PREFACE

Rock art is a term used to define several types of artistic examples in the form of paintings, bruising, pecking, and engravings etc; in the bare rock surfaces of caves, rock shelters and isolated rock boulders, executed by our ancestors. Basically there are two types of rock art. One of them is produced by an "additive process" i.e by adding some colour substance to the rock surface to depict motifs, figures etc. This form of art is variously known as pictographs, petrographs, paintings etc. Since majority of this form of rock art occurs in caves and rock shelters and which cannot be moved from place to place, it is also known as ‘parietal art’. The second form of art is produced by a ‘deductive process” i.e., by removing rock particles from the rock with the help of a sharp instruments, of stone or metal, to depict the desired figure, motif or symbol. This form of art is known in various forms depending on the technique of execution, as petroglyphs, engravings and bruising.

Rock art is a global phenomenon with its antiquity going back to more than forty thousands of years, when men’s subsistence economy was based on hunting and gathering. In the history of mankind no work of fine art other than rock art has such a wide distribution lasting for such a long time. It constitutes the earliest written and visual document of the mankind – a very powerful means of expressing ancient artistic sophistication. It is a storehouse of information for archaeologists and historians in their efforts to reconstruct the life style of the peoples of the remote past. These works of art provide first hand information on society, beliefs, rites, rituals, costumes, tools and implements, technological attainments, means of subsistence, contemporary flora and fauna and above all man-nature relationship. They exhibit incredible artistic maturity, be it in selection of colours or articulation of a form or a pattern.

In the background of this the present dissertation entitled “Rock Art in Orissa: An Ethno-archaeological Study” is discussed in the following six chapters.

Chapter I, "Introduction to Rock Art in India" introduces the topic its definition, scope and its research in India and in a global context. It also
presents an account of the rock art scenario in the country in respect of distribution and subject matter of execution.

India is one of the three countries with largest concentration of the world heritage of rock art, the other two being Australia and South Africa. It is also significant to note that India pioneered rock art research in the world with the evidence of first petroglyphs that was reported in 1856 from Almora by Henwood. The first reported discovery of Stone Age paintings was made in India in 1867-68, twelve years before the sensational discovery of Altamira in Spain, by a British archaeologist Archibald Carlileyle at Sohagighat in Mirzapur district of Uttar Pradesh. What is significant is that Carlileyle even in those days claimed Stone Age antiquity for those rock paintings on the basis of the large number of microliths he collected along with pieces of charcoal and hematite from the occupational deposits of the painted work shelter. After him several scholars reported the discovery of number of rock art sites throughout the length and breadth of the country. Nearly two third of the total rock art heritage of the country are reported from the quartzite and sandstone belts of Central India, mainly in the Vindhyas, the Satpuras and the Kaimur ranges, located in the states of undivided Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. It is interesting to note that territories like Maharashtra and Goa, which were in a dark till the first part of the 21st centuries, also reported some rock art sites. Central India abounds with paintings. Petroglyphs are negligible, almost absent compared to the vast assemblage of the rock paintings. Peninsular India has a rich assemblage of petroglyphs in the granite hillocks of Karnataka and Kerala.

Chapter II, "Rock Art in Orissa" present a detailed account of all the 106 rock art shelters documented in 11 districts of Orissa, as reported so far. Each and every rock art shelters has been discussed in terms of its location & approach, latitude and longitude with elevation, the locations in reserve forest, district, orientation, dimensions, subject matter of art, cultural context found in and around the shelter.

After the discovery of rock art from the rock shelter of Vikramkhol by K.P. Jayaswal in 1993, scholars started working on it and reported 106 rock art sites in the state. The rock art sites are found in the district of Bargah (4 Nos.),
Cuttack (3 Nos.), Jharsuguda (2 Nos.), Kalahandi (1 No.) Keonjhar (6 Nos.), Khurdha (1 No.), Mayurbhanj (5 Nos.), Nuapada (1 No.), Sambalpur (42 Nos.), Sundargarh (38 Nos.) and Suvarnapur (3 Nos.). This shows that the two western most districts of Sundargarh (35.84%) and Sambalpur (39.62%) account for highest concentration of rock art sites in the state. Among the 106 shelters 39 (36.80%) have paintings, 49 (46.22%) have engravings and 18 (16.98%) have both paintings and engravings. Similarly out of 6778 rock pictures, 2425 (35.78%) are paintings and 4353 (64.22%) are engravings, which is a unique feature in the rock art map of India. The subject matter of Orissan rock art includes a host of animal forms in the midst of wide range of motifs, both geometric and non-geometric. No-figurative abstract patterns and motifs like triangles, rhomboids, honeycombs and a series of motifs resembling more or less nets, carpets, saws, denticulate, blades, harpoons, etc repeatedly recur both in painting and engraving. Some of them often vary from simplest dots and lines to more elaborate and complex squares or rectangular or oval shapes, filled with a series of parallel vertical or horizontal or wavy criss-cross lines. These intricate pattern and motifs predominates all other representations. A great variety of animals are also found depicted in these rock panels. They include deer, antler, boar, tiger, snake, lizards, frog, fish and tortoise etc. Most of them have a naturalistic rendering.

Bisected triangle or triangle with a dot at the centre resembling vulvas (female genital) remains the hallmark of all representations both in painting and engraving. Its repeated occurrence in different contexts of the rock panel gives an impression as if there was a deliberate attempt for symbolic representation of the Venus, the primordial mother responsible for all creations.

The survey also brings to limelight another unique feature of Orissan rock art i.e. the pigmented engraving which has been termed as pictoglyph. Most of the engravings are pigmented either with red or blue. Another unique feature of the Orissan rock art is the execution of both paintings and engravings in the same shelter, both being complementary to each other. One is amazed to see the clarity or conception, as well as composition and the maturity of the artist in painting and engraving on the rough and tough rock canvas. Any
geometrist of today would envy at the precision in which the lines have been drawn.

In Orissa the rock system is represented by the sedimentary of fossiliferous, purple, ferrugineous sandstone, sandstone, shells and grits. The rocks are soft, medium grained sandstones and red shale of cuddapah group, which weathers easily. Sandstone hill topped by extensive plateaus with thick vegetation are dissected by several seasonal and perennial streams and naals. The art are found in three types of stone. In sandstone there are 86 (81.14%) shelters, in granite 14 (13.20%) shelters and in quartzite 6 (5.66%) shelters.

It is interesting to note that the rock art sites in Orissa are locally known either as Lekhamoda, meaning rock shelter with writing (Lekha = writing & moda = shelter), Ushakuthi meaning worship hall (Usha = worship or Kuthi = hall), Ushakupa meaning ritual cavity (Usha = ritual and Kupa = cavity), Lekhopathar meaning stone that has got writing (Lekha = writing & Pathar = stone). Some times the reserve forests are named after the rock shelters like the reserve forests of Ushakuthi near Rajbahal in Sundargarh and the reserve forest of Vikramkhol in Jharsuguda. The local people do not attach any special significance to these rock art sites. To them the works of art in the shelters are the works of the heavenly bodies or that of the ghosts. They even often consider it a taboo to touch such works of art.

These priceless heritage of hundreds of thousands of years survive in different stages of preservation. They survive under threat of both human and natural vandalism and hence, need effective strategies for preservation, protection and popularisation.

Chapter III, on "A Survey of Tribal Art" deals with the survey and documentation of primitive tribes such as Kondha, Juang, Saura, Bhuyan, Gond and Santal in their respective demographic profile, language, habitat, settlement pattern, means of subsistence, social structure, dress and ornaments, religion and rituals, beliefs, tradition and legends, life-cycle, rituals, dormitory house and art and craft.
The state is the home to 62 tribal communities. Locally known as *adivasis* implying original inhabitants, they constitute 22.13 % of the total population of the state (2001 Census). Cut off from the mainstream of civilisation many of these tribes live in total isolation and primitivism, subsisting primarily on hunting, gathering and limited farming. Of the 62 tribes of Orissa, tribes like Saura, Juang, Gond, Kondha, Bhuyan and Santal are known for their traditional art and craft.

Art has always been used in the service of religion. In tribal society art and artefacts are not separately viewed nor is art divorced from function or ritual. All tribal art is generally supposed to be related to their myths, their rituals, festivals and magico-religious practices.

The familiar art in any tribal society is that of wall paintings, wood carvings, floor design and tattooing of body. The custom of making designs in walls and floors for some religious purpose is widespread in Orissa. The wall paintings of Saura (*Idital*), Juang, Kondha (*Tikangkuda&Manjigunda*), Bhuyan (*Jhanjra*), Santal (*Chiesta*) and Gond are famous in all respects. The common pigments used are red, yellow, black and white earthen colours, and soot and vegetable colours, which they dilute in water. The factors limiting the tribal artists would be the art of motifs or symbols of his culture. He would be unlikely to invent an entirely new motif, but would use those with which he was familiar.

All paintings are not religious; there are also some instances of secular paintings. Geometrical pattern is the simplest and symbolic way of the embodiment of forms in tribal paintings. It provides force and boldness in the depiction and is quite meaningful. Religious paintings are made with a purpose rather than for display. They are for the eyes of the spirits and not of the man.

Tribals crafts are magnificent examples of art. Their crafts primarily cater to very specialized tribal needs, sociological aesthetic and personal use. In such art works wood carving, terracottas and metal works are important. Each tribal group seems to emphasise some particular forms of creative expression among their many talents. The Juang carving on the pillars of *majang*, and comb; Kondha carvings on doors and *Merika* pillars; Saura carving and engraving of...
the village shrine and on household objects and artefacts, Gond carving on doors and Santal carving on boys' dormitory are famous for their style of execution and subject matters. In most of the wood carvings few subjects and motifs such as decorative geometrical patterns, animals, birds, human forms and trees are often found.

Turning to the floor designs, tribal also have been the product of religious observances. These auspicious pictographic forms of artistic idiom have always been the prerogative of tribal women. They constitute certain sacred and mystical visual symbols that take the place of verbal descriptions, expressing in concise form, the religious beliefs approach to life, and the artistic sense of the people. So they have always been living traditions. Some beautiful designed geometric patterns with recondite mysticism and symbolic meaning have been created.

Tattoo, which is very common in most of the tribes of Orissa, is the main traditional decorative art. There are so many interpretations and beliefs regarding tattooing by the tribals. Some believe that it is the only decoration of the body which remains throughout the life. The female tattoo their face, chest, hands and legs. Usual motifs of some human forms and variety of floral motifs and some geometric designs are also executed. They believe that such decoration of the body keeps it immune from external dangers. Tattoo is associated with puberty among the Bhuyans and Binjhals. On attaining puberty, a Bhuyan girl is tattooed in the ankle portion of her legs. Such tattoo in women is considered auspicious and held in high esteem. The sorcerers are found to tattoo figure of their favourite deities on the body with a view to strengthen their power of sorcery. In case of female children a ceremonial tattooing is done by Gonds, which is believed as the passport to the heaven after death. The Santal women wear tattoo marks on their palms, arms and breasts for the fear of being tormented by insects in the next world after death, where as Juangs tattoo their body for personal decoration or to promote the beauty of their body. Almost all the women have three vertical lines tattooed on their foreheads just above the nose. So art is more realistic or naturalistic among tribals. They can even artistically express the state of mind; such insights make one alert to identify
direct appeal of work of art and the associated elements that give a specific tone to the aesthetic effects on the other.

Chapter IV “A Survey of Folk Art” deals with the documentations of folk arts of Orissa with a special reference to jhooti, tattoo and Ushakuthi paintings.

The daily life of rural Orissa is steeped in the “Jhooti” (alpana). Jhooti are depicted on the ground, floor, on the lower portion of the wall during the marriages, festivals and other similar occasions.

There is growing evidence of the ancientness of the heritage of folk painting on walls and floors. The illustrated palm leaf manuscripts found in abundance in Orissa are other forms of art in Orissa. Writing on palm-leaves, etching and illustrating on palm-leaf with iron stylus were indeed an art. Often these etching were also painted in colours. These included birds, animals, floral designs, gods and goddesses, lovers and beloved, houses, creepers etc.

In Orissa, there is a saying that there are twelve religious occasions or bratas and thirteen festivals or parvas round the year. For each of the occasions, the walls, the doors, the floors are washed and variously painted. The month of Margasira which is early winter in the time for harvesting paddy, people of Orissa go for the jhooti. During this period elegant looking foot prints of goddess Laxmi, the deity of wealth are painted on the floor. At the time of Dushehra palm motifs are drawn on one of the inner wall of the house to warship goddess Mangala, another form of Durga. For both the paintings the pigment is pulverised white rice diluted in water. Folk paintings are intimately related with the living pattern of rural people in the villages. It is highly symbolical, mystical and pregnant with deeper meaning of life.

Chapter V on “Ethnographic Parallels” deals with the comparative assessment between the rock arts of and tribal arts of Saura, Juang, Gond, Kondha, Gond, Bhuyan and Santal found in hilly and upland Orissa and folk art found all over the state. The most controversial aspect of rock art is its interpretation. Any interpretation is highly speculative, no single explanation can be offered of their motivation. Since there is no any universal key to decoding this art, they have to be studied in terms of art, archaeology and ethnography.
Among preliterate tribal communities, the oral tradition including myths and legends is the major source for reconstruction of ethno-history. In order to understand the culture continuum, the comparison between rock art and ethnographic account of relevant tribal societies from the same region is necessary. In addition to the study of tribal art, different aspect of material culture could be a useful source to trace the ethnic background of rock art. In both sectors it is observed that the initial drawings of anthropomorphs and zoomorphic figures constitute arrangements of triangles to form the required figure.

The comparative study helps in drawing analogies and common element between to art traditions not withstanding the difference of time and space between the two. Such an endeavour attempts at explaining and interpreting some important motifs in rock art that repeatedly recur in primeval rock art.

Chapter VI concludes the aforesaid discussions.