UNIT 3 HUNTING GATHERING SOCIETIES*

Structure

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, you will learn about:

- prehistoric lifeways, settlement patterns and tools;
- the kind of archaeological and art evidence available to us for reconstructing the culture of Palaeolithic people;
- Upper Palaeolithic art and Mesolithic art; and
- regional variations of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic cultures of India.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Man, by his tool making ability, emerges from an animal background and assumes higher status than any other animal. He makes tools on stone, wood, bone and antler and obtains his food by hunting. This capacity of tool making is the harbinger of culture. He learns to build shelters, to use fire, to clothe himself, and to transmit ideas through signs or symbols and presumably even by speech, though not in writing. This period of man's history belongs to the realm of **prehistory**. And the evidences for reconstructing the lifeways of prehistoric man are the tools, which are, predominantly, the stone tools that survived the ravages of time. The long period of human development, before the advent of agriculture and use of metal is the epoch of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic cultures. Both are hunting-gathering cultures. These cultures are distinguished by their respective tool types which are called industries.

* This Unit has been adopted from MAN-002, Block 5 and 6

In this Unit, we will be studying the sites, settlement patterns, art evidence, tools and implements, subsistence patterns of the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic people of the Indian subcontinent

3.2 PALAEOLITHIC LIFEWAYS AND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

The Palaeolithic cultures flourished in the geological era called the Pleistocene. The Pleistocene era climatically is characterized by glacial (extreme cold conditions and extensive ice caps) and interglacial (warm period) conditions in the temperate zones and pluvial (heavy rainy or wet period) and inter-pluvial (dry period) conditions in the tropical belt. Early human populations (i.e. Palaeolithic) lived in major parts of the temperate zones (Europe) and tropical zone (Africa and Asia), successfully adapting to these climatic events and environments.

In the Palaeolithic period, evidence indicates that the people lived close to water bodies, sources of food and stone. These were small hunting-gathering communities who exploited the rich flora or fauna for subsistence needs. The stone tools were important elements in their daily life. They were used for chopping, cutting, boring, scraping, cutting, slicing, piercing and whittling. Some of these activities were related to craft work and others to subsistence. Microwear analysis conducted on the tools indicates different types of activities with which the tools were associated. For example, wear and tear traces on the tool edges have been examined under the microscope and the scientists can clearly identify their use on vegetal matter, non-vegetal matter or on wood or bamboo. Some tools showed wear marks that indicated that they were hafted onto handles.

The Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers occupied different environmental niches in the Indian subcontinent and adapted to it. Palaeolithic people lived in rock shelters as at Bhimbhetka in Madhya Pradesh, caves at Sanghao (north-west Pakistan) or in caves such as in Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh. They also camped in the open, in shelters made of branches, grass, leaves or reeds. Evidence for the latter is not much since shelters made out of foliage have not survived. However, evidence in the form of stone tools point to the signs of settlement. A team led by V. D. Mishra and J. N. Pal found 17 Acheulian sites on the slopes of the hillocks and rocky outcrops marking the fringe of the Kaimur range and overlooking the Belan river. In this area, quartzite was easily available and workshop sites were identified. Locally available rocks were used for tool making. The locations were suitable for the hominin groups to observe the movement of game.

Many sites were located near water sources. Professor K. Paddayya's research since the 1970s in the Hunsgi and Baichbal valley in north Karnataka has brought to light over 400 Stone Age sites. The Acheulian site excavated at Hunsgi is an open-air site. An oval-shaped open space flanked by granite boulders was selected by man for his activities. Professor Paddayya concluded that while the boulders would already serve as a windbreak and render the task of making artificial shelters much easier, the location of this spot along a water course must have ensured a perennial supply of water. The springs in the bed of Devapur stream must have been active in earlier times also. The drainage pattern of the valley was not yet fully organized and the Hunsgi stream itself comprised several shallow, braided channels flowing at a much higher level. The valley, as also the plateaus, must

have been covered with a thicker cover of thorn, scrub forest kind of vegetation; such vegetation would allow a free movement of people in their hunting and gathering expeditions. There is, as yet, no direct evidence for knowing the natural food resources available in the area at the time of the Acheulian occupation. Data from later periods suggests that the area possessed game animals as well as wild vegetable foods fit for human consumption. Moreover, the valley contains a plentiful supply of raw material in the form of limestone breccia and gravel accumulations. We can, therefore, confidently conclude that the valley formed a very favourable settlement location for the Acheulian bands.

Types of Sites: Ordinarily, sites represent a palimpsest of activities. At **habitation sites**, people lived, cooked, and spent time in leisure activities like painting and engraving. For example, sites like Bhimbhetka and Hunsgi were occupied for a longer period of time as compared to **temporary camp sites**. The latter category represents a site which was occupied for a short duration in a year, after which people moved on. Specific activity sites are also present, for example **butchery sites** – the predominant activity being skinning of animals and butchering for meat. Similarly, **factory sites** are those where people in the past flint- knapped and made tools.

The organization of early societies would have been in the form of bands of people. These were small communities of less than 100 people, moving from one place to another in search for game and plant foods. The frequent roaming would have restricted the size of the group as children would have been an impediment to movement. Thus, population sizes would have been by necessity small.

It is generally thought that hunter-gatherer groups lived a hand-to-mouth existence without much time for leisure activities. This is a misnomer. The Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers probably did not store food beyond a point as they lacked suitable technology, and their material desires and wants were limited. It naturally follows that once they had obtained sufficient amount of food, their subsistence-related activities would cease and they would have ample time to sleep, play, chat, draw and relax.

Prudent use of natural resources enabled hunting-gathering to become an efficient mode of subsistence. This is the reason why, even in some modern communities, hunting-gathering has continued to be the dominant mode, albeit at a reduced scale. Ethnographic studies conducted on modern hunter-gatherers have shown how gathering part of the activity contributes more to the dietary needs of such people. It is usually the women who assume the gathering role and men hunt. If this was so in the Palaeolithic times too, then women must have played an important role by contributing in a major way to the subsistence base of the Palaeolithic people.

3.2.1 Hunting and Foraging

The entire Palaeolithic stage was characterized by a simple economic organization consisting of hunting of wild animals and gathering of wild plant foods. Based upon the widely accepted premise that the various ecological or geographical zones of India supported rich animal life and vegetation in the Pleistocene periods, we can safely infer that a wide spectrum of animal and plant foods was available for exploitation by the Stone Age groups. The archaeological record does give us some interesting clues in this regard.

Since the middle of the last century, large collections of fossil fauna of mammals have been obtained along with stone tools from the Narmada, Godavari, Krishna and other rivers. These findings gave rise to interpretations that early Humans were exploiting wild cattle, deer and other mammals for food purposes. This interpretation is now supported by the recovery of bone and dental remains of wild cattle and deer species, wild horse and tusk pieces of wild elephant from primary Acheulian sites at Isampur, Teggihalli, Hebbal Buzurg and Fatehpur in the Hunsgi and Baichbal valleys, Chirki-Nevasa in Maharashtra, Attirampakkam in Tamil Nadu and other sites. Cut marks found on these bones indicate that these pieces formed part of food processing and consumption. These skeletal remains either belonged to hunted prey or else were partly scavenged from kill-sites of carnivorous animals. Further, the occurrence of turtle shell pieces at sites like Isampur suggests that the Stone Age groups also exploited a variety of small fauna comprising insects, birds, fish, rodents, amphibians by adopting simple collection strategies.

Now there is a world-wide realization that plant foods also played an important role in the diet of Stone Age groups. D. D. Kosambi had pointed out in 1965 that Stone Age communities of tropical zones like India would have extensively made use of wild plant foods like fruits, berries, seeds and roots. Prehistorians have now realized the importance of looking for plant remains from Stone Age sites. M. D. Kajale recovered remains of wild bread fruit and two species of banana from the Mesolithic levels (*c*. 10000 to 8000 BCE) of the cave site of Beli-lena Kitulgala in Sri Lanka. Besides, ethno-archaeological studies conducted on tribal groups and other under-privileged sections of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh indicate that a wide variety of leafy greens, tubers, root crops, fruits and berries, seeds and gum were routinely exploited by them.

3.2.2 Non-Utilitarian Behaviour

Archaeological record has also preserved some strands of evidence regarding non-utilitarian aspects of the behaviour of the Lower Palaeolithic groups such as cognitive and artistic abilities and personal ornamentation. It has been pointed out that the preparation of hand-axes and cleavers reflects the employment of developed cognitive principles of reversibility and whole-part relations. Developed cognitive abilities are also reflected in many aspects of land use. These include the selection of valley-like topographic settings as habitats for occupation, recognition of seasonal availability of water sources and food resources, and identification of certain rocky-outcrops as suitable spots for workshop-cum-camp sites.

Some of the hand-axes in the Acheulian assemblages, particularly the thin, fine specimens belonging to the pointed, ovate and cordate forms, are very symmetric in shape and aesthetically pleasing. So, the possibility cannot be ruled out that these specimens were valued as such by their makers. The cupules (small cup-like depressions) and simple engravings found on rock slabs from Bhimbetka, Daraki-Chatan and other caves in Central India have been interpreted by archaeologists as artistic creations of the Acheulian groups.

There is some evidence of body decoration too. A few red ochre-like pieces were found at the Acheulian sites of Hunsgi and Baichbal valleys. These were probably procured from the vicinity and used for body smearing.

Case Study- Hunsgi

Four Acheulian localities were excavated by K. Paddayya in the Hunsgi and Baichbal valleys of North Karnataka. Locality V and VI at **Hunsgi** in the Hunsgi valley preserved 20-30 cms. thick *in situ* cultural levels on weathered bedrock (granite); these were covered by silt deposit measuring up to 50 cm in thickness. Rocky eminences or ridges above the beds of local streams were selected for camping and the open spaces found on these ridges were used for erection of temporary shelters consisting of a framework of wooden posts and branches covered with grasses. The main trench (63m square) at Hunsgi Locality VI yielded an assemblage of 291 artefacts of limestone.

The two major clusters of sites – one near Hunsgi valley and the second one near Yediyapur in the Baichbal valley – consisted of 15 to 20 localities spread over a stretch of two or three km. and both clusters were associated with perennial water sources resulting from seep springs. The remaining sites were found in a scattered way all over the basin floor. Considering this differential distribution in conjunction with seasonal availability of water sources as well as wild plant and animal foods, Paddayya inferred that the Acheulian settlement system in this area hinged upon two main seasonal resource management strategies. These are: (1) dry season aggregation of all Acheulian groups near perennial water pools (fed by seep springs) in the two basins and probable reliance on large game hunting, and (2) wet season dispersal of the population in the form of small bands across the basin floor; dependence on shallow rainwater pools, and exploitation of a variety of seasonally abundant plant foods consisting of leafy greens, fruits, berries and seeds and small fauna. It was further inferred that for short-term and day-to-day purposes the Acheulian population organized itself into eight or nine groups or home ranges and occupied different parts of the basin.

Source: Paddayya et. al., 1999-2000

3.2.3 Palaeolithic Rock Art and Cults

Prehistoric art as it is known today, was executed either on stones or bones. At times, mud, charcoal, shell, teeth and horn have also been used. Art work executed on such movable materials is designated as "home art" or "*Art Mobilier*". Art executed on walls and ceilings of caves and rock shelters is called "cave art" or "*Art Parietal*".

Besides engraving and painting, there were also numerous examples of modelling done with simple mud or bone ash mixed with it. These latter examples throw significant light on the additional ability of the prehistoric artist. It is important to appreciate that the skill required to represent an object by modelling is not of the same kind required to either paint or engrave.

Indian Palaeolithic has examples of portable art in the form of ostrich egg shell beads and engraved fragments. The well-known sites are Bhimbetka III A-28, Ramnagar (Chambal valley) and Khaparkheda (Narmada valley) in Madhya Pradesh; Chandresal and Kota (Chambal valley) in Rajasthan; and Patne in Maharashtra. A few of the egg shell pieces have been dated. Patne – 25,000 B.P.; Chandresal (Rajasthan) gave two dates – 38,900 and 36,500 B.P.; Ramnagar (Madhya Pradesh) – 31,000 years B.P. Fragment found at Patne has patterns on

them as it is engraved with criss-cross designs made long ago by humans. Ostrich eggshell was also used to make beads and ornaments. Some of them had a hole through which they could be strung. Forty-one Indian sites have given evidence of such beads in the Pleistocene context ranging from 39000 to 25000 B. P. Ostrich eggshell beads occur in the Upper Palaeolithic context at Bhimbetka and Patne. The Patne beads have a diameter of 10 mm. and the Bhimbetka ones of 5 mm. Upinder Singh has made observations regarding the discovery of ostrich eggshell beads in an Upper Palaeolithic burial context at Bhimbetka rock shelter, found on the neck of the skull of a buried man. He must have been wearing a necklace with different kinds of beads; the others had decayed, but the two ostrich eggshell beads have survived.

Petroglyphs: When some substance of a rock surface is removed through engraving, bruising, hammering, chiselling or scooping.

Source: Upinder Singh, 2008

Examples of mural art are best known from the caves and rock shelters of Bhimbetka. The rock paintings here, assigned to Period I, are ascribed to the

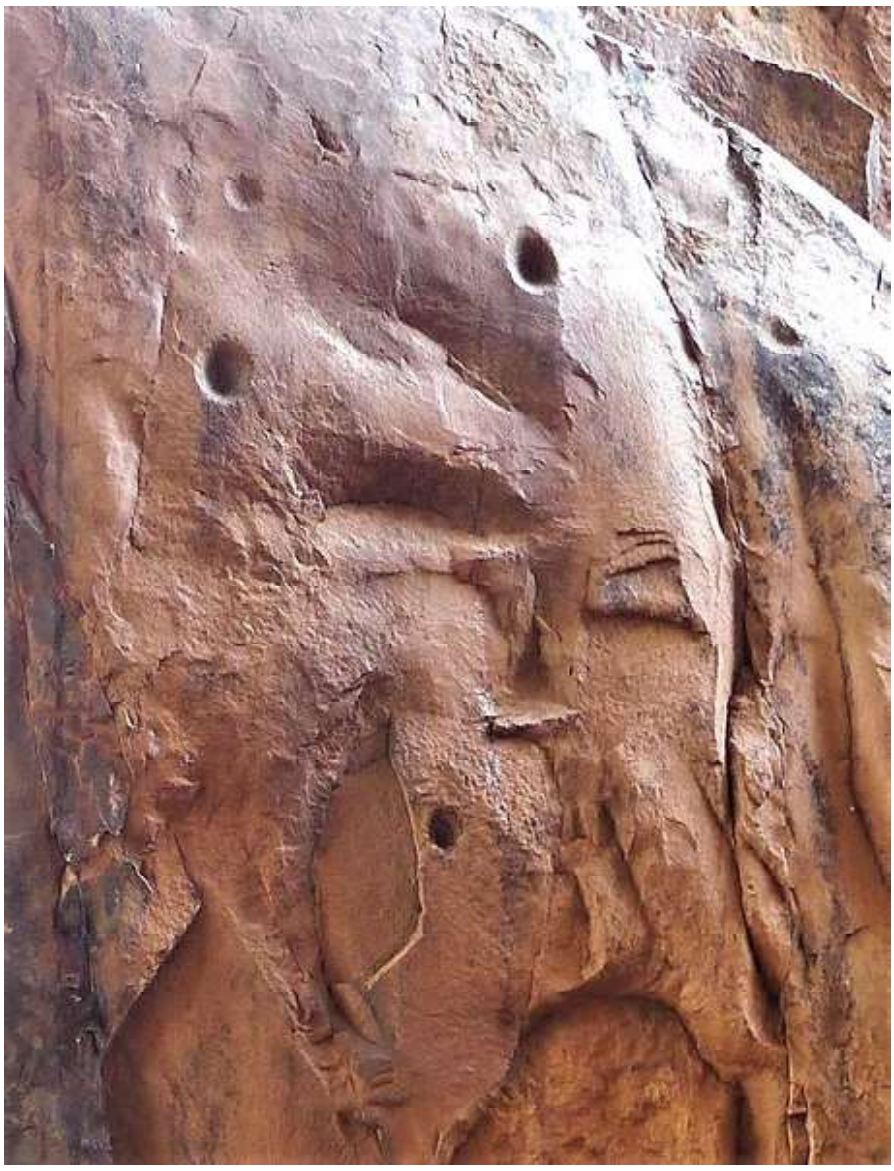

Fig.3.1: Auditorium Cave, Cupules. Bhimbetka. Credit: Dinesh Valke.

Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bhimbetka_-_Auditorium_Cave_-_The_cupules_1.jpg).

Upper Palaeolithic. These include linear representations in green and dark red colours of herds of huge animals like the rhinoceroses, bison, wild buffaloes, mammoths and boars. There are also stick like human figures.

Regarding Palaeolithic art, it is difficult to ascertain whether it had a utilitarian function or was cultic in nature. Upinder Singh discusses some objects which may have had ritual function. There was a damaged Upper Palaeolithic carved bone object found at Lohanda Nala in the Belan valley in Uttar Pradesh which had been identified as a mother goddess figurine by some and as a harpoon by others. Animal teeth have been found in one of the Kurnool caves which had grooves which suggests that they may have been attached to a string and worn as ornaments. A chalcedony disc from Bhimbetka and a soft sandstone disc from Maihar (south-west of Prayagraj) belong to Acheulian contexts and seem to have had some cultic significance. Cave III-F 23 at Bhimbetka has given evidence of what has been called an 'Auditorium Cave' (Figure 3.1) (Upinder Singh, 2008). Belonging to a period between the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic, it has a tunnel of about 25 m. long which leads into a hall having three entrances. There is a large rock in the middle of the cave. The flat and vertical surface of the rock that faces the tunnel has seven cupules (cup like depressions) up to 16.8 mm deep. At some distance away from this rock, at the bottom of a pit is another rock which has one large cup mark along with a meandering line carved on its surface. Scholars believe that the rock with multiple cupules functioned as a gong and cupules were the marks made on it when hit repeatedly. Probably, the whole paraphernalia had some ritual connotations.

The site of Baghor I in Madhya Pradesh has given evidence of an Upper Palaeolithic 'shrine' dated to 9000-8000 BCE. A circular platform has been found here. It is made of sandstone rubble, about 85 cms. in diameter which has a piece of natural stone kept on it and has a pattern of concentric triangular laminations in colours ranging from a light yellowish red to a dark reddish brown. Nine other fragments of this stone were found near the platform. When the ten pieces were joined together, it formed a triangle 15 cms. high, 6.5 cms. wide and 6.5 cms. thick. This triangular stone was evidently placed atop the platform. Ethnographic studies of Kol and Baiga tribes of this part of Kaimur hills show that they make such a platform even today and worship similar triangular stones as a symbol of the Female Principle.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) What was the main subsistence activity of the Palaeolithic people?

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2) Write a note on Palaeolithic art.

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3.3 MESOLITHIC

Mesolithic is a cultural stage belonging to human beings who were completely modern in their biological characteristics and are known as *Homosapien sapiens*. There is development in tool technology as microliths were extensively made and used. These were composite tools and were meant to be hafted or glued to form a serrated edge. Indian Mesolithic is also known for its world-famous rock art. The Mesolithic economy, like the Palaeolithic, was dependent on hunting and foraging, but some sites have given evidence of domestication of animals. During the Mesolithic period, population increased, and people spread to occupy new ecological niches. Evidence of house floors, human burials, ring stones, pottery made their appearance. Interaction and movement among communities is also suggested.

Rock Art: Rock art or Palaeo-art of our ancestors is the earliest signatures drawn on rock surfaces either on the open cliffs or inside the rock shelters and caves where they lived. It can be seen in the form of rock paintings (petrographs) and/ or in the form of engravings, cupules (petroglyphs). They provide a unique opportunity to understand the origins of human mind and serve as source for studying the material culture of the society in its ecological setting.

It is not yet clear whether *Homo erectus*, the species which preceded ours, had developed art during the Lower Palaeolithic times, though he had made beautiful well-refined stone implements seen in the Narmada valley collections which ought to be more than utilitarian in nature and definitely of great aesthetic value. It is widely observed and understood that with the emergence of modern human species, *Homo sapiens*, during the Upper Palaeolithic time over 1,50,000 years ago, fast brain or neurobiological evolution of man occurred and the higher faculty of abstraction of ideas and their expressions was achieved by our species. This faculty heralded fast development in the next Stone Age known as the Mesolithic which witnessed behavioural, social and cultural modernity manifested in the creativity of visual representations, various kinds of art and artistic skills- the Mesolithic art.

3.3.1 Rock Art Sites

Rock art is widely distributed in Northern, Western, Eastern and Southern part of India right from Laddakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Himachal Pradesh to Tamil Nadu and Kerala. But, most of the rock art sites are in Central India, notably in the Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha. This is primarily due to its unique geo-environmental setting which favoured the evolution of early human culture in the Central Indian plateau. The mountainous region of the Vindhyan and Satpura ranges which confine the Central Narmada valley where Stone Age humans flourished, have the largest number of rock art sites. The Vindhyan and Satpura ranges are fractured and elevated in such a way that it produced natural shelters and caves (Figure 3.2) of the Block Mountains.

These shelters could easily be occupied by early hunter-gatherers and pastoralists whose descendants, such as Gond, Muria, Korku, Bhilala etc. tribal communities still thrive on incipient or marginal farming and continue with their traditional lifestyles. Bhimbetka rock shelters in the Vindhyan range and the Adamgarh and Pachmarhi in the Satpura are among the most important rock art sites in India,

beside the Daraki Chattan in Chattisgarh and numerous others in the Hazaribagh, Giridih and Kodarmada, Chatra region of Jharkhand, several of which have become fairly known in recent years through the efforts of Dr. (Colonel) A. K. Prasad. The rock art of Bhimbetka, Pachmarhi and Adamgarh have greater antiquity from the Upper Palaeolithic through the Mesolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic and early Historic periods.

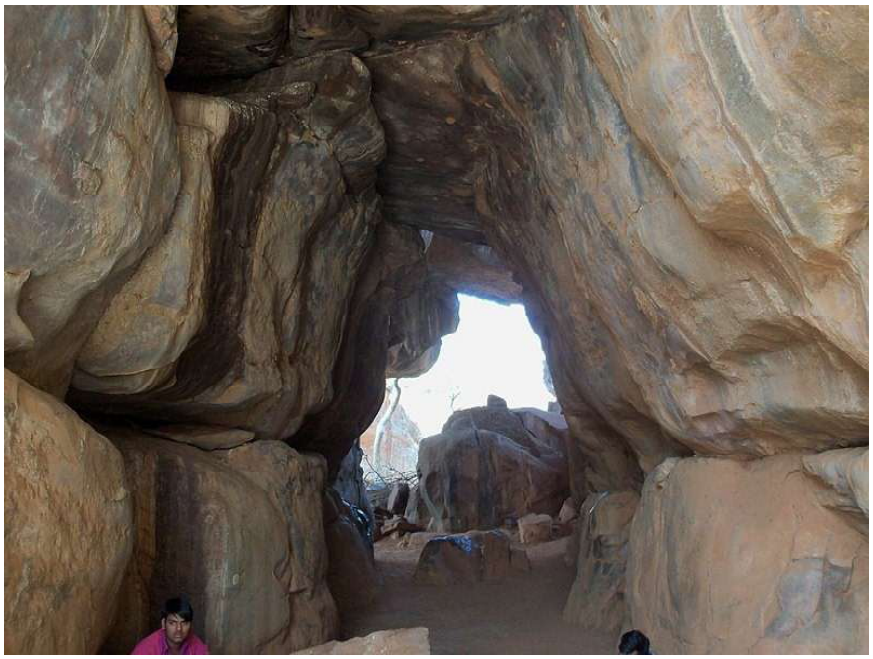

Fig. 3.2: Pre-Historic Rock Shelter. ASI Monument no. N-Mp-225. Credit: Nupur.

Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category: Rock_shelters_of_Bhimbetka#/media/File:Bhimbetka_caves.jpg).

3.3.2 Case Study – Bhimbetka

Bhimbetka rock art site is in the Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh, located at 22° 56' N, 77° 36'E, 45 kms. south of Bhopal or 30 kms. north-west of Hoshangabad. Bhimbetka is a name of a large hill, located near the tribal village of Bhiyanpur. The hill is a part of the deciduous woodland-covered Vindhyan hills of Central India. The hill, with an area of one square kilometre, is topped by disjointed monolithic rocks, which contain at their bases and sides a complex of nearly 800 prehistoric rock shelters and caves. While almost all the shelters contain paintings of prehistoric to medieval periods, a few of them also contain evidence of past human occupation in the form of stone tools, pottery, copper and iron tools, beads of stone, steatite, faience and terracotta and other objects, animal remains and human burials. The site looks like a huge fortified segmented ridge from a short distance. About half of the painted rock-shelters of Bhimbetka are accessible but the rest are in dense forested area infested with wildlife.

Why the name Bhimbetka?

The gigantic rocks of Bhimbetka owe its name to Bhima, literally the seat of Bhima (Bhimbethak), the mighty character of *Mahabharata*, who along with the other Pandavas is said to have stayed in these caves.

Bhimbetka first finds mention in Indian Archaeological Records (1888) as a Buddhist site. However, its painted rock shelters were first discovered in 1957-58 by an archaeologist Dr. Vishnu Wakankar of Ujjain.

The hills at Bhimbetka are of sandstone and quartzite. Bhimbetka and its surroundings receive annual rainfall of about 1000 mm. Because of this the hills are covered with dense vegetation. Besides the presence of perennial springs nearby, there are other water bodies which were used in the past. The locality hosts a rich variety of plants even today. At least thirty species of plant types are found that form a rich source of edible tubers, fruits and roots. Animals like deer, boar, *nilgai*, leopard, wolf, hare and fox are commonly found animals today. Abundant fish is available in the streams. In prehistoric period, though the conditions would have differed slightly, there is a strong possibility for the presence of a richer variety of flora and fauna. The hills have an inexhaustible supply of fine-grained quartzite for making tools. A few kilometres south of Bhimbetka there are exposures of Deccan Lavas which contain veins of quartz and siliceous minerals which were used by the Mesolithic people to make tools and weapons. This is the reason why this locality was so attractive to hunter-gatherers in the past. Resources for shelter, food, water and raw materials were easily available. Most of the tools at the site were made of yellowish quartzite. However, some tools were made of grey quartzite not available locally, probably sourced from afar.

Five floors paved with flat stone slabs belonging to the Lower Palaeolithic were identified (Upinder Singh, 2008, p.71). Due to the presence of acidic soils, no bone remains have survived. In 1970s Jerome Jacobson identified as many as 90 Late Acheulian sites in a small valley enclosed by sandstone hills in the Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh. These probably represented winter-season occupation and the hunting groups moved to caves and rock-shelters of the adjacent Bhimbetka hills in the rainy season.

3.3.3 Excavations

V. S. Wakankar excavated seven shelters and V. N. Misra excavated three. In one shelter, IIIF-24 or Auditorium Cave, Wakankar found evidence of early Acheulian culture and pre-Acheulian chopper-chopping tools. In another shelter, IIIA-28, he found a boundary wall made of large boulders to enclose the Acheulian habitation area. In several other shelters, he came across evidence of Middle Palaeolithic, Upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Early Historic and Medieval period occupations. In some shelters he found human bones which he believed were fossilized.

V. N. Misra excavated three shelters: IIIF-15, IIIF-23, and IIB-33. Of these IIIF-23 is mostly Mesolithic. The Mesolithic habitation was partitioned into two by a wall of stone slabs and boulders. While pre-Mesolithic industries were all made of quartzite, Mesolithic assemblage was entirely made of crypto-crystalline siliceous material. Bones collected from a secondary burial were placed on the floor of the shelter. Shelter IIIF-23 produced a lot of ash from a fireplace, small pieces of wheel-made pottery, microliths and other stone tools.

Shelter IIB-33 had the thickest habitation deposit of 1.5 m, and it belonged exclusively to the Mesolithic. The deposit yielded a highly developed geometric microlithic industry, many grinding stones, a few ground bone and antler pieces, and some pieces of ground red ochre. All these were associated with several primary burials found one above the other. The deposit also produced plenty of charcoal which was used for dating by PRL and BSIP laboratories. A number of dates ranging from 2000 to 8000 BP were obtained from this charcoal.

All the shelters yielded evidence of contact between the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers and settled farmers. This evidence consists of copper tools, painted pottery, stone, steatite, faience, terracotta, agate and carnelian beads, and bangles of shell, porcelain and glass.

3.3.4 Rock Paintings

Out of 642 rock shelters in Bhimbetka, 400 have paintings, engravings and bruisings. They exhibit the earliest pictorial traces of human life in the Indian subcontinent. Bhimbetka rock shelters were also inhabited by the Middle to Upper Palaeolithic man as is evident from stone tools. Primitive tribes still inhabit the surroundings. It had been declared as an important World Heritage Site by UNESCO in the year 2003.

According to Yashodhar Mathpal and Somnath Chakravarty, there are about estimated 6214 rock art motifs in Bhimbetka. A few shelters like the Zoo Rock, Wild Boar and Crab, IIIC-9, and Rangmahal are particularly rich in paintings.

The paintings occur on the walls and ceilings and in the niches or hollows of rock walls. They are made in red, white, yellow, green and rarely, black colours (Figure 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7). The paintings at Bhimbetka are dominated by zoomorphs (animal art) and a combination of animals with human figures (anthropomorphs). They depict a large variety of wild animals which comprise oxen, *gaur*, buffalo, antelopes like *nilgai*, blackbuck, deer like *barasingha*, *sambhar*, *chital*, hog deer, barking deer, elephant, rhinoceros, tiger, leopard, hyena, wolf, jackal, fox, porcupine, monkey and rat. They are portrayed as sitting, standing, walking and running individually or in groups. The animals are realistically drawn and are characterized by vitality and dynamism.

A series of hunting scenes of archers are remarkable at Bhimbetka representing inter-group conflicts and probably within-the-group clashes as well. Scenes of hunting show weapons such as spears, sticks, bows and arrows, traps and snares as also fishing and digging of tubers and roots and collection of honey. Small animals were collected in bags or baskets and carried to camps with the bag slung over the shoulder or back. There are also scenes of sanctified animals like the wild boar which is depicted in several shelters.

The paintings of the later period have human figures and designs in geometric patterns as well as ritualistic/religious symbols and conch-shell inscriptions. There are paintings of dance scenes and horse-riding warriors with umbrella-

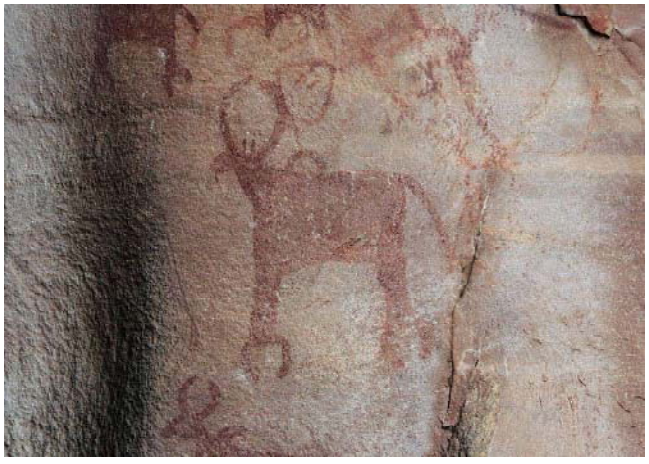

Fig.3.3: Paintings in Rock Shelter 3, Bhimbetka. Credit: Vijay Tiwari.

Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cave_Paintings_Bhembetika_(23)e.jpg).

Fig. 3.4: Paintings in Rock Shelter 9, Bhimbetka. Credit: Bernard Gagnon.

Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rock_ Shelter_ 9,_Bhimbetka_03.jpg).

Fig. 3.5: Horned Boar in Rock Shelter 15. Bhimbetka. Credit: Bernard Gagnon.

Soure: Wikimedia Commons (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhimbetka_rock_shelters#/ media/File:Rock_Shelter_15,_Bhimbetka_02.jpg).

Fig. 3.6: Mesolithic Rock Painting at Bhimbetka. Credit: Yann Forget.

Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://mr.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E0%A4%9A% E0%A4%B F % E0%A4% A4%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4% B0:Rock_painting,_ Bhimbetka,_ Raisen_ district,_MP.jpg).

Fig.3.7: Mesolithic Rock Painting. Bhimbetka. Credit: w:User:LRBurda. Source: Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bhimbetka_rock_paintng1.jpg).

like head gears, scenes of honey collection, fishing, hunting of wild boar etc. There are depiction of musical instruments of horns, pipes, drums and tom-toms. We can also notice palm prints, thumb impressions, hand stencils and finger markings. On the whole, they bear similarities with the subsistence patterns of the surrounding contemporary marginal cultivators and food-gatherers.

The paintings show different overlapping layers in red and white. The paintings in green are considered the earliest, though the use of haematite (red ochre) was also quite common. The earliest layer mostly represents large figures of wild animals either depicted in red ochre or in white/grey colour. The black colour from charcoal or manganese was, most likely, used later.

3.3.5 Why Were Such Paintings Made?

It is easy to assume that these paintings were executed to decorate caves and for pleasure. K. L. Kamat observed that many of them were not planned or organized nicely. The paintings show that not much trouble was taken even to erase the older paintings and drawings. There are several overlaps of layers of sketches on one another. We can separate them by colour and style differences. Most probably, these were created as a means of escape from suffering and as devotion to supernatural entity since red, green and white colours in all hues and varieties were used to decorate the dead. Some paintings appear to have been made with finger, some with brushes or feathers, wood or peacock-feather stems or porcupine needles as per style and texture. With full freedom of expression, the prehistoric people expressed life in a simplified way, drawing the animals and birds in just two or three strokes, and then using symbols. Some are single line sketches whereas some are finished with a fair stroke. Interestingly, the engraved figures in Bhimbetka are almost non-existent unlike Pachmarhi and several other sites in Central India.

Importance of Bhimbetka

Bhimbetka is an archaeological site of exceptional importance in terms of the record of prehistoric technology, economy, biology and art. The complex of more than 800 rock shelters and caves makes it the largest concentration at one site in the world. It has produced one of the richest and most beautiful corpuses of prehistoric art in the world. The paintings can be divided into two chronological stages: prehistoric and historic. The chief subject of the prehistoric paintings is scenes of wild animals, hunting, trapping and fishing. Less common are depictions of daily life, dancing, singing, playing musical instruments, celebrating birth and grieving, sickness and death. The scenes in historic paintings comprise processions of caparisoned elephants and horses and fighting with swords, shields, spears, bows and arrows.

3.3.6 Classification of Bhimbetka Rock Art Complex

In paintings different colours have been used. The colours were made by grinding naturally occurring pigment nodules into a powder form with which plant sap or animal blood were mixed to form a pigment for creating the paintings. The red colour was made out of iron oxide (*geru*), white from limestone and green from green chalcedony. Some paintings are in one colour (monochrome) while others are in more than one colour (polychrome). There is a lot of movement in the scenes. The paintings show a division of labour based on gender. Men are shown hunting and women gathering and preparing food. Yashodar Mathpal and other scholars consider about nine successive developmental phases in Bhimbetka rock art. They are as follows:

Prehistoric

Phase I : Large sized animals (buffaloes, elephants, wild bovids and big cats), outlined and partially in-filled with geometric and maze patterns; no humans.

Phase 2 : Diminutive figures of animals and humans, full of life and naturalistic; hunters mostly in groups; deer dominant; colours red, white and emerald green, humans in dancing, S-shaped bodies.

Phase 3 : Large sized animals with vertical stripes and humans.

Phase 4 : Schematic and simplified figures.

Phase 5 : Decorative. "Large horned animals" drawn "in fine thin lines with body decoration in honey-comb, zigzag and concentric square pattern".

Transitional (Beginning of Agricultural life)

Phase 6 : Quite different from the previous ones; conventional and schematic; body of animals in a rectangle with stiff legs; humps on bovines, sometimes, horns adorned at the tip; chariots and carts with yoked oxen.

Historic

Phase 7 : Riders on horses and elephants; group dancers; thick white and red colour; decline in artistic merit.

Phase 8 : Bands of marching and facing soldiers, their chiefs riding elephants and horses equipped with long spears, swords, bows and arrows;

rectangular shields, a little curved; horses elaborately decorated and caparisoned; white infilling and outlining.

Phase 9 : Geometric human figures, designs; known religious symbols and inscriptions.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

a) Discuss two most well-known rock art sites in India?

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b) Which types of motifs dominate the Bhimbetka rock art? What are the other kinds of motifs?

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3.4 SUMMARY

The Prehistoric societies of hunter-gatherers are studied on the basis of archaeological remains with the help of anthropological theories. The Palaeolithic and Mesolithic Ages represent the hunting-gathering stage of social evolution. Faunal remains give us a considerable idea about the subsistence pattern of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic people. During the Palaeolithic Age people were primarily in the hunting and gathering stage. People seem to have hunted large and middle-sized animals such as elephant, ox, *nilgai*, deer, wild boar and variety of birds. At the same time, they also exploited plant foods like fruits, seeds etc. The hunting-gathering pattern continued during the Mesolithic phase. During the Mesolithic period there seems to have been a shift to hunting of small animals and fishing.

Bhimbetka paintings are a remarkable example of Mesolithic cave art. A variety of animals are depicted such as deer, leopard, panther, tiger, elephant, rhinoceros, antelope, *chital* and squirrel. Different kinds of birds, fish, lizards, frogs, crabs and scorpions and small centipedes are also present. No snakes have been depicted. Rock art is invaluable evidence which tells us about their life and activities. Mesolithic people occupied more varied ecological niches as compared to earlier periods. Some bones of domesticated animals like sheep/goat and cattle have been reported from some Mesolithic sites in India like Bagor in Rajasthan and Adamgarh hill near Hoshangabad. Though this evidence has been questioned, we may assume that beginnings of animal domestication can be traced to this period.

3.5 KEY WORDS

Cupules : Hemispherical, cup-shaped, non-utilitarian, cultural marks that were pounded into rock surface by human hand.

Ethno-archaeology : A branch of archaeology that studies the behaviour and practices of living communities in order to interpret archaeological evidence related to communities who lived in the past.

Fauna : Animals of a given region or period considered as a whole.

Formation Processes : it refers to the events both natural and cultural, that created and affected an archaeological site during and after its occupation.

Game hunting : wild animals, including birds and fishes, such as are hunted for food.

Hominin : any member of the group consisting of all modern and extinct humans and all their immediate ancestors, specifically species more closely related to modern humans than to chimpanzees.

In situ : in its original place.

Microwear study : The study of wear marks or use marks on tools in order to understand their function.

Perennial : lasting or continuing throughout the year, as a stream.

Rectangle : A quadrilateral with right angles between all four sides.

3.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) Hunting and Foraging. See Sub-section 3.2.1

2) For details see Sub-section 3.2.3

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh and Pachmarhi in Satpura. See Sub-section 3.3.1

2) Animal art (zoomorphs). See Sub-section 3.3.4

3.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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