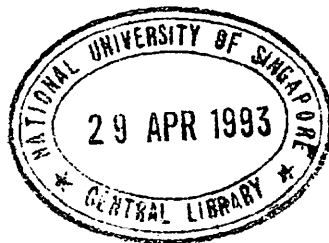


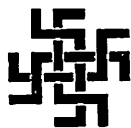
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VIII

Rock Paintings of Pachmarhi Hills

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The Pachmarhi Hills form one of the most beautiful parts of the Satpura Range (fig. 3 bottom). The region is rich in rock shelters which have been occupied and decorated by the ancestors of the inhabitants for a long period of time. The shelters are found all over the hills and the surrounding forests, although favoured sites were located along the foothills and river banks. However, many shelters are found deep in the dark, densely-forested gorges, where today sunlight merely filters through the trees to the ground. The walls and the ceilings of the shelters are covered with paintings depicting a wide range of subjects expressed in a variety of styles. This body of art forms an important part of the great heritage left to us by the early inhabitants of this region.

The Pachmarhi Hills are situated in the geographical centre of the Indian sub-continent in the State of Madhya Pradesh. The hills are, as is the bulk of the Satpura Range, formed of the Gondwana sandstone belonging to the Gondwana series of the Talcher Group formations. The sandstone sequence is of the upper Gondwana formation. The sandstone is relatively friable and, on weathering, forms the sandy soil found at the foot of the hills. The town of Pachmarhi is located on 22°29' north and 78°30' east and situated at an elevation of 3717 ft above sea level.

The area covered by the present study is quite large and access to it is difficult. The hills are thickly vegetated with rich floristic and faunal biota. The natural species represented in the rock art were of great economical importance to the shelter-dwellers. Rock paintings found within shelters here are the major source of our understanding of how their creators related to their physical, biological and cultural environments. These people, as do their descendants at the present time, held beliefs and practices which expressed a direct or indirect relationship between their environment and themselves. Within this body of expression, art plays an important and a multifaceted role.

The painted rock shelters of Pachmarhi Hills were brought to the notice of D.H. Gordon (1958) by G.R. Hunter. Hunter had excavated here in 1932 and again in 1934-35. The 1935 excavation revealed that the cultural sequence within this region commenced during the Mesolithic, confirming that the Pachmarhi Hills were not occupied during the Palaeolithic. Thus, the rock paintings of this region are of the Mesolithic and later periods (Khare 1984).

dwelling traditions of their ancestors. Men and horses of geometric construction are randomly spaced across the walls. Such paintings are done during the rainy season and on festive occasions, and bear a close resemblance to those found in the painted shelters (fig. 7).

The wall paintings of the houses, as the great majority of rock paintings, are executed in red and yellow pigments prepared from haematite or other iron oxides. The white pigment was made from limestone or kaolin, while mixtures of pigments that produce pinks are also found used in paintings.

The rock paintings were executed in a number of stylistic conventions. Some are only sketches or constructs of lines, while others are silhouettes infilled with colours and embellished with decorative designs. In this paper I analyze a number of important paintings found in this region.

Marodeo Rock Shelters

M1 Shelter

These sites are located some 11 km from Pachmarhi in densely-forested hills. They can be reached by taking a right turn 2 km on the Pachmarhi-Piparia road, then following a track for 1 km and finally going due east for some 8 km.

There is a large shelter, 48 m long, 35 m high with a 7 m deep overhang. The paintings are found some 2.5 m above ground level and extend across the length of the shelter. The subjects depicted can be classified into five groups: animal species, human figures, war scenes, hunting exploits and geometric figures.

Representations of animals are very common in the rock art of this region. In this shelter there is a long series of monkeys extending over 3 m and executed as full white silhouettes. Another painting depicts a large, aggressive rhinoceros associated with a smaller hunter figure carrying a bow and arrows. An elephant painting at this site is depicted with some X-ray features and illustrates the hunter's detailed knowledge of his prey.

Many of these animals continue to be worshipped by the different forest tribes of India. In this area, the Gond and Korku tribes worship Bagan Deo, a tiger deity. A painting of this animal, with its body decorated by parallel red and white lines, is found in this shelter (fig. 1e).

Human figures are portrayed in two stylistic variations: as naturalistic representations, and as schematized geometric forms with the body constructed of straight lines and with a square or rectangular head (fig. 1a). Conflict is represented by human figures holding swords and shield. The mode of combat indicates that the people would form groups which sought to dominate each other.

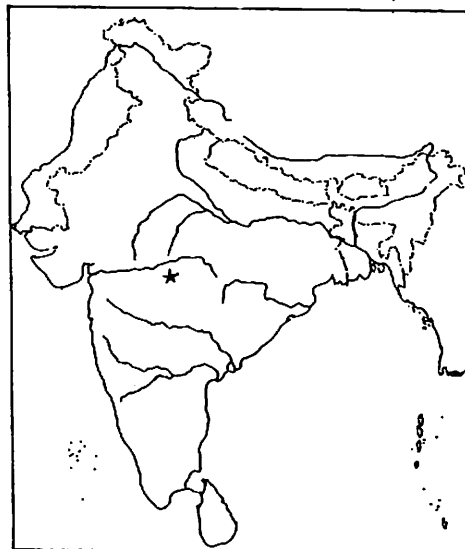
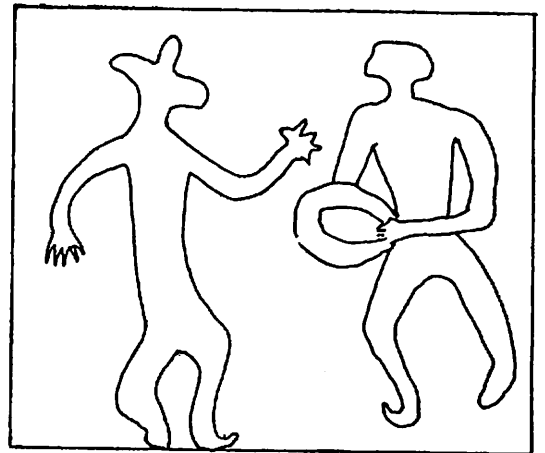
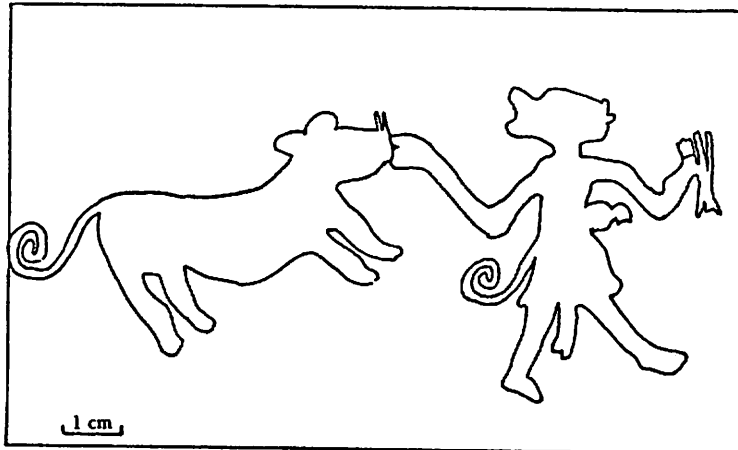
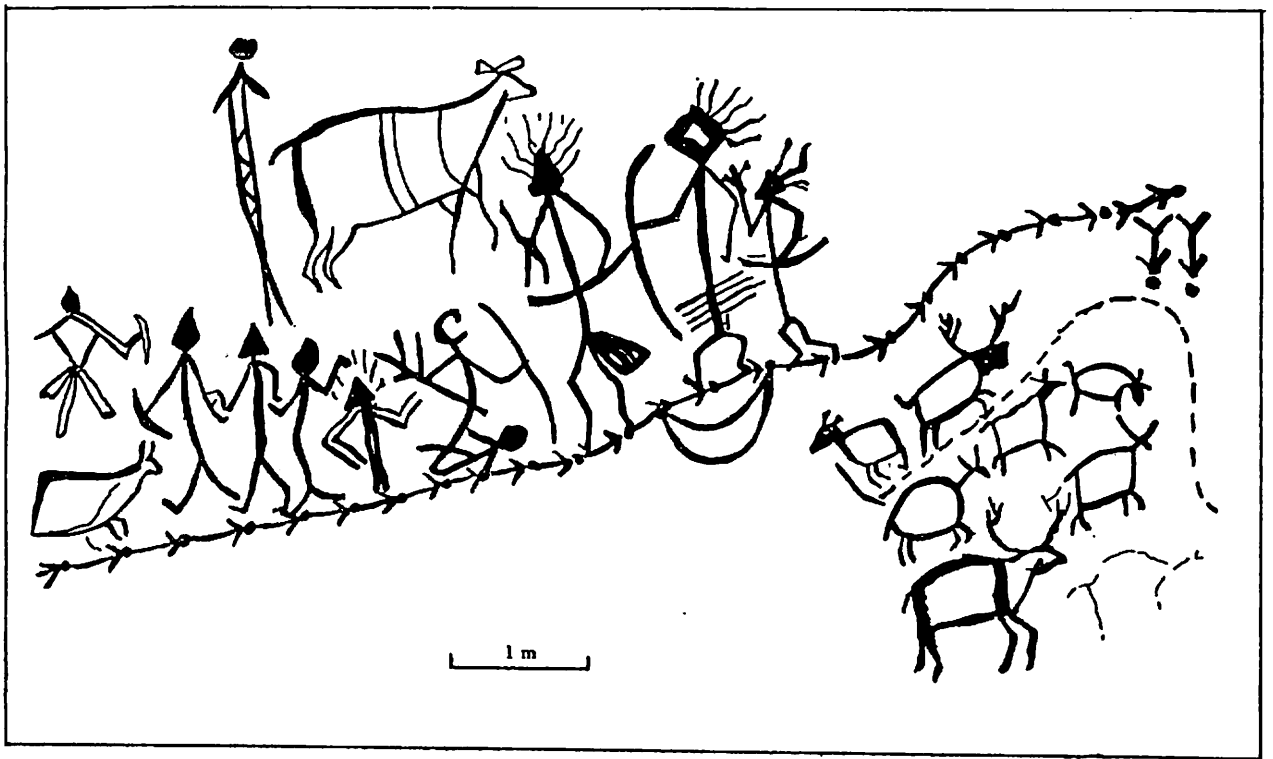


Figure 3 Rock paintings of Pachmarhi Hills. *Top.* Scene in red from Astachal shelter (length = 8 m). *Middle left.* Dorothy Deep shelter: "White demons". *Middle right.* White dancers from Jambu Dweep shelter. *Bottom.* Situation of the Pachmarhi Hills sites.