

UNCOVERING PREHISTORIC ART

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Sashi Sivramkrishna expounds on the historic relevance of the petroglyphs of Pavagada taluk

To understand the prehistoric era, petroglyphs contain crucial information as they depict daily activities such as hunting, entertainment and social interaction. In the Pavagada region, only megalithic tombs, and menhirs were initially reported, as documented by historian Pavagada Cheluvrajan in his work 'Pavagada Taluk Ithihasa' with no mention of petroglyphs.

After visiting Sanganakallu and Kapagallu, in Bellary, which feature dolerite stone boulders and megalithic tombs akin to those in Pavagada, historian Shiva Kumar and I began to question why petroglyphs were absent in the Pavagada region. Given its location on the bank of the North Pennar River basin, abundant grasslands and hilly regions — all conditions conducive to prehistoric settlement, the lack of petroglyphs seemed surprising.

At Pulikonda Hill, near a valley (Kanive), we discovered stone boulders etched with animal and human figures. This discovery excited us, prompting an expedition to the hill, where we found numerous petroglyphs from the megalithic period.

The predominant themes in rock art include the familiar Indian humped cattle, depicted singly or in groups and human figures, often in groups and typically male, are represented in various styles. Other depictions include horse riders, tigers, elephants, armed humans, mating animals, a human palm, a

shield-bearer and warriors on bulls. As we looked at these petroglyphs, we felt the need for immediate preservation measures.

The presence of horses and metal weapons suggests a chronological horizon that is unlikely to begin much before the end of the second millennium BC and to continue into the first millennium BC. These need to be validated by archaeologists.

The cupules (artificial depressions made in rocks) found on this hill are examples of prehistoric rock art that have been discovered on every continent except Antarctica. They were created across all three Stone Age eras: the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic.

The purpose of these cupules remains unresolved. Some theories suggest they were used for ceremonial purposes or to produce musical sounds from the stone boulders, but these hypotheses require further validation.

There are also themes related to religious motifs, such as two hands with a pot in between, nagas, and a depiction of Hanuman, which are known to have historically datable contexts.

The discovery of these petroglyphs underscores the rich prehistoric heritage of the Deccan region. Prompt action is essential to preserve these ancient artworks for future generations. The beautiful monsoon landscape of the Deccan adds to the site's allure, making it a significant location for both historical study and cultural tourism.

The site requires immediate intervention to protect these invaluable petroglyphs from natural and human threats.

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