

FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN PRIMITIVE ROCK ART IN ANCIENT INDIA: A SOCIAL- ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY

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Introduction

The 'female' in South Asian historical and archaeological studies is generally given a relatively less important place compared to the 'male' and is situated in the background which is understood as 'hidden in history'. The female is often discussed in relation to the 'male' and placed in a secondary position. However, it is essential to situate the female within a problem-oriented context. In view of the material evidence, which is available and new directions developed in theoretical perspectives in social archaeology, it is now possible to offer alternative explanations contextualizing the female in history and this study undertakes, for the first time, an in-depth cross regional study aimed at understanding female representations depicted in primitive rock art in India (Karunarathne, 2008).

Objectives

It is important that we understand how females lived in pre-urban societies. I wish to focus on the changes reflected in social, cultural, economic and ritual background conditioning the status of women. The objective of this study is to investigate the actual nature of female representation and the role of women within primitive societies. (Karunarathne, 2008).

Methodology

The growing body of data retrieved from archaeological collection of

information from primary sources, mainly rock art, provides us with artistic expressions on rock media such as bare surface of caves, rock shelters and boulders (Brooks, and Wakankar, 1976). Rock art in India occurs in many places, right from the *Himalaya* to the tip of the sub-continent, and ranks as one of the six major regions in the world (Sridhar, 2005). This art is recognized as primitive expression due to style and techniques (Adam, 1954). Pre Historic man initiated rock paintings and primitive cultures still practice the tradition (Karunarathne, 2008).

This art appears in several forms such as paintings, etching, engravings and brushing, etc. The early cave man was a nomadic hunter gatherer, whose life was inextricably linked to his physical and natural environment (Powell, 1976). What he saw he reduced to an artistic expression in the caverns that he inhabited (Nandadwe, 1986). They are direct material expressions of primitive concepts and thoughts of primitive cultures. In this study these artistic expressions have been supplemented by local and foreign ethnographic sources in comparative studies. The ethnographic data provides us with a useful corpus of information regarding the female of the prehistoric ages and primitive cultures.

Results

It is remarkable that a large proportion of decorative art is a monopoly of women and a number of important crafts such as weaving and pottery were introduced by women. This takes us on a journey through time and space that explores the visually creative essence of women in prehistoric and other primitive cultures. The accumulation of ancient rock paintings is witness to visual art as a medium of mediating, recording, recounting and a new means of more fully experiencing and the profound women events and changes which have shaped our histories. The role of women in primitive cultures could be indentified in the sources placing her in a wider context of activities. Women are represented in pregnancy, breast feeding, nudity, sexual life, the posture of carrying children and looking after kids. It significantly marks the role of mother and concept of fertility and prosperity. It is significant that the image of the female is represented even in the fighting scenes, hunting, fishing, gathering and carrying food, animal domestication and special crafts. These Art representations clearly indicate that the female has directly involved herself in social activities and marks an outstanding contribution comparable to that of the male. Though historians situated the female in a narrow social spectrum, each of these characters had played a varying role in primitive societies. Her qualitative and quantitative position in domestic activities, contribution towards art and specialized crafts could be retrieved from primitive rock art in India (Karunaratne, 2008).

Conclusion

This research enables us to understand the different roles played by the female and her contribution to society. It enables us to question and dispel many myths about the female in our pre-history. It was believed during primitive society the male played a prominent role. However, information obtained from the present study challenges this firm belief. The data gathered from rock art reveals that the role of women during primitive cultures was equally strong (Karunaratne, 2008). Such new information may be used in a productive manner in contemporary research, thereby helping us to focus on the rights of women and their legitimate position in society.

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