
STUDY ON SHAMANISM AND ROCK ART

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ABSTRACT

Unfortunately, rock art has not been created in India for a very long time, and since none of the ethnic groups link themselves with this art form, its original significance and purpose have been lost for a very long time. In point of fact, there is no bridge that can provide access to the meanings of rock art in India at this time. This spans from the Upper Paleolithic period all the way up to the Historic period. On the other hand, certain shapes and topics, such as geometric motifs, are consistently portrayed in rock art all across the world. Rock art is a worldwide occurrence that can be found in almost all geographic and temporal zones of human civilization, and it shares a great deal of similarity with other forms of rock art. As a result, its goal shares many characteristics with other forms of rock art. After reading Lewis Williams's theory, which is based on the universality of the human nervous system and the hunter gatherer setting (Lewis Williams 2002b), I have been left with the impression that it is necessary for me to speculate as to whether or not this neuropsychological model can be applied to understand some of the forms seen in Indian rock art, despite the lack of any directly relevant ethnography. Even more so due to the fact that some characteristics, such as the geometric forms reflected in Indian rock art, are extremely similar to the ones referred to by Williams in his study of Upper Palaeolithic art.

KEYWORDS:- *rock, Indian, Shamanism*

INTRODUCTION

Shamanism is the oldest kind of religious practise, medical treatment, and psychological study that has been practised by humans. It is a tradition that predates all modern religions and primarily focuses on the healing of patients via the establishment of spiritual connections. In point of fact, it served as a religion in ancient societies, allowing people to seek solace in the supernatural for the challenges they faced in day-to-day life because their culture was light-years removed from the scientific method. As a result of Eliade's assertion that "nothing justifies the supposition that during the hundreds of years that preceded the earliest Stone Age, humanity did not have a religious life as intense and as varied as in the succeeding periods," it is impossible to determine how long ago its origins may have been (Eliade 1964).

The word "saman" originates from the Tungus people of Siberia, Central Asia, where a living tribal healing procedure was thoroughly observed and documented during the 19th century. The name "saman" refers to a traditional medicine practitioner (Williams 2002a). It literally means "one who is agitated, stimulated, or raised" (Walsh 1990, 8). It is interesting to note that it may have originated either from a Tungus verb meaning "to know" or from an ancient Indian phrase meaning "to heat oneself or do austerities." Generally speaking, the term shaman has been widely adopted by anthropologists to refer to a particular group of healers that can be found in a variety of cultures. These individuals have also been referred to as medicine men, witch doctors, sorcerers, wizards, magicians, or seers at various points in history. A subset of

practitioners of alternative medicine who claim to honour spirits, to see them, and even to be possessed by them.

OBJECTIVE

1. To study on

Role of a shaman

It was a widely held concept among ancient societies that natural phenomena were imbued with supernatural qualities. There is a presence of the spirits of the ancestors, and they must be appeased with great care. It was also believed that the spirit realm was the root of all of man's ills. This belief dates back to ancient times. Therefore, it is necessary to tame hostile spirits, which is something that can only be accomplished by a Shaman.

A shaman is a person, (he or she), who possesses the unique ability to rise above regular human consciousness and may travel and function among other 'planes.' This enables the shaman to perform a variety of spiritual tasks. (The phrase "planes" refers to separate worlds such as the current world and the spirit world when used in a shamanistic context.) Therefore, he or she serves as a protector of a tribe's total health and welfare because of their role as a mediator between the natural world and the spiritual world that lies beyond it. According to shamanistic belief, the rituals of birth, puberty, marriage, attaining a social rank (status), and death are believed to be moments of transition in the life of any individual. During these times, an individual is believed to be in grave danger because he or she "dies" in terms of his or her former self and has not yet been reborn into his new identity. During these times of susceptibility, it is the shaman's job to accompany the individual's soul through the void of uncertainty that exists between them. As a result, the shaman acts as a bridge between this world and the next, performing the role of a "soul guide" to facilitate the smooth passage of these life transitions.

The following are some of the goals that can be accomplished by a shaman: He or she has the ability to maintain and improve the order, health (including the ability to treat the sick), riches, and happiness of both individuals and the entire tribe. He or she has the ability to placate the ancestors and protect against evil influences (demons, illness, and bad luck), as well as regulate the movements of animals, their lives, and the weather. The amazing parallels shared by shamans from different parts of the world are both fascinating and perplexing, and they frequently prompt the question of how these similarities could have ever arisen in the first place. However, that is another another facet that does not have any relevance to this investigation. In many regions of the world, shamanism is still practised, particularly among various ethnic tribes that have not yet been exposed to the light of knowledge and are, as was indicated earlier, ignorant of the scientific culture. The aforementioned findings concerning the function of a shaman in a traditional community are the result of research conducted on shamans from many tribal societies throughout the world, including those from North America, Australia, Nepal, and India.

SHAMANISM AND ART

The practise of shamanic trances and the associated mental imagery being projected onto rock shelters has been reported from those societies that made rock art until relatively recently. In order to understand this

hypothesis, we need to turn to those societies who made rock art until relatively recently. When it comes to this topic, Tacon (Tacon 1991) stated that "Analogies offer an ethnographic perspective to prehistoric data.....when group of people has no surviving counterparts, analogies should be drawn on societies that utilise similar settings in similar way." The term "shaman" appears to play an important part in practically all of the anthropological information that is currently accessible for rock art. In addition, it is essential to point out that, in accordance with Lewis Williams and Dowson (Lewis Williams and Dowson 1988), the suggestion that the Upper Paleolithic may have been home to a shamanic practise of some kind was advanced by other researchers as well. This is something that needs to be mentioned. Lommel (1967), Eliade (1972), Eichmeier and Hofer (1974), Furst (1976), and Halifax (1982) are only few of the studies that fall within this category. As has already been established, David Lewis William's (Lewis Williams 2002a & b) study has been based in two primary areas, namely neuropsychological and ethnographic studies. These will be the topics of discussion in the part that will follow.

Art on Rocks Found in Southern Africa

I would like to refer to two case studies from South Africa and North America that were cited by David Lewis Williams (Lewis Williams 2002a) in his book "Mind in the Cave" in search of a purpose behind the making of rock art images. These case studies were conducted in South Africa and North America. First, he discusses the San and Bushmen people of the Kalahari Desert's Drakensberg Mountains, who are known to have created rock art up until the second half of the 19th century. The Khoi-Khoi people were nomads who settled in Southern Africa around 4,000 years ago, and they mixed with the established hunter-gatherers of that region to become the San group. Food gatherer is what the word "San" refers to, and these people had occupied the majority of southern Africa for over 50,000 years. Dutch colonists gave the term "Boschesmannen" to another tribe of hunter-gatherers who lived in the Savannah region of South Africa. These people were known as "Boschesmannen." This is how the Bushmen got their moniker. They are the last remaining members of a Stone Age tribe who were previously dispersed all over Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa, the Bushmen are the people who have lived in Southern Africa for the longest period of time and they are also known as the San. (Reference to the website that is sponsored by Endlotane Studios, which is located in Swaziland.)

There are thousands of paintings and carvings on rock surfaces that are believed to have been created by Bushmen and San people who lived in Zimbabwe and South Africa. It is regarded as one of South Africa's most important cultural assets. In the Kalahari Desert of modern-day Botswana, there are only a few thousand San who have managed to live. In the 1870s, a German linguist by the name of Wilhelm Bleek travelled to southern Africa with the intention of compiling a grammar of the Zulu language (William 2002a). During his time spent in the British territory of Natal, which was also the home of the Zulu people, he became familiar with the San people, who made their home in the high Drakensburg mountains. Because Bleek was so fascinated by their language, he decided to stop his research on the Zulu language and instead make an effort to acquire the San language on his own. More than 12,000 pages of notes on San myths, tales of rites, personal histories, and a significant amount of information regarding their daily lives were written by him and his coworker Lucy Lloyd, who was also his sister-in-law (Lewis- Williams 2002a).

Bleek and Lloyd found out that the Sans created rock paintings and engravings (a San man named Dia kwain had opened the window on his people's belief and religion; the specifics of which I will not go into because my primary area of inquiry is India). They also learned about the concepts of!gi:xa, which is a San word that means a person who is male or female who is filled with supernatural potency. This refers to

a'medicine man' or'medicine woman,' who are now universally referred to as'shaman.' They learned about their 'trance performances,' which were associated with mystic drum beats, which helped them achieve 'control over antelope herds,' or bring When these San men were given certain replicas of rock paintings, they were able to identify the shaman that was depicted in the paintings. This is the most interesting aspect.

Even in modern times, the San people maintain their faith in a spiritual realm that is said to be inhabited by God, God's family, God's great herd of animals, the spirits of deceased people, and odd beasts. These are the ghosts that are responsible for shooting 'arrows of disease' into living beings. As a result, it is the responsibility of the San shaman to summon their magical abilities and make the journey into the spirit world in order to carry out the mission of curing the patient. Only a select few individuals are required for the completion of this activity in order for it to take place during a "Medicine," "Healing," or "Trance" dance, while dreaming, or during a "Special Curing." Attendance at the dance is open to males, females, children, and guests. In spite of the fact that there is only one defined form of the dance in the Kalahari region today, variants can be seen in regions further south.

The pattern used nowadays is circular, and there is a fire lit in the centre of the circle. Many people believe that the fire is where the power comes from. Women are seated in close circles around it, with their shoulders touching one another. They sing and clap the "medicine songs," which are tunes that are thought to have healing properties. Men form a separate circle and dance outside of the one occupied by ladies. They do this by stamping their feet in time to the music of the dance and accenting the beat with the rattling sound of rattles that they wear around their calves. They use fly whisks, which are constructed from the tails of various animals, to fend off the arrows of disease, but only while they are performing the dance. The shaman will reach a trance state by inducing an altered state of consciousness by the utilisation of continuous rhythmic movement, audio driving, and strong concentration (along with activities that involve quick and shallow breathing). In the San society, the female shaman will sometimes rise from their circle around the fire and join the males in the dance with more graceful movements and motions. This occurs during the ritual. The dancing begins in a humorous manner but gradually builds in seriousness, and by the time night falls, the environment is filled with the songs, sounds, and shouts of the shamans.

It is thought that the shaman's spirit will leave their bodies through the top of their heads when they enter a deep trance state. It would appear that the inhabitants of the rock shelters viewed the walls of the structures as a "veil" that separated this world from the realm of the spirits. These shamans are able to penetrate this curtain, and upon their subsequent return, they brought with them revelations of what was occurring in the world beyond. Even though there is no evidence to suggest that only shamans painted, it is likely that the shaman painted the images coming through into the world of the living as well as the visions of the transformations they experienced in the spirit world. This is despite the fact that there is no evidence to suggest that only shamans painted. Therefore, the walls of the shelters, along with the paintings of the shamans, were gates that offered ordinary people the opportunity to explore realms that they would not have been able to visit otherwise (Lewis Williams 2002a).

The Rock Art of North America

The second case study focuses on the rock art of North America. Ethnographic evidences from the Chumash culture, who lived on the west coast of North America, reveal that magic and otherworldly power played a significant role in the majority of their stories (Blackburn 1975). In point of fact, James Keyser and Whitley (Whitley 2000) have found 19 references in anthropological accounts to a relationship between rock art and

shamanistic vision quests. They are only focusing on the Columbia Plateau region. For instance, Ake Hultkranz (Hultkranz 1987), a member of a community known as the Wind River Shoshoni (Lewis Williams 2002a), who still live in some of their ancestral territories in the Wind River Valley and the Grand Teton, Wyoming, has described vision quests amongst the Shoshoni community, which further corroborates our understanding, as they have a direct historical relationship with the rock art of that region. These vision quest Some additional ethnographic reports (Lewis Williams 2002a) suggest that Native American people believed that rock images were made not by the quester (the shaman), but rather by the spirits that are commonly referred to as 'water babies,' 'rock babies,' or 'mountain dwarves.' These spirits were believed to have created the images. These spirits were thought to be the spirit helpers of shamans, and the only way to see them was in a trance or other altered state of awareness. According to Maurice Zigmond (Zigmond 1986), it is a common belief among the Kawaiisu people who live in south-central California that a spirit known as Rock Baby resided in the rocks and was responsible for creating rock drawings. Therefore, if an individual returned to a rock art site and saw that additional images had appeared during the individual's previous visit, it was believed that the new images were the workmanship of a Rock Baby. If someone touched a rock painting and then rubbed their eyes, it may cause them to lose their ability to sleep and even cause death. Because of this, they believed that the images were more than just visuals; rather, they carried an intrinsic power.

Glenn Ranck discovered in the 1920s that "one night a Wishram medicine man (shaman) used an unknown force to create a pictograph during the night." Glenn Ranck discovered this information. The following morning, his body was discovered in a trance at the base of the pictogram (Keyser and Whitley 2000). As a result of these tales, we now have a better understanding of the connection between shamans and rock art in North America. However, based on ethnographic reports, we should also keep in mind that it was not only shamanistic visions that led to the making of rock art in North America. As we see in Southern California, puberty ceremonies culminated in rock paintings, so this is something that we should keep in mind as well (Lewis Williams 2002a). Boys and girls of all ages in Southern California participated in these rites, where they were taught religious and moral truths as well as appropriate behaviour. In addition to this, they used hallucinogens such as jimsonweed for the lads and tobacco for the girls. The incipients competed against one another in a race to a predetermined rock at the culmination of the ceremonies. It was believed that the winner of the race would live a long and healthy life. After the race, the initiates were tasked with creating rock art images on the surrounding rocks under the direction of shamans (Lewis Williams 2002a).

ROCK ART OF INDIA

Now I will analyse the rock art of India to determine whether or not some of it was created when the artist was in an altered state of consciousness, whether or not shamanism is still practised among the indigenous tribes, and whether or not this leads to the creation of any kind of image. It is interesting to note that some motifs and even topics, to be more exact, are ubiquitous in rock art regardless of the geographical places they are found in. According to the neuropsychological model, these have already been interpreted in the west as symbolic representations generated as part of a ritual that involves shamans. This interpretation is based on previous research. There are also many mysterious geometric marks found in the rock art of India. These signs are sometimes placed on the bodies of animals, and other times they are done separately. The neurological model developed by David Lewis Williams can provide some insight into the meaning of these complex geometric symbols. It is important to keep in mind that entoptic visions are the result of the fundamental neural architecture of the human brain. As a result, anyone who is in a certain altered state of consciousness will have the same experience of entoptic visions, regardless of where they are in the world

or what their cultural upbringing is like (Lewis Williams, 2002a). In addition to geometric figures, there are other depictions, such as bees, monsters, demons, deformed or composite animals (body like boar with trunk like an elephant's), fish, turtles, palm prints, group dances, elaborate head embellishments, individual dancers with raised hands, and above all clustering of a single rock face with number of images. All of these different types of depictions are symbolic and associated with the spiritual quest of the shamans, and they encourage one to speculate. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that sound and music play a significant role in shamanic rituals. This is because they aid in producing a trance by providing hypnotic rhythm, which is one of the characteristics of shamanism (Williams 2002b). As a result, the presence of a variety of musical instruments in the rock art of India contributes further evidence to support this interpretation.

It is important to note, however, that aside from purely shamanistic rituals (for example, intended to cure the sick or to ward off an evil spirit, etc.), academics have proposed a few other scenarios in which rock art was created. Totemic rites (Layton 2000), hunting magic (Turpin 1992), fertility rites, and the recording of astronomical phenomena are among these (Plog 1997). Furthermore, it is thought that local mythology was depicted in the rock art of any particular place at some point in time. These hypotheses are appropriate even in the context of Indian rock art because rock art is a phenomenon that occurs everywhere. For instance, the engraved core from the Upper Palaeolithic that was discovered in Chandravati, Rajasthan (Sonawane 1997) lends credence to the idea that reproductive rituals involved the symbolic representation of a mother goddess. At the Upper Palaeolithic site of Bhagor 1 in Son valley, Madhya Pradesh, evidences of triangular shaped natural sandstone with concentric laminations in the form of triangles were discovered. From this, one might draw the conclusion that these features were found (Kenoyer et.al. 1983). Today, the indigenous Koli and Bhaiga people of the area worship colourful natural stones that are quite similar in appearance as emblems of Mother Goddess.

In India, it is sad that the current tribal and folk groups do not link themselves with such art in their own regions. Instead, they interpret it as the work of bad spirits or legendary heroes (Chakravarty and Bednarik 1997). Some locals, notably Babulal, the senior most person in Miapur hamlet, in the neighbourhood of Bhimbetka rock shelters (central India), have the notion that witches and spirits visit the rock shelters at night to create rock art. Babulal is the most senior person in the village (personal communication). Orissa is located in eastern India, and the people who live there hold the belief that these works of art were created by celestial bodies or ghosts. As a result, they believe that it is impolite to even touch these works of art, and they consider it a taboo to even look at them (Pradhan 2001). However, in order to address the topic of shamanism leading to the production of rock art, it is necessary to take into consideration the reported shamanism that occurred within India. The majority of today's tribal societies continue to make use of shamans as a means of protecting their people from harmful supernatural forces.

TRIBAL ART OF INDIA

It is necessary for us to investigate the indigenous art of India and hunt for any hints or information that may perhaps shed some light on the meaning of rock art. Religious beliefs and rituals of contemporary tribal societies are highly diverse and intricate due to the tribes' long history. However, it is important to keep in mind that these tribal groups have been assimilated and integrated into the rural population, despite the fact that they have maintained their traditional religious and cultural practices. In addition to their own traditions and beliefs, they pay homage to the gods and goddesses of Hinduism and speak the languages spoken in the regions where Hindus have traditionally lived (Aryan 1994). On the other hand, it is interesting to take note of the fact that magico-religious ideas continue to play a significant part in their daily lives. All misfortunes,

diseases, and even death are believed to be caused by malicious spirits, which must be appeased in order to get protection and assistance. Because of this, religion plays a significant part in their life, and this, in turn, is reflected in the art that they create and is utilized in the crafts that they do. Traditionally, tribal art is characterized by its ritualistic nature, its incorporation into the collective consciousness of the tribe, and its adaptability to new circumstances within the tribe.

It is interesting to note that certain motifs present in tribal art are indicative of themes found in rock art. This is something to keep in mind when looking at this topic. For instance, on the 11th day after Diwali, when I went to the village of Miapur, which is the closest locality to the Bhimbetka rock shelters, I noticed several homes with five hand prints and a crescent moon made on the main entrance of the house. In addition, colourful designs consisting of geometric patterns were made on the floor. This was the case during my visit to Miapur village, which was on the 11th day after Diwali.



Fig.1 (Photo by author)

Handprints have also been discovered at several rock art sites, which have been individually examined in the thesis under the 'Human Figures' section (For example, the handprints that were discovered in rock shelter 111 at Bhimbetka are also seen in tribal dwellings). However, we shouldn't give the same meaning to rock art and tribal art because they 'may well be the results of different behavioural process in the past and present.' This is something that we need to keep in mind, despite the fact that certain themes and techniques may appear to be similar between the two types of art (Chakravarty & Bednarik 2017).



Fig.2 (Photo by author)

The fact that rock art and contemporary tribal art share so many similarities is something that fascinates us to no end as observers of both. Although these are unable to give us with the significance of the rock art or the technical intricacies involved in its creation, they are able to show graphic examples of the motifs and designs that were constructed to signify rites and festivals inside India.

CONCLUSION

As a result, we are able to show that shamanism has been practiced all throughout the world as an element of traditional ceremonies. Shamans have been known to achieve their goals through the use of dissociation and other experiences that involve altered states of consciousness, with the assistance of supernatural beings. In this context, it is important to keep in mind that any form of artistic expression have the potential to produce an illusion and to bring the invisible and the unknown into plain view before our very eyes. These wondrous and enchanted properties have prompted every spiritual school to, in some form or another, make use of the enchantment that is found in the arts. This connection will be examined further throughout the rest of this study.

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