels besides establishing a cultural sequence of Lower Palaeolithic and transitional phase between Lower Palaeolithic and Middle Palaeolithic cultures. Dr. Agrawal said that the need of the hour is to make efforts in locating undisturbed and primary sites and subject these to detailed multidisciplinary studies. He hoped that the forthcoming seminar on Pleistocene art in France would provide an important opportunity for Indian scholars to project the Rock Art Heritage of India. Finally, he thanked the authorities of the A.P.S University and other organizations for their valuable help, support and co-operation in making the RASI Congress a success.

Dr. R.N. Shukla (Professor of Environmental Biology at the A.P.S. University) who represented the Vice Chancellor in the inaugural function, said that the various scientific disciplines as applied to the studies on rock art would provide a firm basis for chronology of the rock art which is still unresolved in various parts of the country. He hoped that scholars would take up, in right earnest, the researches in and around Rewa have provided ample evidence of rock paintings of different cultural phases. He invited the RASI to take up rock art studies in the area on a multidisciplinary basis with emphasis on palaeoenvironment and also help provide guidelines and training to the scholars in



8. Workshop on "What can I contribute for the promotion of Rock Art Discipline".

this part of M.P. Shri Erwin Neymeyer, the well known specialist on Indian rock art from Austria, who along with his wife was on a visit to Indian rock art sites, was the Chief Guest of the meeting and talked about Dr. Wakankar's contribution to the field of rock art and the urgent need for preserving and conserving the rock art heritage in India for the posterity. He stressed the fact that India holds a very important place in the world in rock art research and such studies should be encouraged at all levels and earnest efforts should be made to expand the scope of such studies in and around Rewa. Professor V.D. Misra (formerly of the Allahabad University) delivered Dr. V.S. Wakankar memorial lecture on Rock-Art and Mesolithic Culture of the North-Central India. He said that the north-central India, comprising parts of Chandauli, Mirzapur, Sonbhadra, Allahabad, Chitrakut and Banda districts of Uttar Pradesh and Rewa, Sidhi and Satna districts of Madhya Pradesh abound in rock-shelters both plain and painted. The theme of the paintings include hunting scenes, group dance, animals, particularly stags, bovinds, boars and avifauna including peacock, collecting of honey, palm impression, etc. These paintings are executed generally in red or white pigment. However, occasionally paintings executed in black pigment have also been found. On the basis of theme, colour and style it is reasonable to infer that the painting activities in the concerned area cover a long span of time. Dr. Misra stressed that authorship and antiquity of the rock-art of the north-central India are complicated issues. It stands to reason that the ancestors of the tribal people still living in the area might have been the authors of the concerned rock-art.

About the antiquity of the rock-art Dr. Misra said that from most of the rock-shelters microliths are found in abundance. These microliths are also obtained from adjoining open-air settlements. Excavations have been conducted in nine rock-shelters, six in Mirzapur, one in Allahabad, one in Rewa and one in Sidhi district. Two of the excavated sites - Baghaikhor and Lekhahia have yielded evidence of human burials as well. Excavated open air Mesolithic sites, nine in number, include Bhadahwan (Chandauli), Chopani Mando (Allahabad), Morahana, Lekhahia and Baidha (Mirzapur) and Baghor II, Medhauli, Banki and Kunjhun I (Sidhi district). The Lekhahia dates read  $6420 \pm 75$  B.C. and  $6050 \pm 75$  B.C. and that of Baghor II read 6380 B.C. From Adamgarh and Barkhera, both in Madhya Pradesh obtained C-14 dates read 5505 B.C. and 5520 B.C. respectively. Further, a C-14 date reading  $6010 \pm 120$  B.C. has been obtained from Loteshwar in Gujarat. Supportive dates have also been obtained from the Ganga valley sites as well. From Sarai Nahar Rai the concerned date reads  $8395 \pm 110$  B.C. A thermoluminescence date obtained from Wari-Kalan Damdama ranges from 7000 B.C. to 5000 B.C. Two AMSC-14 dates from Damdama read  $6690 \pm 65$  B.C. and  $6915 \pm 65$  B.C. From Mesolithic Paisara in Bihar a radio carbon date reading  $7420 \pm 110$  B.C. has been obtained. In the light of facts stated above, the rock-art of the north-central India may tentatively be traced back to Mesolithic period between 10,000 B.P. to 8000 B.P.

Dr. V.H. Sonawane delivered the Key Note address at the function talking about the contributions of Dr. Wakankar in helping to bring the Indian rock art



9. Visit of the Congress delegates to the Gaddi Pahar rock art site.

on the global arena. He summarized the contributions of various scholars in rock art in India following the works of Dr. Wakankar, and gave an outline about the progress made in the area in India during the last few decades. Dr. Sonawane talked about the rock paintings in Gujarat bringing out the various discoveries particularly in the districts of Panchmahals, Sabarkantha and Bhavnagar. He made mention of Tarsang paintings representing floral motifs, swastika, lamps etc., the famous fluted core from Chandrawati bearing geometric design on its cortex, the ethnoarchaeological aspects and other related subjects of rock art. In the end, a vote of thanks was proposed by Dr. Mahesh C. Srivastava who talked about the various activities of the Dept. and the effort the students and staff of the Dept. had put in for making the seminar a success. He reiterated the co-operation, support and help of RASI, CAM and APSU in organizing the seminar.

The Academic sessions started in the afternoon at 2 p.m. after the lunch break and continued till 8 p.m. on the following day, i.e., 19th Dec. 2009. Fifty research papers were presented in six academic sessions on varied aspects of rock art research going on in India. The speciality of the Congress was that junior scholars and students, specially from APS University were given priority to boost their confidence.

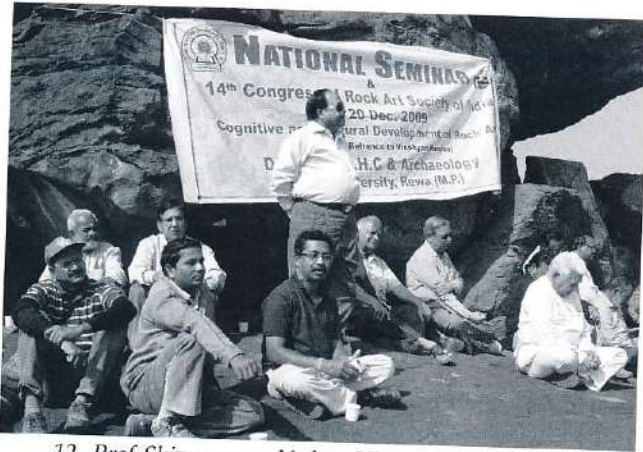
Dr. O.P. Mishra informed about the proposal of the M.P. Govt. for starting Dr V.S. Wakankar Centre at Bhopal, and compilation of hundred years of rock painting studies in India. He requested for articles for Puratan special issue on rock art. Dr. S.S.Gupta, Dr. Tahir, Sri Kushawa made interesting presentations about their work on various aspects of Rock Art.

Besides Dr. Giriraj Kumar and Dr Sadasiva Pradhan convened a session on 19th Dec. on "My Contribution to Rock Art Discipline in the coming few years" in which a few topics as mentioned below were discussed.

Exploration and scientific documentation of rock art sites and rock art heritage; Identification of important sites; continuity of rock art tradition in the present communities; innovative approaches for popularisation of rock art; rock art and adventure; documentation, conservation and preservation of rock art etc.

Participants to this discussion were: under Documentation Programme included V.N. Prabhakar, Murari Lal Sharma and Madan Lal Meena. Participants suggesting Research and Teaching Aids and Publicity Campaigns included Arakhita Pradhan and Giriraj Kumar. Ragini Roy submitted a plan for making short films on rock art as an aid for students and general masses. Sunita Sharma and Tanushri Tandon also were for making rock art popular. Giriraj Kumar suggested promotion of Indian rock art heritage on global scale. Ramakrishna talked about generating awareness of the study in general masses. On the whole the above suggestions were well received. It was appreciated that generally youngsters came forward with these suggestions (some scholars were not present but their contributions were read). Dr. O.P. Misra suggested that awareness to the rock art could be achieved through posters. Dr. Meenakshi Pathak volunteered to organize excursion trips to the rock art sites around Rewa with the help of Sainik School. Dr. S.K. Bajpai suggested to make directory of resource persons in each region. Dr. Bharati Shrotri gave example of formation of Ram Dharohar Samiti in some parts of Chhattisgarh to take care of conservation of the rock art sites in each distt. Prof. Sundara suggested that popular books and brochures be published every two to three years to popularize the rock art study which would also help in conservation aspects of the sites. Dr. S.S. Gupta suggested that an Interpretation Centre at Bhimbetka was under way which would be useful for understanding the lifeways of the tribals in and around the area. Dr. Giriraj Kumar suggested that rock art should be digitized and this was already started by Sri S.B. Ota at Bhopal. This practice can be followed at other sites as well. Dr. Sadashib Pradhan suggested that rock art should form a part of tourism, and package trips could be organized. These were useful suggestions for popularization and conservation of rock art.

The discussions and suggestions that followed each presentation in the seminar were thought provoking and useful. Some presentations of course generated heated discussions as happens in seminars. The delegates were requested to incorporate the suggestions made during the deliberations and update their data.



12. Prof Shivnarayan Yadav, Vice Chancellor of the A.P.S. University addressing the workshop on the site.

In the Valedictory function, the Vice Chancellor of A.P.S. University Dr. Shiv Narayan Yadav recalled his association with Late Dr. V.S. Wakankar in the past and expressed satisfaction that his work and teachings have inspired the young generation to take up and make positive contribution to the areas of rock art. He suggested that RASI may take up the work around the less known rock art sites in and around Rewa.

Dr. M.C. Srivastava, as the local Organising Secretary, thanked the authorities of RASI and other delegates for having taken the trouble of coming over to Rewa and examine the rich sites in and around Rewa. He also enumerated the difficulties that he had to encounter to organize the meeting with limited resources and at a short notice. He thanked his University authorities and his colleagues for co-operation and support.

The Chairmen and reporters of different sessions were thanked so also the scholars who attended and presented papers during the deliberations by the Secretary RASI. It was also agreed that RASI may take keen interest in working around Rewa. Dr. R.C. Agrawal, the President of the RASI thanked the authorities of the University and various agencies for making the seminar a success. He dwelt upon the future course of activity to be undertaken by RASI. The proceeding of the seminar would be published in the current year and Dr. Agrawal appealed to the participants to send their updated papers to the Secretary and Editor for onward

transmission (after editing and finalizing) to the Commissioner, Archaeology, Archives and Museums of the M.P. State Deptt. at Bhopal, who has very kindly agreed to publish the proceedings. Special thanks were sent to the Commissioner through his representative officer Dr. O.P. Mishra.

In the end certain points were discussed about the permanent office facility of RASI and redesignating some office bearers. The next RASI conference would take place either at Lucknow (U.P.) or at Raipur (Chhattisgarh). In the RASI General Body meeting Dr. Giriraj Kumar was requested to deliver the Wakankar Memorial lecture in the forthcoming 15th RASI Congress. Dr. Kumar kindly agreed for the same. Dr. Badam suggested that Dr. N. Chandramouli may be requested to deliver the Key Note address in the next meeting. Things would be finalized soon.

#### Field trip to rock art sites and on the spot workshop

On the 20th December delegates were taken on a field trip to rock art sites at Gaddi Pahar, around Rewa in which the Vice Chancellor, Registrar and other officers of the APS University and all the delegates of RASI participated. The scholars were surprised to see the rich rock heritage around Rewa, but were at pain to see that some government officials had wrote big marks on the classical rock art figures themselves. It is an institutional vandalism, and must be condemned. On the spot workshop was also organised and scholars were requested to present their impressions about the site and rock art they just visited. Views were expressed by the Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Dr Agrawal, Dr Giriraj Kumar, Dr Badam, Sri Ota. Dr m.C. Srivastava coordinated the workshop. This experience added considerably to the knowledge of rock art of the Rewa region. On the following day Dr. Badam studied some of the fossil collections made by the University during the last decades from the Son valley.

Thus, the 14th RASI Congress was a great success

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