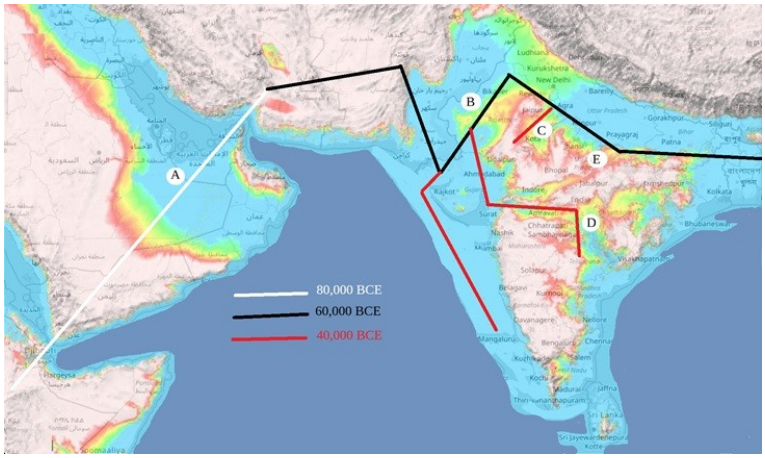
India Cave Art: An Archeological View

by Potluri Rao In Seattle ©2018 (CC BY 4.0)

DNA C and F were the original Homo Sapiens that voluntarily left Somalia in search of perennial rainwater resources. DNA O was a subgroup of the F. The O and C lived in Sunda; the F lived only in Peninsular India. Cave art similar to that of Sunda was discovered in India. Both shared a common style of narrative art form. A painting of a pig in both places looks like a mirror image. The DNA samples derived from the 2011 Census confirmed that the India and Sunda cave art was produced by the same people separated by geography.

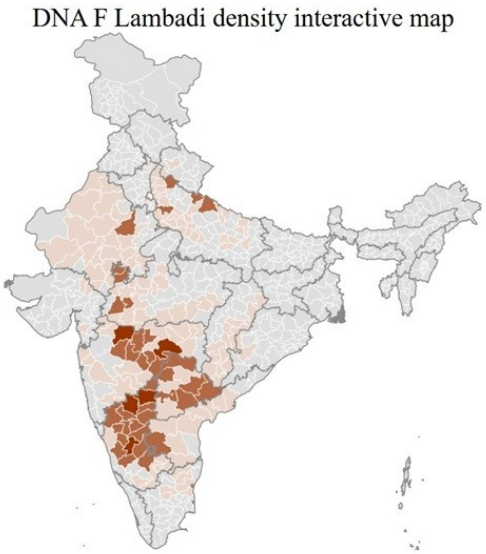
DNA C and F voluntarily moved out of Somalia 100,000 years ago and followed the Indian monsoon winds. The monsoon winds reversed direction every 20,000 years due to the earth's orbit around the Sun, called the Axial tilt. They were lowlanders and lived only along the perennial rainwater rivers of mountain ridges that were perpendicular to the monsoon winds. The ridges were fertile lands on one side and wastelands on the other side depending on the direction of monsoon winds. Every 20,000 years they flipped, and people were forced to relocate from one side to the other to adapt to the climatic change.



The elevation map is generated to depict the geology at the time of migration. The areas in green and yellow colors are lowlands where the C and F lived. The area A is between two mountain ridges and has perpetual rainwater. The areas B and C are on either side of the Aravalli Ridge. The areas D and E are on either side of the Satpura Ridge. The B and E had rainwater 60,000 years ago and 20,000 years ago; now they are wastelands. The C and D had rainwater 40,000 years ago and at present; they were wastelands 20,000 years ago.

The C and F were in the A 80,000 years ago. Some of them moved to the B when it turned to fertile land 60,000 years ago. The C and O moved along the black line to reach Sunda. When the winds reversed direction 40,000 years ago, the B turned into a wasteland. Some of the F moved to the C, some moved to the D, and the rest moved to the now-submerged West Coast.

The F in the D was the Lambadi. The density map is derived from the 2011 Census. It shows clearly the migration path of the F from the B to the D 40,000 years ago when the B turned into a wasteland. The D turned to wasteland 20,000 years ago when the winds reversed direction. The F were forced to move south to the Nilgiri hills. The D was turned to fertile land only 4,000 years ago when the monsoon winds reversed direction. Only Lambadis lived in the D for 40,000 years. The current population of Nagpur, Amaravati, and Wardha are recent immigrants; they are DNA J2b, the F who moved from the B to the C to the E to the D. They also painted caves along their migration path.



The C and O who moved to Sunda 60,000 years ago and the F who moved to the D 40,000 years ago were the same people who lived in the now-submerged Persian Gulf 80,000 years ago.

The C and F were expert painters and evolved a unique style that is reflected in the Indian and Sulawesi cave paintings. The art form must have evolved long before they were separated by the climate. They were a highly advanced logic-based culture that voluntarily moved from Somalia to Sunda 60,000 years ago along the monsoon path.

India pig painting 40,000 BCE

Sulawesi pig painting 60,000 BCE

The following pages are a description of the cave art in the D as presented by the archaeologists who discovered it.

(Presented in Rock art Society of India Conference (RASI) in Badami (Karnataka) on 16-11-2012)

Distinctive Features of the Art of Ambadevi Rock Shelters in Satpura-Tapti Valley

V. T. Ingole

vijayingole@hotmail.com

Abstract:

After the first discovery of rock shelter painting in early 2006, more rock shelters have been discovered and identified by the author and his group and perhaps many are yet to be discovered. This region appears to have been occupied for a very long duration from upper Paleolithic to prehistoric era. The art of early human settlers in this region appears to be very rich. Many of the pictograms of tortoise are found and their attributes on animal painting as well as geometric motifs was found to be striking. Number of animal paintings, though in reasonably good condition, can not be identified as they do not resemble with any living animals in this region or Indian sub-continent. The objective of the paper is to bring forth the richness and distinctive art of early human settlers in this region so that further detailed investigation could be initiated.

Introduction:

The discovery of rock shelter painting in Satpura-Tapti valley was reported by the author and his group [V.T. Ingole et al, RASI 2007]. This region is known as Ambadevi Rock Art region and located on the north-east border of Amravati District (Maharashtra) and south border Betul (Madhya Pradesh) (Figure-1).

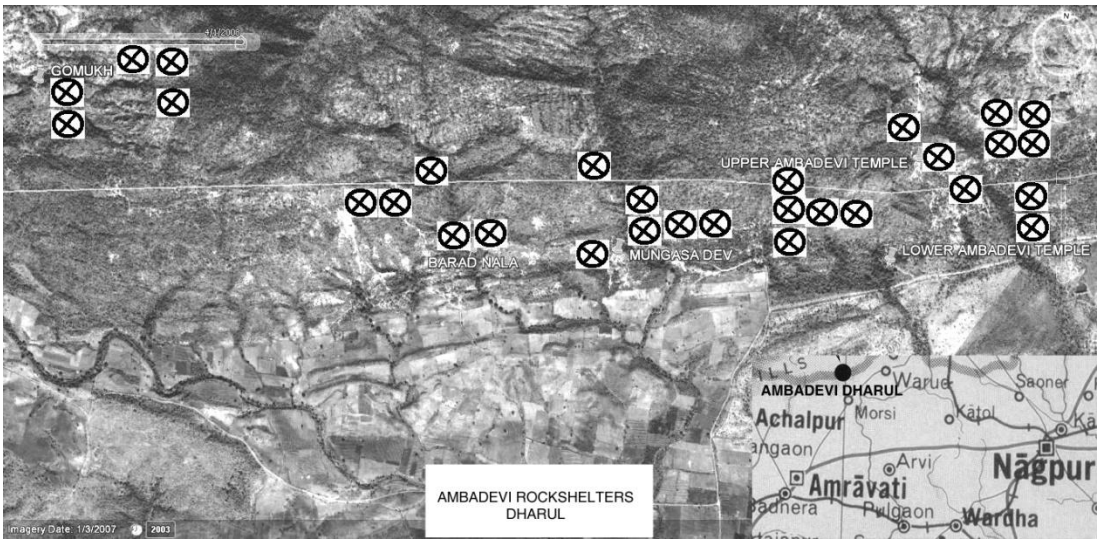


Figure-1 LOCATION MAP OF REGION SHOWING CAVE SHELTERS

Further to earlier studies this region was visited extensively and studied by the author and his group. More than 100 rock shelters suitable for human habitat have been discovered so far since 2007. Thirty of these rock shelters have been found to have petroglyphs, pictograms, geometric motifs, cult worship place, and cupules. The said site is located 21.55 Deg. N and 77.5 Deg E spread over an area of 40 sq. km. at an average altitude around 300 to 350 mtrs (MSL). The strata are rocky consisting of yellow sand stone, patches of red sand stone, and quartzite layers. At places the sand stones are very soft and can be crushed by hand. Due to constant weathering and rosion certain patterns of hard strata have emerged resembling Coral ridges (Figure-2)

Figure-2 CORAL RIDGE ROCK FORMATION

which might be an interesting study for geologists. The mountain comprises three to four ranges going from east to west having altitude ranging from 300 to 800 mtrs. The lower range is facing the south Deccan peninsula looking over the horizon. This range has number of naturally formed rock shelters (Figure-3).

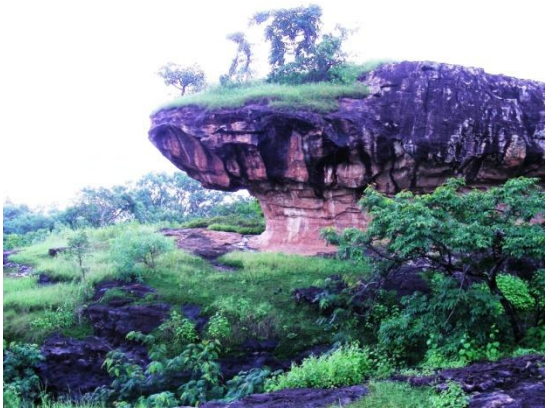


Figure-3 TYPICAL ROCK SHELTER Figure-4 HUMPED BULL

Most of the shelters are facing southward direction. The depth of the shelters varies between fractions of metre to few metres. During the exploration we came across many hurdles as there were no path ways leave aside cattle paths. However, we used to identify shelters from a distance from their outer contour and many a times by hunch. Due to non availability of road maps or path on such rocky region while treading we had to overcome many hurdles including straight up rocks cliff, dark tunnels, caves, heaps of knee deep leaf layers scattered on the floor of the shelters, snakes and wild animals. It goes without saying that this expedition would have been impossible without the help of local people conversant with the region and terrain.

Our studies revealed that the settlement of human habitation in this region might have started from upper Paleolithic (10ka) to prehistoric (3ka) era. How suddenly this habitation and shelters gone into oblivion is a matter of speculation. The habited shelters are generally located near perennial water source like small river tributaries or springs. Sand stone strata are advantageous due to the peculiar properties which being porous absorbs water during rainy season and forms perennial spring for water source. Now there are only signs of such sources sans water.

During September, 2010 expedition we examined cluster of rock shelter we found twelve number of humped bull identifiable petroglyphs [Figure- 4, 5]

Figure-5 MULTIPLE BULL PETROGLYPH

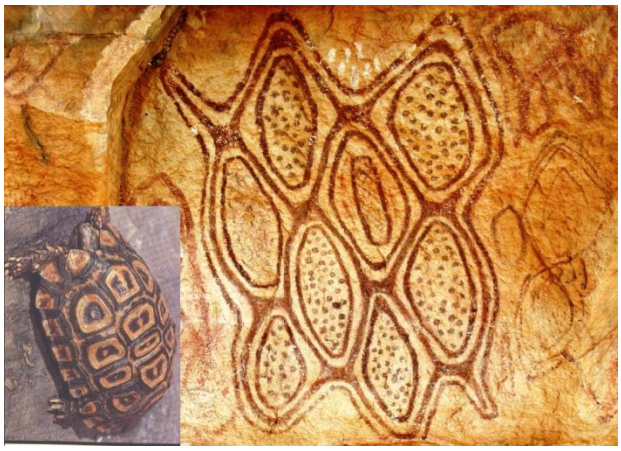


Figure-6 TORTOISE FIGURATIVE

produced by scratching sharp tools. The depth of engraving ranged from 2 to 4 millimeters and size ranged from 20 to 30 cm. All have prominent humps and horns in attacking posture, heads facing at an angle of 10 to 15 degrees towards the right. It was further observed that engraving of one humped bull was superimposed on some pictogram. This indicates that the pictograms were drawn earlier than the petroglyph. Finding as many as twelve humped bull petroglyphs on the same rock surface was quite surprising. Perhaps it might be an act of some cult worshiping or part of ritual. Interestingly the outline of the humped bull appears to be similar to the bull tablet (Harappa Seal) found in Harappa civilization.

During our visit to the said region during 2007 - 2011 we found seven numbers of identifiable pictograms of tortoise in various shapes and style. All are artistically drawn and beautifully coloured in red pigment (Figure- 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15).

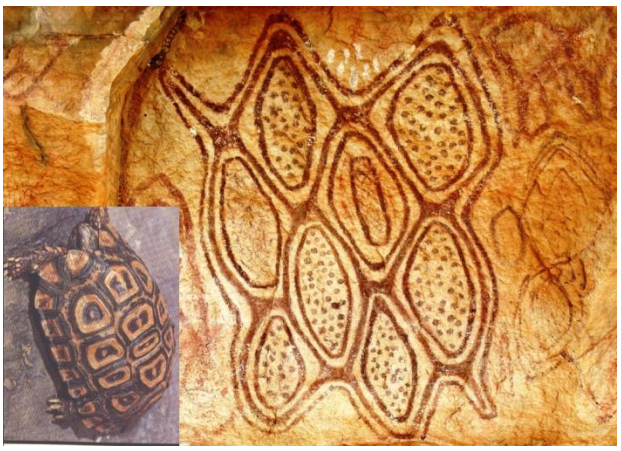


Figure-6 TORTOISE FIGURATIVE

Figure-7 TORTOISE

Figure-8 TORTOISE AND FIGURATIVE

Figure-9 WILD BOAR AND TORTOISE

Figure-10 TORTOISE FIGURATIVE

Figure-11 TORTOISE FIGURATIVE

Figure-12 ANIMAL WITH TORTOISE FIGURATIVE

Figure-13 DEER WITH TORTOISE FIGURATIVE

Figure-14 DEER WITH TORTOISE FIGURATIVE

Figure-15 DEER WITH TORTOISE FIGURATIVE

From the thickness and neatness of curved lines it appears to have been painted by finger. Tortoise pictograms are rare in Indian rock art. Various species of tortoise might be abundant in this region. Their slow speed might be making them an easy pray for the early settlers. Tortoise and turtles are known for the variety of symmetrical geometrical pattern on their back and mankind has always been fascinated by them (Figure- 6 inset). It appears that compared to other species,, tortoise colour, patterns and symmetry might have primarily influenced and attributed to the general painting style of other motifs, geometrical figures and paintings especially .pictograms of various wild animals body parts in this region. A mother & child are shown in one of the paintings having similar pattern (Figure- 16). Similar observation was also made in one white coloured motif (Figure- 11).

In one of the shelters a pictogram of a bird with wide open wings and extended legs is painted (Figure- 17).

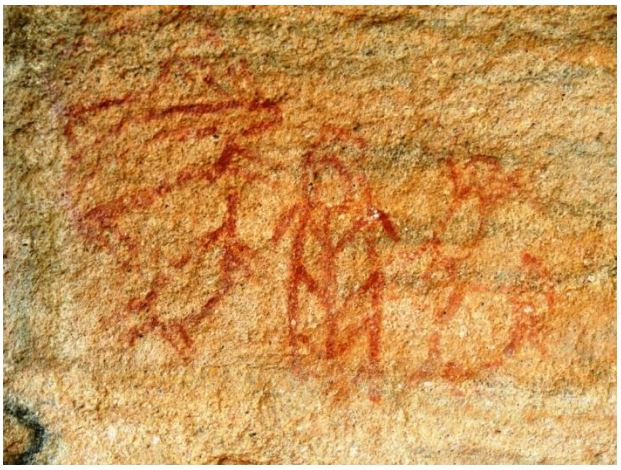


Figure-16 MOTHER AND CHILD

Figure-17 VULTURE

The bird pictogram is beautiful, artistic and with proportionate outline. It looks like a vulture about to land perhaps on a carcass. Pictograms of vultures are rare in rock art in India. In one of the shelters an animal pictogram was noticed which looks like an African ant eater Aardvark. Though this animal has never been reported to have existed in India, a comparison shows a striking resemblance (Figure- 18). In the same shelter another pictogram is found to be of a long necked animal like Giraffe. On investigation it was found that a close cousin of Giraffe known as Sivatherium (named after the discovery of it's remain in Siwaliks mountains), did roam in India though now extinct. If the pictogram of the said animal is compared to the artist sketch of Sivatherium one can notice the similarity (Figure- 19).

Figure-18 UNKNOWN ANIMAL LIKE AARDVARK

Figure-19 UNKNOWN ANIMAL LIKE SIVATHERIUM

A pack of animal from Carnivore order is painted in one of the shelters having long erected ears. The ears of Indian wild dog (Dole) are short than their African cousin whereas the ears of Indian striped hyena are rounded. From the above it appears that the painting perhaps of specie similar to African wild dog (Figure-20). A painting of single horn Indian Rhinoceros is painted in one shelter. Perhaps this is the only painting of Rhinoceros found down to south below in Satpura mountain range (Figure- 21).

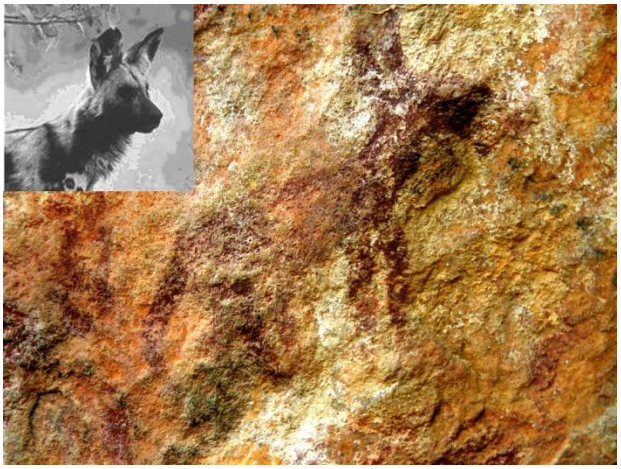


Figure-20 WILD DOG

Figure-21 INDIAN RHINOCEROS

A pair of Fish is painted in one rock shelter (Figure-22). Identification of animals in the rock paintings has always been debatable however; one can not totally deny the probability.

Reproduction has been an important act of all living organism. No social stigma was attached to its open appearance. Many animals like bull, elephants, wild boar and then horses have been represented as symbols of sexual power. We have observed few pictogram and petroglyph depicting the same. A naturally formed horizontal stone phallus about 50 cm long was discovered in a stream bed (Figure-23).

Figure-22 PAIR OF FISH

Figure-23 NATURAL STONE PHALLUS

Such shape was formed due to erosion by water turbulences. It was located near a rock shelter. Interestingly in the same rock shelter we found a mystical human figure nearly 1.5 metres tall painted on a rock surface having an unusually long phallus between pair of testicles and extending below the legs. The posture of the image has stretched hands and limbs. The open palms are stretched outward portraying power. This shelter appears to be a place of ritual related to sex (Figure-24). In another rock shelter we found nearly five triangularly shaped petroglyphs of with a circular depression on the lower side (Figure-25).

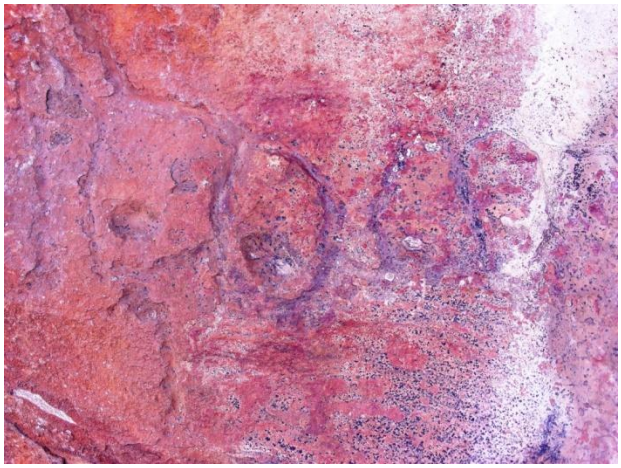


Figure-24 MYSTICAL FIGURE WITH LONG PHALLUS Figure-25FEMALE SEX ORGAN PETROGLYPHS

Initially we thought them to be petrograph but on close examination we found them to be close to women sex organs. We also observed that in wild boar painting the testicles are painted very prominently (Figure-26). It appears from the above observation that in the life of early settler's sex presentation was an important subject.

The entire shelter site is full of cupules of various size, shape and orientations. The cupules which are on the vertical rock face were observed to have been formed chiefly due to rain water dripping through them (Figure-27).

Figure-26 WILD BOAR TESTICLES Figure-27 MULTIPLE CUPULES ON VERTICAL CLIFF

Many are formed by insects as we could see their comb shells containing sand particles (Figure-28, 29).

Figure-28 INSECT COMB IN CUPULE Figure-29 MULTIPLE INSECT COMB IN CUPULE

We also found nest of swift birds (Apus affinis) in cupules. The strata are mainly of sand stone having interlaid softer stone layers hence easy to scratch therefore natural formation of cupules due to rain and wind or by insects and birds may be cause. In many shelters we have seen quite a few number of cupules formed on the floor having depth varying from few centimeter to 25 cm and diameter ranging from 7 cm to 15 cm. Invariably all are having hemispheric bottom made by percussion. Though the purpose behind excavation of such cupules is not clear perhaps they might have be used as storage space. We also observed cupules formed due to rain water dripping from the roof of the shelter (Figure- 30). In one shelter we saw four elliptical cupules 12 to 15 cm

long, 6 to 7 cm wide and 6 to 7 cm deep having similar geometrical shape (Figure-31, 32). Typical oily ridges could be seen very prominently on the edges of these cupules as the outer rock has been eroded due to weathering. It appears from the typical geometry of these cupules that they might have been used for grinding especially animal fat (Figure- 32). We also found a rusted piece of iron metal in the vicinity of the same shelter.

Figure-30 CUPULE ON FLOOR FORMED BY WATER

Figure-31 MULTIPLE ELLIPTICAL CUPULES ON FLOOR

Figure-32 STRUCTURE OF ELLIPTICAL CUPULE

Figure-33 SOLDERS PROCESSION

In another shelter we found a procession like formation with solders holding weapons like spades, swords and others riding on elephant, horse and camel.

It appears from the aforesaid observations that this region was extensively occupied by early settler for a very long period as evident from the type and styles of paintings. It can be further said that the area must have been very rich in food and other necessities hence the settlers had ample time for devoting to painting, engraving and sex.

Conclusion: From the above observations it appears that the civilization of Ambadevi rock shelter was very rich in art and had a long history with a distinctive style. Further detailed study regarding various facets of rock art is needed.

Acknowledgement: I wish to thank our group members Mr. Padmakar Lad, Dr. Manohar Khode, Mr. Dnyaneshwar Damahe, Mr. Shirish kumar Patil, Mr. Pradip Hirurkar being part and parcel of the discovery of these rock shelters and further for their suggestions. I would like to extend our sincere thanks to local Gond adiwasis Suresh, Ashok for guiding us through the treacherous paths during the exploration. I would like also to thank Archeological Survey of India (ASI) for taking the cognizance of the discovered ancient art by further exploring and numbering certain shelters. I am greatly thankful to Dr. Giriraj Kumar for his constant encouragement and support.

Reference: 1. Discovery of Painted Rockshelters from Satpura-Tapti Valley
Vijay Ingole et al. Rock art Society of India Conference (RASI) in Wayanad, Sultan Batheri, Kozikode (Kerala) (Oct.2007)

,