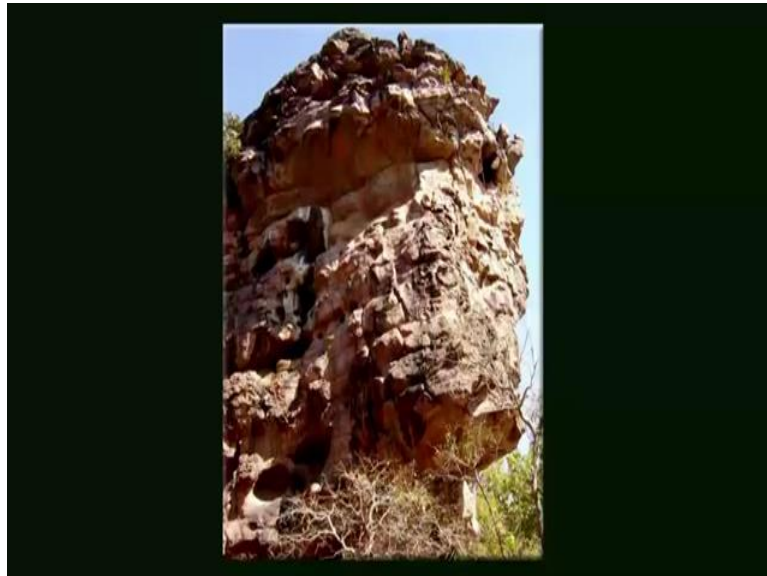


**Introduction to Indian Art – An Appreciation**  
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**Module- 01**  
**Pre- historic art: Rock painting of Bhimbetka**  
**Lecture: W2 - L1**

Welcome viewers to the MOOC online course on Introduction to Indian Art and Appreciation. This is the first module of the second week titled as religious and cultural diversities. In order to focus on the religious and cultural diversities of Indian art, we have selected four different group's classes of works a sites of art works in five different modules. The first one the one that we are going to discuss today will be on the pre historic art of India and specifically on the rock painting of Bhimbetka.

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Now as you all know Bhimbetka rock shelters are an archaeological site of that Paleolithic period, so pretty old and some of the rock shelters can be dated back to let us say 20,000 BC even 25,000 BC. And these shelters these Bhimbetka rock shelters exhibit the earliest traces of human life on the Indian subcontinent and hence it is a beginning of the south Asian stone age face according to some archaeologists, but what we are concerned with is not the civilization at the pre historic history of mankind, we are more

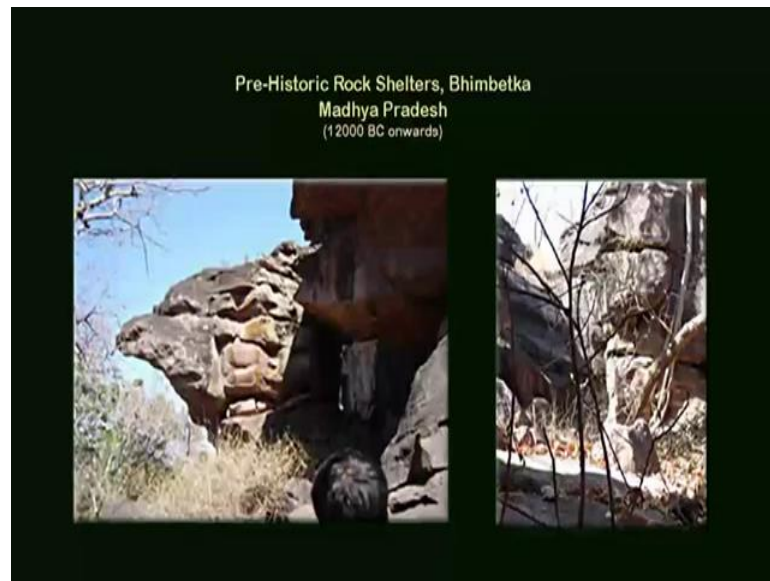
concerned with the art works that these people have left behind on the walls on the completely uneven rocky surfaces of these rock shelters.

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And when you look at some of these images or when you can actually go and visit this site. It is very close to Bhopal say around 40 to 50 kilometers from Bhopal. It is a now it has a motor able way, you can reach right up to the entrance of this rock shelters and there at least right at the outside, from the outside it is difficult to imagine that these rock shelters will be having not one or two, but a huge number of paintings inscribed on the walls of these rock shelters on the inner surfaces, also on the walls which are generally inaccessible, yet you find them in great number and that is one of the reasons why this site is so famous, as one of the best examples of pre historic rock painting in India.

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In fact, from the outside it is really difficult to imagine that these natural rock shelters, yes this is the point to remember that these rock shelters were not carved out by human beings. These are natural rock shelters where prehistoric people lived. These places were the dwelling places for them and as they lived in these places; they also kept on doing a number of paintings over many generations.

So that is one of the reasons, why you also find paintings overlapping one on top of the other. This overlap of paintings indicates that this painting was done not within one single time frame, but at several points of time by different generations of people who might have lived in that same shelter over a period of many 1000 of years. So it is a very important location for archaeologists and art historians.

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Because the moment you enter this rock shelter which is as I told you just around 40 kilometers to the south of Bhopal. And this place is the home of some of the oldest cave paintings known to us. According to some historians many of these paintings can be dated back to 10,000 years. According to some other historians many of these paintings should be dated back to 15,000 years or even 20,000 BC. Now irrespective of the debate over the dating of some of these paintings, what we get to see when we look at these paintings. First of all, we see images of animals, birds, human beings, to put it very simply. Then as you look keep looking at them carefully, you notice some very interesting things.

First of all, that imagine somebody 20,000 years back doing some paintings on uneven rock surfaces of natural shelter, yet having a certain kind of skill and we historians we call them skill of representation. In order to represent in order to visually represent some image which actually exists in the real life out there, you need to have certain skill. In terms of getting their proportions right getting their anatomies right and in order to acquire the skill today we go to art colleges. Or we get our sustained under some art teacher. Now where did these people go to acquire such training we do not have any answer, but the amount of and the kind of skill that we see that is evident in this paintings is simply mind boggling.

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Look at a few more images. They may look like child art at the beginning, but when you study this images carefully, you begin to notice that no, it is not so geometric it is not so rudimentary, but rather he people who painted this images of animals.

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And even human beings here, they have surely observed the reality around very

carefully.

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That does not necessarily mean that the images will be having a naturalistic depiction of the world out there. They might have noticed the world outside very carefully, but when they doing the drawings or the paintings on the rocks, they are following a method which can be termed as a simplistic method are very basic method of drawing, oscillate method where they contour lines and the shapes of the bodies as shown without going in going in too much details.

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But you also have this kind of images, on the walls of the Bhimbetka rock shelters. Where despite the fact that the painters he people who painted them did not go into much detailing, but the identity of the animals, the realistic presence of the animals, the image power of the animals is undeniable.

Now how does this happen to somebody who never went to an art college, who never went to or who never underwent any formal training of art, yet he was able to come up with some amazing images of animals which resemble the real life images very closely. This is one question I throw to you so that you can give it a thought and come up with possible answers; the as far as the placements of this paintings are concerned.

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Once again you find them on the walls right in front of your eyes. You find them on the ceilings, you find them on the corners of the shelters, you find them beneath the rocks, but usually Bhimbetka rock paintings are not found on the exterior walls. So when you reach that spot today from outside you really cannot see any painting. You have to enter into the rock shelters and then you get to see paintings one after the other on both sides of the rocks, on the interior surfaces of the rocks, on those portions of the rocks which are absolutely behind.



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And most of these painted surfaces are filled up with as I just mentioned images of animals, images of human beings on top of the animals.

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And interestingly, you might also come across in Bhimbetka certain images some drawings and paintings, where it seems like that the painter are trying to tell you some

story. He is trying to narrate an incident. So, on the one hand you have images of animals or a cluster of animals very randomly painted.

On the other hand, if you look at these images carefully and if you try to connect the images internally, you may come up with some story. According to the experts on prehistory art, not only of India, but generally pre historic art all over the world, they have this they have come up with this idea this concept known as magical belief.

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For example, when you look at various examples of prehistory paintings from world famous sites like Althamira in Spain, Lascaux in France; there you see images of animals for example, the very famous image of a Bison or a wounded bison. He has just been wounded by a sphere thrown by someone in the painting and this particular motive of a wounded bison, wounded by a sphere thrown by a man has been painted repeatedly in many sites of pre historic paintings all over the world.

According to the concept of magical belief, it is believed that when these people are to go out for hunting, they would do a painting like this with the belief that this image of a wounded bison, would assure a very good result of their hunting. They will be able to bring back an animal properly hunted and ready to be eaten. So in a sense it is a

ritualistic painting, but this definitely does not explain all the paintings that you see in the pre historic painting sites all over the world. Not that all the paintings are always related to hunting or magical belief this is one aspect.

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But there are other examples also. In fact, we need to remember that this cave dweller lived in a not a very friendly surrounding, but in a hostile surrounding. Surrounded by wild animals and they lived a life full of struggle mainly struggle against nature. Mainly they norm a struggle to find out and hunt the food and other hostilities of nature, and perhaps this very act of painting those images that they are confronting every day in their life, had some psychological effect on them, or it was possible that it had a ritualistic purpose. It was possible that these images help them to overcome the fear that they were thrown into almost on a daily basis.

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So one can way come up with various explanations, but the evidence is telling us I mean the pictorial evidence is give us this clue, that though we are not very sure whether they were able to speak whether they had any language, we do not know if they use to sing or whatever, but we definitely know from this evidences that they painted a lot in all the sites.

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Now, it is also assured that in the leisure time, these early pre historic man painted on the walls of the rock. But according to another group of scholars it is not in the leisure time this scholar would like to believe that doing this painting not one or two, but in huge numbers on these uneven rocks uneven walls of these rock shelters was not necessarily a past time, but an essential activity of their life. It is a part of their living.

Now this also needs to be explained these also needs to give a thought. Whether we should consider these paintings as a result of their past time or we should look at them as an essential part of their daily activity. As essential as eating as essential as hunting the; however, the overlapping and superimposition of paintings imply as I mentioned a little while back that, these paintings were used or these rock shelters were used like canvases for art by different people from different periods and from different generations. Technically speaking or archaeologically speaking, from the upper Paleolithic period through the Mesolithic period and chalcolithic period, right up to the early historic the very recent medievalists.

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Apparently Bhimbetka rock shelter was pretty active. Young people kept on living there, where as in other places for example, Altamirine Spain after a certain time due to some reason this pre historic people left the caves once and forever. But it seems that

Bhimbetka rock shelters well a kind of lived in space for many years, for many generations till the medieval period as well.

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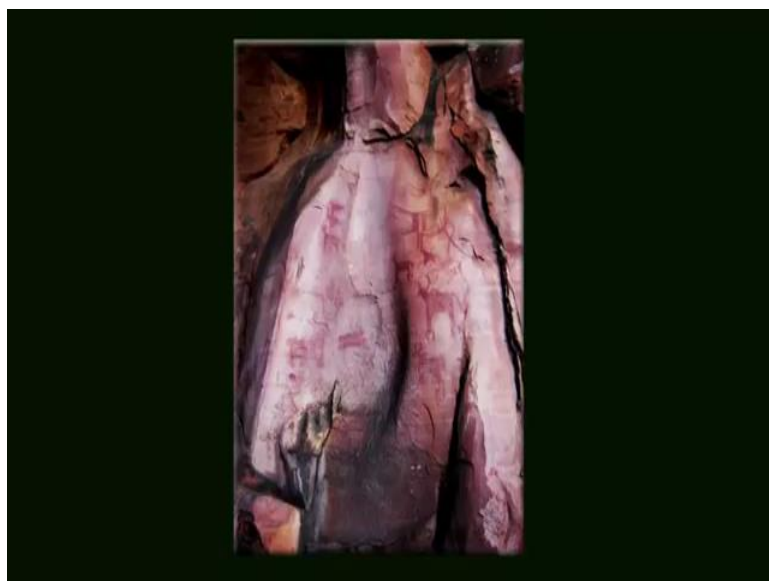
Now, apart from these images of animals and birds in Bhimbetka, like elsewhere we also get this kind of nonrepresentational marks a kind of parallel lines on the walls which are very curious, because we are yet to make any sense out of this. We cannot very clearly or conclusively tell what these marks represent, but they are there in great numbers.

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So this is another addition to the entire range of paintings that we get to see in Bhimbetka. Beside images of animals, birds, human beings, we see this kind of marks. So definitely these were very purposeful. They definitely had some meanings for them. So what did this, what are the functions of these marks? The purpose of making these marks on the wall can you give it a thought.

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So, not only in Bhimbetka, as I already mentioned we see similar kinds of images also in Aaltamira in Spain. Which is even more old I mean older than Bhimbetka. If the earliest image available from Bhimbetka can be dated back to 17,000 BC or 20,000 BC, in Aaltamira we have images where which were probably painted in 25,000 BC or 30,000 BC. So this is one example from Altamira.

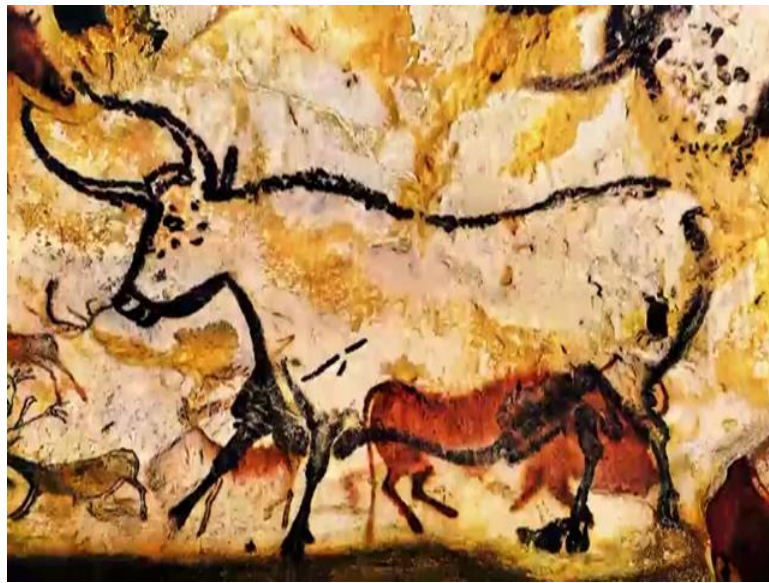
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Altamira again, where you can see huge images of bison and huge animals painted not on the side walls, but on the ceiling; now do not you think it is immensely difficult to do a painting on the ceiling, but they did have side walls available to them. Sometimes they did use that, but mostly they left the side walls blank and they rather choose the ceilings for their paintings. Why? Let us give it a thought to they suspect too.

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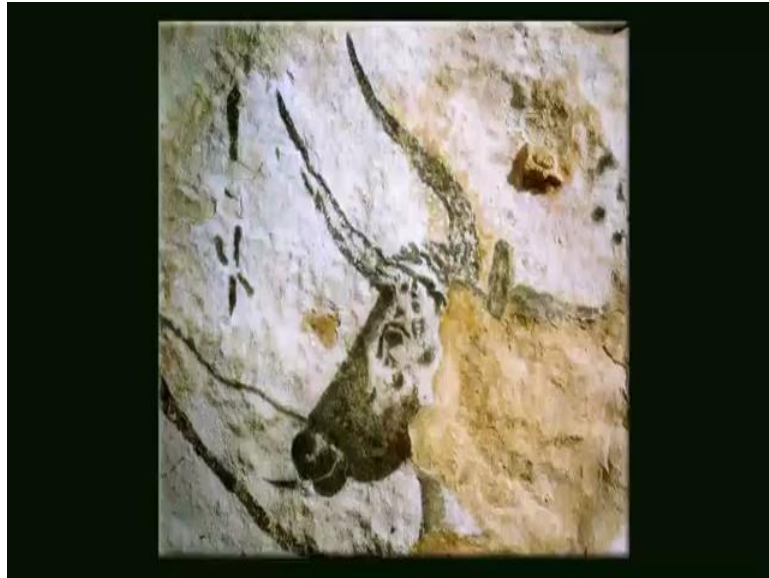
This is from another very famous pre historic site, from France known as the Lusk caves. One more from the same site Lusaka France; and from this image you can again think about the naturally developed scale of a naturalistic representation of animals. In order to accord this skill today we need to go to an art college, but how did they learn to come up with this very convincing representation of animal images.

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Look at the caves at Altamira very difficult terrain. There are certain areas which are almost inaccessible normally yet you find paintings at those inaccessible corners as well. Where even light could not reach. Did they use torch light or some kind of natural light or fire, we do not know how did they paint in those areas which are very dark even in the day time.

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Another image from Lusaka; look at the proportion of this animal the horns the face absolutely brilliant and flawless in terms of its representation.

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There are two major sites of excellent prehistoric paintings in India:

(1) Bhimbetka Caves, Foothills of Vindhya, Madhya Pradesh.

(2) Jogimara caves, Amarnath, Madhya Pradesh.

So finally, there are a few aspects, few points that we need to remember at the end of this module. First of all, it is not Bhimbetka. At least now we have discovered many more such pre historic sites in India. There are number of prehistoric sites, but not also sites of paintings. I am talking about those historic sites in India which have some rock paintings on them. And two major sites of excellent prehistoric paintings in India are one Bhimbetka caves at the foothills of Vindhya Mountain near Bhopal of which we just saw few images and second Jogimara caves at Amarnath again in Madhya Pradesh.

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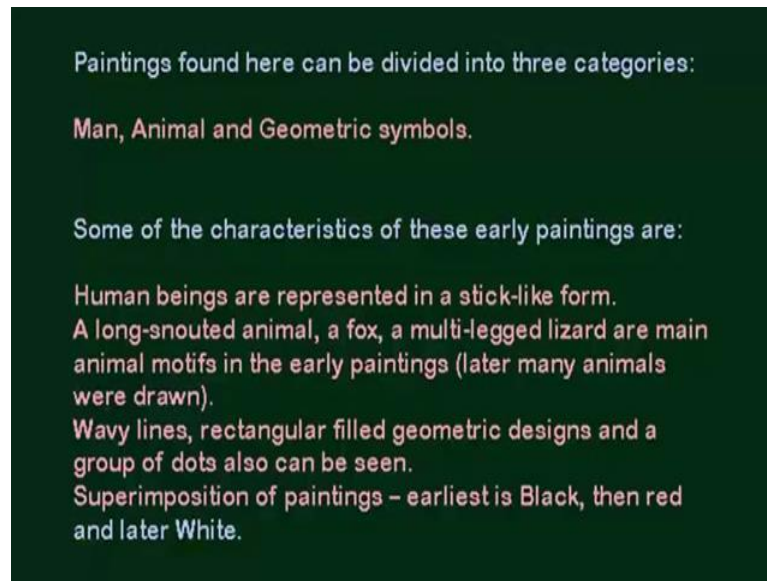
In India, remnants of rock paintings have been found on the walls of caves situated in several districts of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Bihar and Uttarakhand.

Some of the examples of sites early rock paintings are Lakhudiyar in Uttarakhand, Kupgallu in Telangana, Piklihal and Tekkalkotta in Karnataka, Bhimbetka and Jogimara in Madhya Pradesh etc.

Now, in India remnants of rock paintings has been found on the walls of caves situated in several districts. Apart from Madhya Pradesh, for example, you have such rock sheltered paintings in UP in Andhra, Telangana, Karnataka, Bihar, Uttarkhand and recently some rock sheltered paintings prehistoric paintings have been found on also from Tamilnadu. The some of these examples of sites early rock paintings are Lakhudiya in Uttarakhand, Kupgallu in Telangana, Piklihal, Tekkalkotta in Karnataka and of course, Bhimbedka and Jogimara in Madhya Pradesh.

So I hope some of you will make an effort take an initiative and visit at least one or two from these sites and see some of the examples of our earlier evidences of an Indian painting.

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And finally, to summarize to today's lesson, we can divide the prehistoric paintings into three categories; one the man animal and geometric symbols. Now some of the characteristics of these early paintings are human beings are represented in stick like form. But we also have seen animals represented in rather saluted forms which give you a sense of volume or a realistic presence. The long snorted animal a fox a multi legged lizard are main animal motifs in the early paintings. Later many other animals were drawn added to the whole range of the world of animals in Bhimbedka.

Then we have also noticed different kinds of lines employed to depict this animal. Wavy lines, rectangular lines, geometric designs, sometimes very straight kind of lines and dots. There are lots of paintings with dots. They used dots as a part of their texture, to cover up the space and finally, for imposition of paintings. So you find the earliest painting black, then you find red paintings super imposed on the black and finally, even the white paintings imposed on the red. Now all these points suggest that these painters 17,000 year back 10,000 years back not just impulsive or intuitive or primitive painter without any thinking process. They were thoughtful painters, they were doing this painting very consciously, give it a thought to this.

Thank you so much.