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Q1(d)

Prehistoric rock arts from Uttarakhand

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Anthropology GS 2 · 10 marks · Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization

1.1 Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization-Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic), Protohistoric (Indus Civilization). Pre-Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan cultures. Contributions of the tribal cultures to Indian civilization.

Core demand of the question

- Write a note on prehistoric rock arts from Uttarakhand
- Name the main localities, motifs, and chronology as far as evidence allows
- Place them in Himalayan prehistory
- Keep the note within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Lakhudiyar near Almora is the type painted shelter of Uttarakhand.

Other Kumaon overhangs include **Lwethap**, **Petshal**, and **Falsima**.

Motifs are humans, animals, dancers, and geometric signs in red, white, and black.

Yashodhar Mathpal and **K. P. Nautiyal** documented the province.

Chronology is mainly relative, from Mesolithic-like to later Holocene overlays.

Introduction

Uttarakhand holds painted rock shelters in the Kumaon hills. They are a Himalayan province of Indian rock art, smaller than the Vindhyan belt, but important for settlement in the mid-altitude valleys.

Body

Localities

- **Lakhudiyar** (also written Lakhu Udyar) near Almora is the best-known painted shelter, with humans, animals, and geometric signs in red, white, and black.
- Other Kumaon clusters include shelters reported from **Lwethap**, **Petshal**, **Falsima**, and related Almora-Nainital scarps, documented by **Yashodhar Mathpal**, **K. P. Nautiyal**, and later surveys of the Uttar Pradesh (now Uttarakhand) state archaeology wing.
- The paintings sit in quartzite and sandstone overhangs above river terraces, not in high glacial caves.

Motifs and date

- Stick-like human groups, hunting scenes, cattle or caprids, hand-linked dancers, and dots or comb signs are typical.

- Superimposition and pigment fade suggest more than one episode. A Mesolithic to late Holocene span is usually argued by analogy with Bhimbetka and Central Indian styles, not by many direct dates.
- Mathpal compared Kumaon figures with Central Indian hunter-gatherer art, while noting a thinner large-animal repertoire.

Meaning for prehistory

- The art records mid-hill occupation, hunting, and group ritual in a zone later known for terraced farming.
- It should not be collapsed into historic Garhwali temple art. It is prehistoric picture-making on living rock.

Flow diagram

Lakhudiyar Almora -> Humans animals signs
Kumaon shelters -> Lakhudiyar Almora
Humans animals signs -> Hill hunting occupation

Conclusion

Uttarakhand rock art is a Kumaon shelter tradition centred on **Lakhudiyar** and nearby Almora sites. Humans, animals, and signs in red and white record hill hunting and gathering. Dates remain mostly relative, so the note must stay cautious.

Facts & figures

Lakhudiyar

Painted rock shelter in Almora district, the principal published site of Kumaon prehistoric art.

Yashodhar Mathpal

Documented Kumaon rock paintings and compared them with Central Indian hunter-gatherer art.

K. P. Nautiyal

Garhwal-Kumaon archaeologist whose surveys placed hill shelters in a regional prehistoric sequence.

Pigments

Red ochre, white, and black on quartzite or sandstone overhangs above river valleys.

Bhimbetka comparison

Uttarakhand art is a smaller Himalayan set; style analogies with Vindhyan Mesolithic paintings are used in the absence of many direct dates.