

## **Painted Rock Shelter in Murghazar Sub Valley of Swat**

The art of painting is the expression of ideas and emotions, with the creation of certain aesthetic qualities in a two dimensions. It is an application of colour, pigment or paint to a surface. The painting shapes, lines, colours, tones and textures are used in various ways to produce sensations of volume, space, movement and light on a flat surface. These elements are combined into expressive patterns in order to represents real or supernatural phenomena, to interpret a narrative theme, or to create wholly abstract visual relationships. The artist communicates his visual message in terms of the qualities and expressive possibilities and limitations of a particular medium technique and form.

Painting is an art which originated in prehistoric times. The Palaeolithic artist covered the surfaces of caves and rock's shelters with richly coloured with lifelike birds and mammoths. The paintings of the Neolithic period show a trend to severe geometric designs. Paintings can be found in the caves and shelters of the nomadic hunters. Recently the claim of Upper Palaeolithic paintings is made in Tor Ghar area of Loralai and Sulaiman Ranges of Zhob District in

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Baluchistan province of Pakistan (Kakar 2005: 21-25). At Tor Ghar 20 rock shelters, while in Sulaiman Range 27 rock shelters of paintings were reported in said province of Pakistan. The subject matter of the paintings is fighting and hunting scenes. They represent animals and human painted in red and black on the undressed surfaces of rock-shelters. A few animals are shown in triangular form, rendering the body by two triangles at one corner. This method is typical for the Neolithic and early Bronze Age periods and is commonly used in the rock-engravings of the Upper Indus Valley (Nasim Khan 2000:2).

Evidence of the early Bronze Age paintings so far known in Pakistan is recorded from the terracotta objects and pot-shreds. Painted pottery of different designs has come down to us from the sites of Mohenjo-Daro (Marshall 1931: 37-38), Harappa (Vats 1940: Pl. LXIII.), Amri (Casal 1964: Figs. 9-11), Kot Diji (Khan 1965: Pl. IX, X), Rehman Dheri (Durrani 1981, fig. VI), Kuli Gul Mohammad (Allchin 1985: 101, fig 5-17), Mundigak (Allchin 1985: 135, fig 6.2, 6.3,6.4), Quetta Valley (Fairservis 1956: 78), Bir-kot Ghundai (Stacul 1985: 348) and Ghalegay (Stacul 2005 : 211). Painted designs on the pottery of these sites are geometrical and floral such as wavy lines, triangles, lozenges, diamonds, loops, intersecting circles, honey combs, pipal-leaf, fish scale, radiating sun, stylized animal figures usually bull and ibex, and very rare crude human figures (Sardar 1992: 114). The colour they used was monochrome, bichrome and polychrome such as red, black, white and chocolate. The art of sculpturing had progressed where life-like representation of human beings and animals do occur, but these representations are rare in painted forms.

In 1979 the study of rock paintings in the Upper Indus Valley received special attention of scholars as a heavily painted boulder near Shatial Bridge was reported by Jettmar (Jettmar 1985: 753). He produced figures of Buddha, Bodhisattvas, stupas and other figures (Jettmar 1989: 407, fig. 2). Most important among them are those coming from Baltistan area of Khaplu, Astor Valley and Mehdi Abad (Jettmar 1990: 801). One of the important site famous for Buddhist paintings is Chaghdo situated 20 kms east of Skardu. It reveals fresco paintings of three stupas in traditional Tibetan style with dark red colour. Chaghdo paintings belong to Medieval period (Nazir Khan 1998: 102, fig. 1). Another important place of paintings is Shigar situated about 35 kms north of Skardu (Nasim Khan 2000: 6-11). These painted images are normally accompanied with Brahmi inscriptions of 4<sup>th</sup>- 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

In Gandhara paintings had its own historical development. It falls into three distinct periods separated from each other by a fairly long interval. They are classified into three groups; (i)-Pre-Buddhist paintings (ii) Early Buddhist paintings and (iii) Late Buddhist paintings.

**Pre-Buddhist:** Pre-Buddhist paintings reveal hunting, fighting and ritual representations. At least three rock shelters bearing vestiges of ancient paintings namely Natian, Torai Gata and Swara Gata have so far being documented (Nasim Khan 2000: 15). Natian paintings reveal horse riders, hunting scenes, human and animal figures. The human figures are shown with extended arms. Most of these paintings are executed in red (Nasim Khan 2000: 15). Torai Gata paintings reveal animals, humans figures, hunting and fighting scenes. The figures are shown with simple bold

outlines. The paintings of Swara Gata show a scene of human figures riding, holding banners in their hands and moving in different directions.

**Early Buddhist:** Majority of the Gandhara paintings belongs to the early Buddhist period, mostly human representations and sometimes religious structures like stupa and monastery. Early Buddhist paintings sites are Parlai-Dab, Kafir-kot, and Kala Tassa paintings. Parlai-Dab paintings site is situated about 3 kms northwest of Gidari village in Swabi District. On the surface of shelter a variety of paintings and Kharoshthi and Brahmi inscriptions are painted. Among the figural paintings a *cakras*, geometrical designs, architectural representations and other unidentified figures are reported (Nasim Khan 2000: 24).

Kafir-kot area locally known as Nokkono Ghwand, near Thana village in the Swat Valley, is famous for early Buddhist painted shelters. Four different shelters namely Kafir-kot, Shamo, Marano Tangai and Hinduano Hatai with paintings of early historic period have been reported (Nazir Khan *et al.* 1995: 333). These paintings are include stupas, geometrical designs, animal and human figures, etc. Red pigment, reddish-orange, yellow colours are used in painting applied directly to the undressed surfaces of the shelters. These paintings are dated between 1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. (Vidale & Olivieri 2002: 189)

Kala Tassa cave is situated near Peshawri village between Mansehra and Thakot. Paintings are Buddhist in character with Kharoshthi inscriptions. It reveals paintings of two stupas with several monasteries. The stupa is shown with a drum where a seated figure of a Buddha is in meditation. Railing of the stupa is shown with horizontal and vertical

beams. The dome is conical in shape filled with red colour, showing *harmika* supporting a *yasti* with a single umbrella. On both sides of the stupa are two lion capitals. Different animals like rabbit, pig, horse, goat, chicken and birds are identified. A Kharoshthi inscription is painted on both sides of the *chatras*. (Nasim Khan 2000: 33). Recently a chance discovery of Mural paintings from the Buddhist monastery of Jinan Wali Dheri (Taxila) is stated as unique phenomena in the whole of Gandhara region (Ashraf & Hasan 2004; 20).

**Late Buddhist:** The late Buddhist painted shelters are Patvano Gata and Babuzai, the former is located in the mountain range separating Suddham Valley from District Buner. The paintings are a few yards to the west of Tanure village, accessible from Ambela Police Station on walk. It is a group of three images: a *Dhyani* Buddha flanked by two Bodhisattvas. These paintings are dated between 4<sup>th</sup> -5<sup>th</sup> century A. D. (Nasim Khan 2000: 36).

The Babuzai paintings situated in the mountain range separating Suddham Valley from Shamozaï and Babuzai, where painted shelters are locally known as Barai-Uba and Ramanrai (Nasim Khan 2000: 69). These shelters are situated near ancient tracks and historic passes which connect Gandhara with the outside countries, especially to the Upper Indus Valley where paintings and carvings show Central Asian, Iranian, Chinese and Indian influences.

**Ancient Paintings in Uddiyana:** In Swat from the site of Butkara-I a fragment of Buddhist painting was discovered, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B. C., and was considered as the earliest specimen ever recovered from Buddhist

establishment (Faccenna 1981: fig. I & L). Later on in 1990 the existence of cave with paintings was reported in the Kafir-kot area at site of Nokkono Ghwand near Thana village. The paintings reveal 8 stupas, a human figure, animal, drawings of men and riders, archers and horsemen (Nazir Khan 1994: 213-14). The paintings of Kafir-kot site represent nine human figures, three stupas representation and a horseman with bow (Nazir Khan *et al.* 1995: 336). Marano-tangai shelter reveals a set of abstract symbols, squares intersected by a cross and square filled with a single dot (Nazir Khan *et al.* 1995: fig. 14).

Subsequently the IsMEO Mission started survey of the Kafir-kot area with collaboration of Pakistani colleagues for detail studies of painted shelters in the area. During survey of the area signs of the paintings were reported from the sites of Hinduanohatai, Shamo and Marano-tangai. Paintings of Hinduanohatai reveal Buddhist Stupas, while paintings of Shamo site shows men with weapons, a horse and a stupa ( Vidale & Oliveri 2002: 189). On the bases of Buddhist architectural representations all these sites were dated between 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century A. D.(Nazir Khan *et al.* 1995: 350; Oliveri 2005: 215).

Further more in 2000 the Mission discovered three painted rock shelters in Sargah-sar, Kalkai-kandao and Dwolasmannai-patai (Vidale & Olivieri 2002: 173) in Kandag Valley. Sargah-sar paintings reveal, human figures carrying weapons, animals and elaborate geometric symbols are clustered (Vidale & Olivieri 2002: 183). Paintings of Kakai-kandao shelter represent crowded designs, vivid composition of animals, humans and geometric patterns (Vidale & Olivieri 2002: 186). Dwolasmannai-patai shelter show complex, irregular geometric pattern and human carrying weapons

(Vidale & Olivieri 2002: 188). All these shelters are located far from Buddhist sacred areas, and this differs in respect from those already known near Thana village. They are dated between 1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> century A. D. Painted shelters of Kafir-Kot area and Kandag Valley so far recorded by the ISIAO mission belong to a single cultural framework (Vidale & Olivieri 2002: 189). Kafir-kot was attributed to the historic period because of the presence of pictograms of Buddhist architecture and mounted horses. While painted shelters of the Kandag region seem to have no relationship with the Buddhist cultural settlements of the Valley. These paintings are monochromatic and executed using red ochre oxides, often applied with fingers (Oliveri 2005: 216).

The paintings and drawings of Kafir Kot and Kandag areas, done in brick-red colour can still be seen on the lower part of a huge rock shelters near Thana village. They depict hunters, riders and mostly Buddhist stupas. Few of them are quite parallel to the paintings and drawings of Upper Indus Valley. The discovery of two elaborate painted depictions of hunters in Gurikot (Astor Valley) by the German scholars, provide supplementary evidence for the existence of strong cultural links between Swat and Upper Indus Valley.

### **Newly discovered Painted Shelter of Kaferi Smasta at Murghazar Sub-valley**

This shelter is located in Charoona Dara locality to the south of present Kukrai village in Murghazar sub-valley of district Swat. This shelter is about 3 kms south of Kukrai village situated on the crest of Gishar hill in west of Mt. Ilam. The shelter is accessible through a pedestrian path from Kokrai village and is locally known as Kaferi Smasta (shelter), with paintings of hunters and human figures. It is semi circular in

shape, about 1.50m in depth and 5m height open to southeast side.

The images are painted on the right side wall of the shelter only, with a mud pigment. On the right side wall where the ceiling begins to slope down reveal seven figures and representation of a monument, most probably a stupa. To facilitate description of the paintings, it may be divided into two groups although they make up a uniform composition. On top is a person standing in front of monument in akimbo position. The stairs like structure/monument, branches out on top, almost like vertical antennae represents a stupa. A vertical monument with a six stages structure and a human figure on top of it reveals close similarity with that of Upper Indus Valley site of Hodar. This monument, in my opinion can be related with the so-called derivative stupa (Jettmar 1985: fig. 13).

Human figures at the bottom are standing frontally in different positions. All figures have opened wide hands and legs. It seems that they are celebrating a hunting scene. The technique most commonly used for the painting is that of outlined figures, but human figures are more realistic on the wall of the shelter. All the human figures hold a weapon, a tool or attribute: a bow, or a club in their hands. The human figures of Kaferi Smasta reveal resemblance to the painting of Dwolasmane-patai shelter of Kandag Valley and can be dated between 1<sup>st</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> century A. D.(Oliveri 2005: 220).

All these objects were probably painted with a finger or using white ochre. The original paintings were in white, and faint white line remains visible and round figures are subsequently repainted in yellow. Kaferi Smasta paintings are in a yellowish cream shade, which at times can be made to look pink. However, the shelter's greater exposure to the



weather is responsible for fading of many of the paintings. Shepherds have frequently utilized the site for shelter, the fleece of their flocks rubbed paintings from the walls, or smoke from their fires has made the colours light. All these objects were probably painted with a finger or drawn with white mud colour. It seems that mineral pigments, which provided colouring matter, were not applied directly but were used in solution or suspension.

**Chronology and Dating:** In the absence of C14 dates, the paintings cannot be dated precisely. But on the basis of other antiquities, surveyed and documented in immediate vicinity, these can be assigned to an approximate date of the Patvano Gata paintings. Among these discoveries, the most important, of course, are the epigraphical records. Paleographically they belong to 4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> century A. D. (Nasim Khan 2000: 67). The Gupta period inscriptions near Babuzai suggest that all these antiquities might belong to 4<sup>th</sup> -6<sup>th</sup> century A. D. The art of painting appears to have attained the degree of excellence almost equal to that of stone carvings in the area. It is also clear that the skill of the painter in the region of Gandhara reached its height during 4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> century A. D.

The mixture of Indian and Central Asian influence in these paintings confirms that the region of Gandhara was not only geographically but also historically and culturally linked by caravan routes and trade relations. In addition to other archaeological discoveries especially in the Upper Indus Valley, these paintings make it clear that apart from the cultural ties as mentioned above this region had close links with China also.

The moisture and exposure of the air did not affect the paintings but it is in fact by the locals who damage most of the paintings in the area. The region of Gandhara needs to be scanned out properly to document all these paintings before antique dealers or human vandalism.

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## **PLATES OF THE PAINTINGS**



**Painted Shelter of Kaferi Smasta**



## **Paintings of Kaferi Smasta**





**Paintings of Kaferi Smasta**

