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Q1(b)

Mesolithic rock art in Indian subcontinent

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Anthropology GS 1 · 10 marks · Mesolithic

(ii) Mesolithic

Core demand of the question

- Write a note on Mesolithic rock art in the Indian subcontinent
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length of about 150 words

Revision summary

Mesolithic paintings sit on Indian sandstone and granite shelters.

Bhimbetka, recorded by Wakankar, is the central cluster.

Scenes show hunt, dance, and early animal management.

Microlith floors tie the pictures to a foraging economy.

The art is ritual and record, not a later doodle.

Introduction

Mesolithic rock art in India is painted and engraved on sandstone and granite shelters. It records hunting, gathering, and early herding after the Pleistocene.

Body**Sites and style**

- **Bhimbetka** in the Vindhyas, notified by **V. S. Wakankar**, carries Mesolithic hunting scenes in red and white, later overpainted in historic layers.
- Other clusters include **Adamgarh**, **Pachmarhi**, **Mirzapur**, **Lakhudiyar** in Uttarakhand, and **Kurnool** and **Edakkal** in the south.
- **Figures are dynamic:** deer, boar, bison, dancers, and honey-gatherers. Superimposition shows long use of the same wall.

Meaning

- **D. H. Gordon** and later **Erwin Neumayer** read the art as a living record, not as idle decoration.
- **Microliths**, occupancy floors, and faunal bone at the same shelters link the pictures to a foraging economy that was already managing animals in some valleys.
- The art is evidence of cognition and group ritual. It is not a cartoon of the Neolithic.

Flow diagram

Mesolithic rock art -> Bhimbetka Wakankar
Mesolithic rock art -> Adamgarh Pachmarhi Lakhudiyar
Mesolithic rock art -> Hunt dance herd

Conclusion

Indian Mesolithic rock art is a shelter archive of hunt, dance, and early herd. **Bhimbetka** is the type site, but the style is subcontinental.

Facts & figures

Bhimbetka

A UNESCO rock-shelter complex in Madhya Pradesh with Mesolithic hunting scenes under later historic paintings.

V. S. Wakankar

Identified and reported the Bhimbetka shelters, which made Indian Mesolithic art a world file.

Microliths

Small backed tools of the same period found on shelter floors, linking art to a foraging toolkit.

Lakhudiyar

Uttarakhand paintings of humans and animals extend the Mesolithic art map beyond the Vindhyas.

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