CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSION
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The dissertation, thus, brings to limelight as many as 6778 rock pictures documented in 106 rock shelters from a region which was considered a lesser known area in the rock art map of India. Distributed in eleven districts of Orissa, the rock shelters are situated in deep reserve forests several kilometres away from the present day habitations. The shelters do not show any preference for their location, size, orientation or opening towards any particular directions for execution of paintings or engravings. Barring a few, the pictures are normally drawn in convenient places and approachable heights.

Here in Orissa, unlike elsewhere in the subcontinent, engravings constitute a special feature, which co-exists with paintings, both being complementary to each other. Together they exhibit unique traits in their compositions and style of execution. The subject matter is, by and large, non-figurative abstract patterns and motifs in the midst of a few female genitals, rhomboids, honeycombs and a series of geometric and non-geometric intricate patterns resembling more or less carpets, nets, saws, denticulate and blades, harpoons, etc. repeatedly drawn in paintings as well as in engravings. They often vary from simplest dots and lines to more elaborate and complex square or rectangular or oval shapes, filled with a series of parallel vertical or horizontal or wavy or criss-cross lines. Palm, foot and cupules are the popular motifs both in engravings and paintings (in paintings dots have taken the place of cupules). The motifs are executed non-schematically at convenient places with or without keeping any link with one another. So also the animal figures are drawn in the midst of patterns and motifs and the vice-versa. The intricate patterns and motifs predominate all other representations.

A great variety of animals are also found depicted. They include deer, antler, sambar, boar, hare, rhinoceros, tiger, porcupine, snake, lizard, frog, fish and tortoise. They were portrayed in different moods and postures such as standing, running, looking back, up and down. Most of them have naturalistic rendering. But unlike the central Indian animals whose bodies are often decorated with a variety of geometric and non-geometric intricate patterns, the animals in Orissa are bereft of any body decoration.
Anthropomorphs are almost negligible in paintings as well as in engravings as compared to other subject matter of art. They are less impressive. Unlike the dynamic 'S' profile human figures of Central India they are shown in stiff standing positions with horned headgears and sticks in hand. In historic paintings human figures are shown with drapery and wielded with metallic weapons like sword and shield and musical instruments as seen at Manikmoda and Lekhamoda-VI.

In engravings two techniques are discernible; one by drawing the outlines through deep incision and the other by making a shallow depression on the rock surface after the outline is drawn. In both the cases the figures and patterns are finished with the application of ochre in the grooves and the scooped out surface. Such practice is noticed in the rock pictures at Bainete Banda. At Bainete Banda in the reserve forest of Lankapalli in the Kammam district of Andhra Pradesh, the grooves of the engravings of animal forms, rhomboid, lizard and anthropomorphs are pigmented with ochre. Making a comparison between the two, Neumayer (1993:40) aptly remarked, “Engravings drawn in a similar technique – partly filled in with red pigment – but of a quite different style, were found at sites in Sambalpur and Sundargarh districts of Orissa”. It may be mentioned here that the tradition of pigmentation rock engravings continued in Orissa even up to the early historic period as may be seen in the Hathigumpha inscription of king Kharavela dating back to the 1st century B.C. The inscription engraved on the brow of a natural rock shelter in Udayagiri hill near Bhubaneswar, written in Brahmi and recording the career and achievement of the king was originally smeared with ochre whose traces are still available in the grooves of the incisions and the rock surface. Incidentally the shelter also preserves prehistoric pigmented engravings and paintings, which is the only example in India where both the historic traditions of written communication and the prehistoric traditions of communication through images survive the close harmony.

It is significant to note that two parallel traditions of art, in painting and in engraving, prevailed within a radius of 100 kms as crow flies. Close observation of the subject matter and style indicate that they belonged to two different epochs of prehistory. First the paintings and later it was engraving with painting.
Engravings are brought to sense and live with application of pigments in the grooves.

The artists have no option of rock for painting or engravings. Both paintings and engraving are found in the same sandstone zone of the Gondwana formation in Sundergarh and Sambalpur. Engravings, however, are not seen in quartzite rocks, though some instances of granite engravings are there.

A distinct regional character of Orissan rock art is discernible when compared with the adjoining rock art sites in Chhatisgarh. Western part of Orissa and Chhatisgarh belong to the same geo-morphological province of India. In the early medieval times they constituted one political unit under the name South Kosala and until 1936 this part of Orissa was under the administrative jurisdiction of Central Provinces with Hindi as the official language. Between the two there exist a lot of cultural and linguistic affinities. But it is surprising to note that despite such close proximity, the study brings to the forth two distinct art idiom that prevailed in both the regions notwithstanding some superficial parallel. In reported sites like Kabrapahad, Karmagarhi-Ushakuthi and Singhanpur in Raigarh district, which are not very far from the rock art sites in Sundargarh district, not a single specimen of engraving is noticed. The non-figurative motifs besides being depicted independently have profusely been used for decorating / filling the body of the animal and human figures. Triangle, the hallmark of Orissan rock art is not found in any of these rock art sites of Chhattisgarh. They largely come under the Central Indian tradition of rock paintings. This proposition is, however, subject to correction on availability of new evidences, which appears quite promising, particularly in the district of Raigarh and the adjoining areas.

Orissan rock art, thus, with its vast assemblage of engravings and paintings characterized by non-thematic and non-figurative pictorial codes exhibits a distinct regional trait like its language, scripts and art and architecture.

In the absence of any absolute date for these rock pictures, it is difficult to trace their origin and development. A tentative chronology has been worked
out on the basis of their superimposition, style of execution. The bold and mature carvings in engravings and the selection of colours and their compositions and above all the precision in which line have been drawn on the rough and undulating rock surface in paintings are suggestive of a long evolutionary tradition behind them, may be in portable medium lying buried to be unearthed by the spade of the archaeologists.

The most controversial aspect of rock art is the motivation behind this art. Any interpretation on it is highly speculative. Like the erotic sculptures in temple art, no single explanation can be offered for their motivation. It is, however, hard to believe that they are inspired by “art for art” sake, i.e. for the sake of decoration or recreation or even for aesthetic pleasure alone, when man hardly had any leisure from his hunting and gathering excursions for sustenance. Repeated representation of certain motifs such as the triangles, honeycombs, rhomboids, cupules and beaten brush marks probably had some functional ritualistic significant like the icons of the Sauras, who practice a great deal of ritual wall-paintings as the continuity of tradition. This however does not suggest that the Sauras are the descendents of the prehistoric rock shelter dwellers. But like them, the hill Sauras also known as the Lanjia Sauras even today subsist mostly on hinting and gathering. Cut off from the main stream of civilization, they live in total isolation and in primitivism. When the primitive mind fails to comprehend the cause of any unnatural tragedies like earthquake or killer epidemics or even attacks by tiger or other ferocious animals, they draw icons to appease the malevolent spirits responsible for the tragedy as they believe. Though the icon is basically functional and ritualistic some amount of artistic impulse is also noticed in them. Analogies can be drawn with the early historic paintings in terms of colour composition and the style of execution of anthropomorphs. The early historic paintings pronounced by non-naturalistic dispositions appear to have been drawn with indifference as if as a matter of ritualistic necessity. Australian and South African ethnographic records attest to such functional significance of rock art.

It appears as if the Prehistoric man was under the sway of a complicated religious system which induced him to decorate the walls of the shelters with symbolic figures, sometimes realistic, sometimes abstract to overcome the
malevolent spirits as observed in the icons of the Sauras. History tells us that it is the religion or the belief system of the time that partakes the subject matter of art, whether it is Buddhist, Jain, Brahmanical or tribal art.

There is no standard or universally accepted method for interpretation of rock art symbolism as abstract designs and symbols are not culture specific to only the hunter-gatherers of the rock shelters. They are also found in advanced societies of the past as well as of today. All languages use symbols. They are not always easy to understand. They may be related to their referents in very complex ways. One and half centuries of studies on pre-historic symbolism has provided as many explanations such as; magic, sympathetic hunting, totemism, fertility, initiation rites, aesthetics, eroticism and sexual fantasies and so forth. Since symbols are culture specific all kinds of symbols may not have similar implications all over the world. Discontinuous distribution and disparate forms and contexts may have different meanings in different regions. As heart does not symbolize love everywhere. (We have quite a few instance of heart pattern in the rock art of Orissa.).

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