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Q3(b)

Was Mesolithic culture the first step towards a sedentary way of life? Illustrate your answer by citing suitable examples.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Anthropology GS 2 · 15 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

- Ask whether Mesolithic culture was the first step towards a sedentary way of life
- Define Mesolithic and sedentism
- Illustrate with Indian and, where needed, West Asian examples
- Give a balanced yes with limits

Revision summary

Mesolithic means Holocene microlith-using hunter-gatherers and early herders.

Sedentism means staying through much of the year, not a single overnight camp.

Bagor, Langhnaj, Adamgarh, **Bhimbetka**, and Ganga sites such as Damdama show repeated occupation and burials.

That is a first step, comparable in logic to the **Natufian**, not a finished village.

Mehrgarh, Burzahom, and Chirand mark fuller Neolithic sedentism.

Introduction

The Mesolithic is the Holocene hunter-gatherer and early herder phase of microliths, between Palaeolithic mobility and Neolithic farming villages. Sedentism means staying at one place through much of the year. The Mesolithic is a first step toward that life in some places, not a completed village revolution.

Body

What Mesolithic people did

- Microliths, composite tools, fishing, hunting, and wild plant use mark the phase. In India, **Bagor** (Rajasthan), **Adamgarh** and **Bhimbetka** (Madhya Pradesh), **Langhnaj** (Gujarat), **Sarai Nahar Rai**, **Mahadaha**, and **Damdama** (Ganga valley) are type sites.
- **V. N. Misra** at **Bagor** showed a long occupation with later cattle, still not a full Neolithic town.
- Ganga valley cemeteries with many burials suggest repeated return to the same ground, which is a step beyond a one-night camp.
- Rock art at **Bhimbetka** records animals and groups in a landscape that was used again and again.

First step, not full sedentism

- True year-round farming villages in the north-west appear at **Mehrgarh** in the Neolithic, with mud-brick houses and stored grain.
- **Burzahom** (Kashmir) and **Chirand** (Bihar) are later settled Neolithic-Chalcolithic points. They are not Mesolithic.
- **Many Mesolithic groups remained** seasonally mobile: base camps plus hunting stations. **Lewis Binford's** forager-collector model fits this better than a village map.
- **West Asia shows the same nuance:** **Natufian** hamlets before full Neolithic farming are a famous "first step"; Indian **Bagor** is a regional analogue, not a copy.

Regional variation

- Coastal and lake sites with fish and water plants can support longer stays than dry-upland hunting.
- Contact with early herders at **Bagor** blurs Mesolithic and pastoral. Sedentism here is a gradient.

Answer to the question

- Yes, Mesolithic repeated-use camps, burials, and broader diet were the first widespread step toward staying put after the Pleistocene.
- No, they were not yet the sedentary farming village. That step is Neolithic.

Flow diagram

Palaeolithic mobility -> Mesolithic base camps
Mesolithic base camps -> Burials microliths fishing
Mesolithic base camps -> Neolithic village
Neolithic village -> Year-round sedentism

Conclusion

Mesolithic culture was the first step toward sedentism where people reused camps, buried their dead, and widened diet. It was not yet the farming village. Indian examples are **Bagor**, Ganga cemeteries, and **Bhimbetka**; **Mehrgarh** still marks the fuller sedentary turn.

Facts & figures

Bagor

Rajasthan Mesolithic site excavated by V. N. Misra, with long occupation and later animal herding.

Damdama and Mahadaha

Ganga valley Mesolithic cemetery-settlement sites showing repeated burial at one place.

Bhimbetka

Shelter complex with Mesolithic occupation and rock art, recording repeated landscape use.

Mehrgarh

Neolithic farming settlement that shows year-round houses and stored crops after the Mesolithic step.

Natufian

West Asian late Epipalaeolithic hamlets often cited as a first step to sedentism before full farming.

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