

Pre-historic Cultures in India

Background

Three different phases:

- **Prehistory:** The period of human evolution before writing was invented and records kept.
 - Characterized by rudimentary tools, artifacts, and early human practices→Reflects interaction with the environment.
 - Archaeology is the primary source of prehistory knowledge.
 - Contributions also come from biology, paleontology, geology, anthropology, linguistics, and genetics.
- **Protohistory:** Transitional phase between prehistory and history.
 - Characterized by undecipherable written records
 - However, the presence of inscriptions, seals, and symbols that indicate communication and organization within society.
 - In India, the phase of Proto-History encompasses the period roughly spanning from 3000 B.C. to 600 B.C.
- **History:** phase after invention of writing.
 - Characterized by an abundance of extensively documented written records that offer a thorough insight into past societies, events, and individuals.

Human Evolution

Species	Time Period	Characteristic Features
Australopithecus	5.5 million to 1.5 million years ago.	Bipedal; pot-bellied; very small braincase, measuring 400 cubic centimeters
Homo habilis	2-1.5 million years ago	Braincase measuring 500-700 cubic centimeters
Homo erectus	1.8 to 1.6 million years ago	Strongly built skull; braincase measuring 800-1200 cubic centimeters.
Homo Sapiens	230,000 to 30,000 years ago	Large rounded braincase, lack of a brow-ridge, a chin, and a narrow pelvis compared to other species in the Homo genus.
Homo Sapiens Sapiens	115,000 years ago,	Modern human beings; only living members of the genus homo; large rounded braincase measuring 1200-2000 cubic centimeters.

The First Humans in India

- Two competing versions exist regarding when Homo sapiens first arrived in India: the "**early version**" and the "**late version**."
 - The early version suggests that they arrived between 74,000 to 120,000 years ago from Africa through the Arabian Peninsula with Middle Stone Age tools.
 - The late version posits a much later arrival, around 50,000 to 60,000 years ago, with more advanced microlithic tools.
- **Important Fossil Records**
 - **Ramapithecus (female) and Sivapithecus (female)**
 - Earliest skull fossils found in the Potwar plateau (in the Siwalik Hills), situated in the Punjab province of Pakistan;
 - believed to be around 2.2 million years old.
 - **Narmada Man**
 - Found on the banks of River Narmada at Hathnora in Madhya Pradesh
 - Recognized as archaic Homo sapiens.

Influence of Geographical Setting

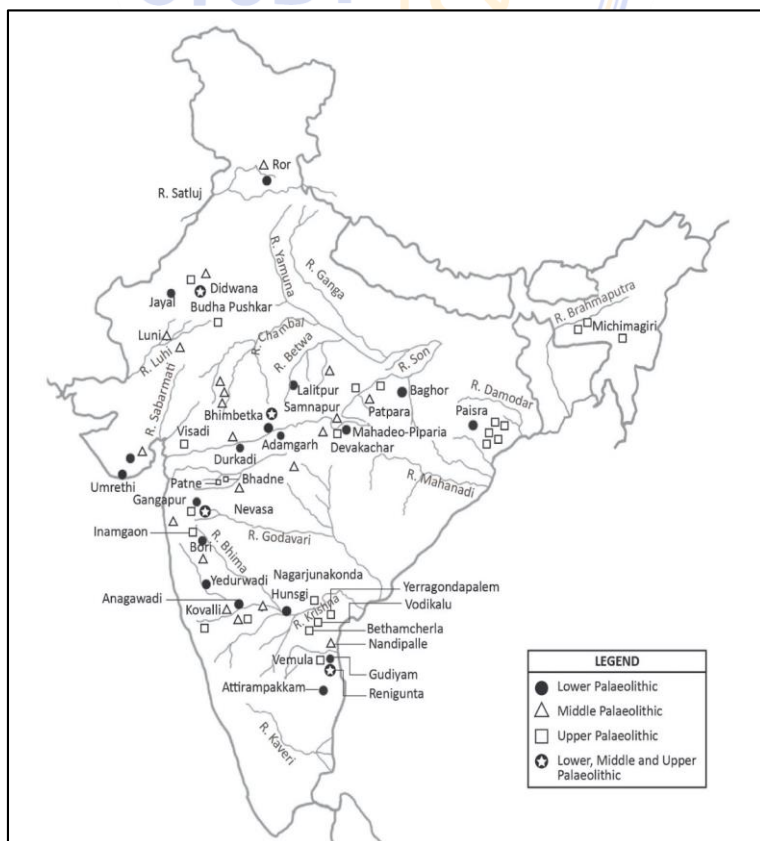
- **Climate and Rivers:** Semi-arid climate of Sind region and rivers like Indus and Saraswati aided irrigation, transportation, and urban settlement growth in the Harappan civilization.
- **Strategic Location:** Pataliputra thrived due to its location near the Ganges, Son, and Gandak rivers, offering natural defenses, communication routes, and fertile plains.
- **Resource Potential:** Geography affects resources: forested regions offer timber, coastal areas provide seafood, and mineral-rich hills enable metallurgy (E.g., Magadha was located near iron ore mines and sources of stone and timber in the Chotanagpur plateau).
- **Subsistence Patterns:** Fertile river plains allow surplus crop production, fostering trade. Soil type determines crops, and surplus drives exchange activities and large-scale trade.
- **Trade and Communication:** Navigable rivers, mountain passes and coastal routes enabled trade in ancient India. (E.g., Palghat Pass linked the east and west coasts of India and facilitated Indo-Roman trade in ancient times)

Prehistoric Cultures in India

- As the initial tools used by humans were made from stones, this stage of human development is referred to as the **Stone Age**.
- The Indian Stone Age is divided into three categories based on geological age, stone tool type and technique, and sustenance base.
 - Old Stone Age or Palaeolithic Age (5,00,000–10,000 BC)
 - Middle Stone Age or Mesolithic Age (10,000–4000 BC)
 - New Stone Age or Neolithic Age (7,000–1000 BC)

Paleolithic Age (Old Stone Age)

- Based on advancements in techniques for crafting tools, changes in hunting and foraging methods, and the nature of climate change, the Palaeolithic age is categorized into **three different phases**: the Lower, Middle, and Upper Palaeolithic.



Age	Time period	Characteristic Features	Important Sites in India
Lower Palaeolithic	600,000 to 150,000 BC -Covers greater part of ice age.	Tools: Large sized tools such as hand axes, cleavers, chopping tools, polyhedrons, etc. Two principal tool-making cultures: • Soan Culture: chopper chopping tool tradition, found in Soan valley, Punjab. • Acheulian Culture: Also known as the Madras culture, it is the Hand-axe tool tradition found in Indian peninsular region. Habitation: inhabited open-air locations, rock shelters, or caves, in proximity to water sources, food and raw materials for tools. Sustenance: food gathering, small game hunting and also ate fish and birds.	Soan Valley (Punjab in Pakistan), Belan Valley (Mirzapur in U.P.), Narmada Valley (Madhya Pradesh), Didwani (Rajasthan), Bhimbetka (Madhya Pradesh), Singrauli Basin (Uttar Pradesh), Chhotanagpur Basin (Jharkhand).
Middle Palaeolithic	150,000 to 35,000 BC	Tools: smaller and thinner tools; characterized by flake tool industry . Tool types: small and medium-sized hand-axes, cleavers and various kinds of scrapers, borers, and knives. • Nevasan Culture: Middle Palaeolithic tool making industry found in central and peninsular India; named after the Nevasa site (in Maharashtra), where the renowned archaeologist H. D. Sankalia first discovered Middle Palaeolithic tools. Habitation: open air sites, rock shelters and caves	Bankura and Purulia (West Bengal), Nevasa, Nodur, Madhmeshwar, Suregaon (Maharashtra), Malaprabha Basin and Ghatprabha Basin (Karnataka), Didwana and Budha Pushkar (Rajasthan), Bhimbetka (M.P.), Narmada, Godavari, Krishna, Yamuna River Valley

		near to food, water and raw material sources. Sustenance: hunters and gatherers.	
Upper Palaeolithic	35,000 to 10,000 BC -Coincides with the last phase of Ice Age -Marks the appearance of Modern Humans (Homo sapiens sapiens)	Tools: The basic technological innovation → method of producing parallel sided blades from a carefully prepared core. Main tool types scrapers, points, awls, burins, borers, knives, etc. Habitation: open air sites, rock shelters and caves. Sustenance: hunters and gatherers. Rock Art: The early paintings primarily featuring simple human figures, human activities, geometric designs, and symbols. Important examples of early rock painting sites in India: Lakhudiyar in Uttarakhand, Kupgallu in Telangana, Piklihal and Tekkalkotta in Karnataka, and Bhimbetka and Jogimara in Madhya Pradesh, among others.	Kurnool (A.P.), Meralbhavi (Karnataka), Baghor-I and Baghor-3 (Central M.P.), southern U.P, south Bihar plateau, Gujarat, Patne (Maharashtra), Cave shelters at Bhimbetka.

Mesolithic Age (Middle Stone Age)

- Phase of transition between the earlier phase of hunting and gathering seen in the Palaeolithic age and the subsequent shift to farming and herding during the Neolithic age.
- Aligns with the onset of the Holocene epoch-characterized by a warmer climate, melting of glaciers and a resultant change in flora and fauna.

Characteristic Features

- **Microliths** (small stone tools) made from materials like silica, chalcedony, and chert, used for composite tools like spearheads and arrowheads.
 - **Non-microlithic tools**, such as flakes, cores, and blades, were also used.
- A shift towards **semi-nomadic lifestyles** occurred, with a transition from hunting large animals to smaller ones using bows and arrows.
- Evidence of **crop domestication** exists, with Mesolithic communities practicing agriculture alongside hunting and gathering → e.g. Sites in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Rajasthan.
- **Domestication of animals**, like dogs, sheep, and goats, began → evidence from Adamgarh and Bagor.
- Mesolithic **rock art**, found in sites like Bhimbetka and Adamgarh, reflects cultural and social advancements.
- **Interactions with Chalcolithic cultures**, including trade → evidences at Bagor and Langhnaj (copper arrowheads linked to the Harappan Civilization).

Important Mesolithic Sites in India

Sites	Location
Bhimbetka Rock Shelters	Madhya Pradesh
Bagor Village	Rajasthan
Langhnaj Village	Gujarat
Sarai Nahar Rai	Uttar Pradesh
Adamgarh Cave	Madhya Pradesh
Deccan College Archaeological Site	(Pune) Maharashtra
Bhagimori Site	Rajasthan
Chaturbhujnath Nala	Madhya Pradesh
Baghpat Site	Uttar Pradesh
Roopkund Lake	Himalayas
Rakhi garhi	Haryana
Moharana Pahara	Uttar Pradesh



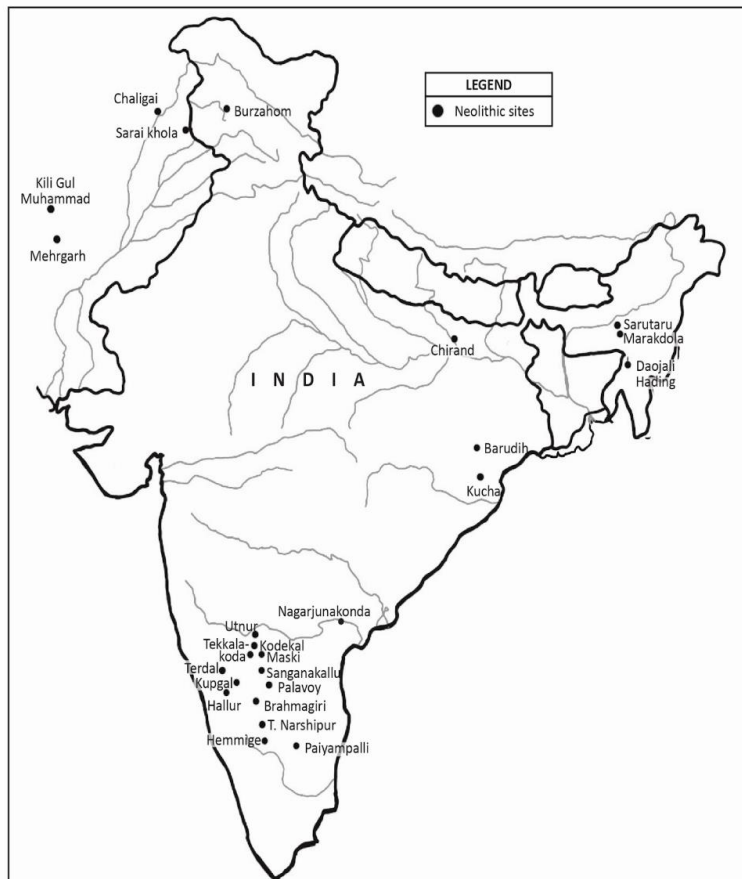
Neolithic Age (New Stone Age)

- Profound changes in human society, technology, and cultural practices.
- The primary trait that sets the Neolithic Age apart from the other cultures of the Stone Age is deliberate food-production, as opposed to mere food-gathering, as the means of subsistence.
- The oldest Neolithic settlement within the Indian subcontinent, dated to approximately 7000 BC, is located in Mehrgarh, in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan.

- Neolithic settlements in South India are generally believed to date back to around 2500 BC, while Neolithic sites discovered on the northern slopes of the Vindhyas Mountain range are not more ancient than 5000 BC.
- Some Neolithic sites found in certain parts of Eastern India and South India that are as recent as 1000 BC.

Characteristic Features

- Neolithic people were **early farmers**, growing crops like ragi, rice, wheat, and barley, while continuing to hunt, gather, and fish.
- **Domestication of sheep, goats, and cattle** was common; cattle were used for farming and transport.
- **Innovations in stone tools** included ground, pecked, and polished axes, mainly for agricultural use.
- **Sedentary lifestyle** emerged, with people living in mud and reed houses, either circular or rectangular.
- **Pottery, initially handmade and later crafted with foot wheels**, was introduced for storing grains and cooking.
- **Trade began**, as evidenced by items like beads and bangles from Burzahom, showing contact with nearby regions.
- **Village communities** formed, with a **division of labor** based on sex and age due to the shift to food production.
- **Neolithic rock art** featured geometric symbols and paintings, including the first depictions of humped bulls.
- **Spinning and weaving developed**, with evidence of textiles from Burzahom pointing to a growing industry.
- **Burial practices varied by region**, reflecting evolving cultural and religious beliefs.



Regional Distribution of Neolithic Sites

Region	Major Sites
Northwestern Region (Pakistan and Afghanistan)	Mehrgarh (Kacchi plains), Kili Gul Muhammad (Quetta valley), Rana Ghundai (Loralai valley), Anjira (Surab valley).
Northern Region (Kashmir)	Burzahom, Gufkral, Kanispor.

Region Along Vindhyan Hills and River Valleys of Belan and Ganga	ChopaniMando, Koldihwa, Lehuradeva, Mahagara (Ganga valley).
Mid-Eastern Ganga Valley Region	Chirand (on Ghagra river banks), Chechar, Senuwar (near Sasaram), Taradih.
Central-Eastern Region	Kuchai, Golbaisasan, Sankarjang.
Northeastern India	Marakdola, Daojali Hading, Sarutaru (Assam).
South India	Sanganakallu, Kodekal, Budihal, Tekkalakota, Brahmagiri, Maski, T. Narsipur, Piklihal, Watkal, Hallur (Karnataka); Utnur, Pallavoy, Nagarjunakonda, Ramapuram, Veerapuram (Andhra Pradesh); Paiyyampalli (Tamil Nadu).

Chalcolithic Age (Copper Age)

- Crucial transitional phase in human civilization, bridging the gap between the Neolithic and Bronze Ages→coexistence of copper and stone tools during this age.
- In India, the Chalcolithic Period spanned from approximately 2000 BC to 700 BC→more widespread during the pre-Harappan period; persisted into the post-Harappan era.
 - Closely associated with farming communities such as Kayatha, Ahar or Banas, Malwa, and Jorwe.

Characteristic Features

Trade:

- Traded materials using wheeled bullock carts and river transport. E.g., Ahar people supplied copper tools to Malwa and Gujarat.

Religion:

- Worshipped the mother goddess and the bull; E.g., The Mother Goddess is depicted on a huge storage jar of Malwa culture
- Fire worship→fire altars have been found
- Belief in life after death →funerary objects found with burials of Malwa and Jorwe people.

Economy and Technology:

- Primarily agriculturalists
- Progress in ceramic technology→use of painted pottery, which were well fired in a kiln



- Progress in metal technology → Metal tools were mostly made up of copper obtained from the Khetri mines of Rajasthan; gold ornament found only in Jorwe culture.
- **Copper Hoard Culture:**
 - Copper Hoards consists of weapons, tools, and the objects of worship.
 - Copper harpoon was first discovered from Bithur in Kanpur.
 - Largest found in Gungeria in Madhya Pradesh.

Chalcolithic Cultures in India and their Features

Culture	Period	Features	Sites
Ahar-Bans Culture	2000 - 1400 B.C.	• Distinctive black and redware pottery, including flaring rim pots and dishes. • Advanced metallurgy, with extensive use of copper. • Practiced agriculture, including rice cultivation. • Evidence of trade with Harappan cities.	Ahar, Gilund, Balathal (Rajasthan).
Kayatha Culture	2000 - 1800 B.C.	• Threefold ceramic tradition: black and red ware with geometric designs, red slipped ware, and chocolate slipped ware. • Mix of hunting-gathering and agriculture. • Copper and stone tools discovered. • Some sites show signs of fortifications.	Kayatha, Chichali (Madhya Pradesh).
Malwa Culture	1700 - 1200 B.C. in Central India and 1700 -1400 B.C. in Maharashtra	• Malwa ware pottery: fine finish, thick slip, geometric designs in black on red. • Varied shapes: bowls, dishes, vases. • Evidence of wheat, barley, and animal domestication. • Widespread trade, possibly with the Harappan civilization.	Daimabad, Inamgaon, Kayatha, Nagda, Vidisha, Eran, Mandsaur, and Navdatoli
Savalda Culture	c. 2000-1800 BC	• Stone foundation houses indicate	Savalda, Prakash (Maharashtra).

		permanent settlements. • Copper and stone tools: axes, adzes, chisels. • Agriculture included bajra cultivation. • Evidence of animal domestication.	
Jorwe Culture	c. 1400-700 BC	• Ochre-colored pottery: flat-bottomed bowls and dishes with painted designs. • Strong fortifications suggest organized defense. • Evidence of social hierarchy and trade. • Agriculture: pulses, wheat, and barley cultivation.	Jorwe, Daimabad, Inamgaon (Maharashtra)
Prabhas and Rangpur Culture	Prabhas (c. 2000-1400 BC), Rangpur (c. 2200-1500 BC)	• Micaceous redware pottery: thick and sturdy. • Agricultural economy with significant trade activity. • Rangpur culture: well-polished redware, advanced agriculture, varied diet. • Pottery links to the Harappan civilization.	Prabhas Patan, Rangpur (Gujarat).

Limitations of Chalcolithic Culture

- Archaeological record shows a high mortality rate among infants and young children, indicative of widespread diseases and malnutrition
 - Suggests communities endured periods of significant hardship, aggravated due to their limited farming capabilities and dietary restrictions.
- The knowledge of metallurgy was rudimentary
- Reliance on copper restricted their technological advancements.
- Inability to create and use bronze implements constrained their agricultural, societal, and military development.

PYQs

Prelims

The word 'Denisovan' is sometimes mentioned in media in reference to (2019)

- Fossils of a kind of dinosaur.
- An early human species.
- A cave system found in North-East India.
- A geological period in the history of Indian subcontinent

Answer: (b)

Mains

Q. Explain the role of geographical factors towards the development of Ancient India. (10 marks, 150 words) (2023)

