European Journal of Business & Social Sciences
Available at https://ejbss.org/
ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 01
January 2019

Prehistoric rock Art – A Global Distribution

By: Dr. Dilip kr. kushwaha

Deptt. Of A.I.H., Culture and Archaeology.

GKV.HARIDWAR, UTTRAKHAND.

The history about the discovery of Cave Paintings is very interesting. As is generally the case with other discoveries, the detection of Cave Painting was not a result of an expedition, or due to a research project in Art. It was not even initially sighted by any expert in the field. It is stated in many books & articles written on cave paintings or Rock Art, that the finding was accidental, that too by a Girl in the caves of Altamira in Spain.[1]

Over a century and two decades has passed from the time, when in year 1879, the young daughter named Maria of Don Marcellino S. Sautola, rushed out of a cave in which she was playing, calling out loud “Bulls, Bulls”, hence accidently helping out her father and providing him the opportunity of becoming founder of Rock art studies. The news of discovery is known today as the “Sistine Chapel of Prehistory”.[2]

This discovery of art by Sautola was initially treated with disdain and contempt by the archeological community, as they contested that the paintings were done by mans long dated ancestors. The argument provided was that they were painted by soldiers hiding in the caves to protect themselves from harsh weather and defeat in a war. After over twenty years the eminent prehistorian, Emile Cartailhac, changed the perception of the the archeological society through an article “Mea Culpa d’un sceptique” acknowledging the importance of Sautola’s finding and recognizing the intellectual and artistic ability of our forebears[3] and by a similar discovery of painting in the caves of Font de Gaume in year 1895.

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In Europe, new discoveries of Rock art and cave paintings were being made by scholars like L'abbe Breuil, Cartalhae, Perony, Alcalde del Rio, Obermaier and others. These researchers visited caves from France to South Africa, excavated, discovered and made copies through photography, sketches and drawings of the caves and art discovered by them. The most admirable of these scholars Breuil established the first rules for Rock art studies.

Similar discoveries occurred elsewhere in different parts of the world, which altered the supremacy of the European Rock Art in quantitative & Chronological terms. Rock art is found around the world. As of today rock art is reported from more than 70 countries and over 20000 sites are documented around the world[4]. The six principle regions recognized for rock art world wide in terms of their concentration and antiquity are:

1. South Western Europe
2. North Africa
3. South Africa
4. Australia
5. India & Russia
6. North America

Rock art is reported from Spain (Betran 1982), Italy (Anati 1964), Portugal (Bahm 1985), Scandinavia, Sweden & Siberia (Lommel 1966), Western Alps (Seglie 1988), France (Wagneur 1988), Japan (Ogawa (1988), China (ZhaoFo 1988), USSR (Ksica 1988), Turkey, Syria, Jordon, Israel, Saudi Arabia (Anati 1979), Tibet (Hui Sheng 1988), Pakistan (King 1940), Sri Lanka (Bandranayake et. Al. 1986), Thailand (Bullen 1988), New Guinea (New man & Mark 1988), New Zealand (Taylor 1988) & Fiji Land (Brodick 1948).[5]

In the book World Rock Art, directed & edited by Emmanuel Anati, who is well renowned & recognized for his understanding & knowledge of Rock Art it is stated that the world production of Rock Art documented so far numbers over 35 million figures, but it can be safely estimated that the total number of rock art figures still

ISSN: 2235-767X
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preserved should be well over 50 million. This constitutes an extraordinary documentation of man's intellectual adventures, an outstanding world heritage and a unique source for historical reconstruction.

The discoveries made till date place Southern Africa with the greatest concentration of Rock art in the world. The concentration of caves consisting of rock art or prehistoric cave painting have been discovered and excavated in Angola, Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In Northern Africa the major concentrations are located in Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Ethopia, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Somalia and Sudan.

In Asia numerous discoveries have been made of presence of Rock art in the caves in countries like Iran, Israel, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, in Central and Far East Asia the discoveries have been recorded in Afghanistan, China, India, Mongolia, Pakistan and in several areas of Russian Central Asia & Siberia.

Major rock art sites in North America are located both in Canada & USA. In Latin America they are known in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Dominican Republic and Venezuela.

In Europe, the findings have been made in France, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, England and Russia.

In Oceania, by far the major concentrations are known in Australia including Tasmania, others are found in Eastern Island (Chile), Hawaii, New Guinea, New Zealand and the Solomon Islands.

In the world context so many popular and hard worker association has working like: The **International Federation** of **Rock Art Organisation (IFRAO),** which is a federation of national and regional organizations promoting the study of palacolothic art and cognitive archaeology globally.[6] And in America, **American Rock Art**

ISSN: 2235-767X
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Research Association (ARARA), Wakankar Rock Art & Heritage Welfare Society and **Rock Art Society of India (RASI)** has been working.

In Africa which has the greatest variety of rock art, where for the rock art study so many greatest centres has working likes: The **Rock Art Research Centre** at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa, offers degree courses in rock art studies, and Botswana has built an interpretive museum at its popular Tsodilo Hills site, and **Southern African Rock Art Project.** In 1996 there established the **Trust for African Rock Art,** a nonprofit organization whose mission is to survey, document, and monitor sites, be an information resource, create global awareness of the importance and endangered state if Africa's rock art, and promote and support its conservation.

Australia, which is very famous in world context for rock art research, where Australian Rock Art Research Association (AURA) has been doing extremely good work on rock art.

European Rock Art Association pour le Rayonnement de Part paricial European (ARAPE) has been working for long time. In India too there are both governmental and non-governmental efforts are being mere in this direction.[7]

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