

## **Embark on a Captivating Journey into Ladakh's Untold Tales with "Speaking Stones: Rock Art of Ladakh"**

Photographer and writer Ahtushi Deshpande presents "Speaking Stones: Rock Art of Ladakh," a profound journey delving into the cultural heritage of India's northernmost union territory – Ladakh! After more than ten years of extensive travel across this expansive region, Deshpande unveils this masterpiece, drawing from a personal archive containing thousands of images.

The title *Speaking Stones* signifies the ancient petroglyphs that act as a visual language, telling stories of bygone eras through the permanence of rock. Inspired by these sacred engravings, the book examines how these artworks offer insights into the lives, beliefs, and environment of early human societies. Each petroglyph represents a dialogue between people and their surroundings, preserved in stone for millennia. Through this visual exploration, the author seeks to highlight how these ancient symbols bridge the gap between the past and present, revealing the timeless bond we share with our environment.

The book invites readers on a captivating journey through Ladakh's hidden petroglyph galleries as it meticulously captures them through artful photography and insightful text. These ancient imprints, scattered across Ladakh's remote corners, serve as the first stamps of human civilization and communication found here. Etched into the very fabric of the landscape, these engravings date back thousands of years, offering a testament to our rich history and cultural legacy.

Rock art transcends time and geography, offering insights into the cultural, spiritual, and artistic expressions of our ancestors. Each depiction provides a window into ancient communities' daily lives, rituals, beliefs, and experiences, enriching our understanding of human history and evolution. Beyond its aesthetic and historical significance, "Speaking Stones" champions a compelling conservation narrative.

The book serves as a valuable record for posterity, enabling the conservation of a fast-depleting resource. It is a collector's item that promises enduring shelf life, appealing to travelers, academics, history enthusiasts, art lovers, and antiquarians alike.

Above all, "Speaking Stones" brings this unique art form to life, offering a curated gallery from locations that are often challenging to access. It serves as an armchair travel guide to a vast outdoor museum of fantastic art etched on the canvas of stone, fostering appreciation and respect for the rich tapestry of human experience.

*Speaking Stones* is an invitation to find a renewed appreciation for the quiet yet powerful presence of the natural world and to recognize the stories embedded in the seemingly mundane.

Embark on this captivating journey into Ladakh's ancient echoes via "Speaking Stones: Rock Art of Ladakh," and discover the enduring legacy of our ancient ancestors carved into the very fabric of the land.

### **Highlights:**

#### **ChatGPT said:**

1. **Man and his Environment:** "*Speaking Stones*" unveils the mysteries of Ladakh's ancient petroglyphs, showcasing a profound dialogue between nature's grandeur and enduring human creativity across generations.
2. **Unique Photo Documentation:** As the pioneering photographic documentation in Ladakh undertaken for the first time in India by a mainstream photographer and travel journalist, "*Speaking Stones*" employs innovative techniques, notably using night photography at petroglyph sites for the first time in the region's history.
3. **Inaugural Book:** This pioneering work, the first of its kind to encompass the entire Ladakh region, is an original creation and curation reflecting the author's personal aesthetics. It is designed with considerations of distribution, creative range, and stylistic diversity. Not only did the author self-publish the book with the help of crowdfunding and philanthropic support, but she also designed the entire layout herself.
4. **Exploration:** The book elevates Ladakh beyond the ordinary, unveiling hidden stories and historical links with neighboring regions. After 18 visits to Ladakh, with 14 visits conducted specifically for this project, the author has compiled a comprehensive collection of Ladakh's petroglyph panels, uniting them for the first time.
5. **Challenging Endeavor:** Perhaps the toughest task undertaken for this art has been Ahtushi's in-depth research through academic papers on Ladakh's rock art, as well as studies from around the world and neighboring countries. Her goal has been to present this research for public understanding, a feat she hopes to have accomplished with this work.
6. **Recognition and Exhibitions:** Ahtushi Deshpande's work has gained international acclaim, featured in exhibitions in Paris and recognized among the top 80 Indian photographers in a book and exhibition celebrating 75 years of Indian photography titled '*Dhrishti*' by India Photo Archive Foundation. She has hosted solo exhibitions, including "*The Colour of my Cancer*" and "*therefore I climb....*"

7. **Conservation Catalyst:** "*Speaking Stones*" champions a compelling conservation narrative, advocating for the preservation of Ladakh's cultural and historical sites, many of which are deserving candidates for UNESCO World Heritage status. Emphasizing the importance of preserving shared ancestral heritage, "*Speaking Stones*" becomes a crucial tool in conserving Ladakh's historical legacy.
8. **Personalized Touch:** The book offers a personalized perspective on Ladakh's cultural richness through maps, personal journeys, and distinctive photographic art. Emphasizing the importance of preserving shared ancestral heritage, "*Speaking Stones*" becomes a crucial tool in conserving Ladakh's historical legacy.

### Book Launch and Presentations

- **Initial Launch:** Online release on the *Speaking Stones* website, June 2024
  - **Official Release:** Held at the India Habitat Centre on July 25th, supported by Kri Foundation and Himalayan Environment Trust (HET)
  - **Active Participation:** Talks at IGNC A and the inaugural 'Lalka' event in Delhi
  - **Upcoming Presentations:**
    - Talk at IIC on September 9th
    - Presentation at Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum in Mumbai (date TBD)
  - **Additional Events:**
    - Confirmed participation in the Bhopal Literature Festival
    - Interest from Museo Camera and IGNC A for future exhibitions
9. **Upcoming Paris Exhibition:** "*Speaking Stones*" is scheduled for a two-month exhibition in Paris, at Edmond Rostand Media Library, supported by the City of Paris, in November 2024. Ahtushi also participated in a group exhibition at the Humathèque in Paris (September 2023) showcasing her petroglyph work from Ladakh.
  10. **Transformation of Ladakh's Heritage:** "*Speaking Stones*" embodies a transformative journey that not only preserves Ladakh's cultural legacy but also catalyzes vital conservation efforts, aiming to empower initiatives safeguarding the region's heritage.

### The Personal Story of resilience and discovery

Ahtushi Deshpande's captivating journey led her to uncover Ladakh's hidden treasures of enigmatic rock art over nearly two decades. Venturing across the formidable high-altitude desert, she embarked on 18 expeditions since her first step into Ladakh in 2005. Her explorations were marked by solitary forays on foot, multi-day treks, extensive drives, exhilarating rafting along the Zaskar river, and even aerial sorties over Ladakh's majestic mountains, sculpted to perfection by nature's hand. Initially drawn by Ladakh's stunning landscapes, Ahtushi's fascination deepened when she encountered her first petroglyph gallery in 2011—a profound connection with ancient art etched onto unforgiving surfaces, showcasing remarkable artistic prowess. Thus ignited an adventure fueled by curiosity, driving Ahtushi to delve deeper into the mysterious petroglyphs scattered across Ladakh. Over a decade, she meticulously documented these ancient artworks, racing against time as many vanished

before her lens, preserved only within the pages of her book. Ahtushi's unparalleled photo documentation spans Ladakh's highest passes to its coldest, scarcely inhabited regions. From humble homestays to braving bitter cold nights in her tent, her relentless pursuit of these sites knew no bounds.. Ahtushi's journey is not merely about documenting ancient art; it is a testament to the power of the human spirit and the enduring bond between people and their land. It is about the wisdom of ancient people and the enduring tales they left behind through engravings on stone in Ladakh's several open-air galleries.

Despite facing three cancer diagnoses, she persisted with her work and managed to complete and release the book while undergoing treatment for her third encounter with the disease, demonstrating her firm belief in the power of mind over matter.

**Pre-orders and Release:** Online orders for the book are available at the speaking stones website. Be part of this cultural journey that captivates, conserves, and celebrates Ladakh's history.

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[www.speakingstonesladakh.com](http://www.speakingstonesladakh.com) (upcoming are backroom stories, behind the scenes and archive of the work beyond the pages of the book)

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