

**WRAP Exams · wrapexams.com**

Prelims PYQ, Mains model answers, and copy evaluation. Write to the desk for this paper, a doubt, or the AI waitlist.

**ask@wrapexams.com · +91 85951 84903 · wrapexams.com**

Q1(b)

## Origin of State Societies

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · 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

- State what anthropologists mean by the origin of state societies
- Name the main theories and Indian archaeological illustrations
- Distinguish chiefdom from **early state**
- Keep the note on process, not on a single founding king

### Revision summary

State societies have central offices, territory and surplus extraction beyond kinship.

Service and Fried staged the move from tribe and chiefdom to state; Childe linked it to urban surplus.

Carneiro stressed warfare and circumscription; hydraulic theories over-fit India.

Rakhigarhi and other Harappan cities show urban organisation; Magadha shows a clearer **early state**.

Hill and forest polities in India often remained chiefly or acephalous until colonial mapping.

### Introduction

State societies are polities with a centralised, specialised authority that can extract surplus, settle disputes beyond kinship, and claim a territory. Anthropology asks how that form arose from bands, tribes and chiefdoms, not only who the first king was.

### Body

#### Theories of origin

**Elman Service** and **Morton Fried** staged bands, tribes, chiefdoms and states. A chiefdom still rests on kinship rank; a state has offices that outlast a lineage. **V. Gordon Childe linked the state to the urban revolution: surplus, writing, specialists and monumental centres.** **Karl Wittfogel** over-stressed irrigation ("hydraulic") despotism; Indian monsoon agriculture does not require that single cause. **Robert Carneiro** argued that circumscription and warfare concentrate power. **Maurice Godelier** and Marxist anthropologists treated the state as control of surplus and ideology together.

**Henri Claessen** and **Peter Skalník** described the **early state** as a transitional type: **sacral kingship, tribute, and incomplete bureaucracy.** **Pierre Clastres** warned that some Amazonian societies actively prevented the state; the origin is not an inevitable climb.

## Indian illustrations

Harappan cities - **Rakhigarhi**, Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, Dholavira - show urban planning, craft specialisation and long-distance trade without a palatial text that names a king. That is a **state-level** organisation whose political form is still argued. Later **mahajanapadas**, Magadha and the **Mauryan empire** fit Fried's state more clearly: tax, army, and dharma as public ideology.

Tribal India supplies the other end. **Nuer** segmentary opposition (**Evans-Pritchard**) and many Indian hill polities remained acephalous or chiefly. **S. C. Roy** on the Mundas and **Verrier Elwin** on NEFA described headmanship and khuntkatti without a territorial bureaucracy. Colonial ethnography then made a state by mapping tribes onto districts.

## Caution

No single cause - irrigation, trade, conquest or religion - explains every origin. Indian evidence favours **multiple pathways**: Bronze Age urbanism in the north-west, iron-age territorial kingdoms in the **Ganga plain**, and delayed or resisted state formation in forest and hill tracts.

## Flow diagram

Band tribe -> Chiefdom  
Chiefdom -> Early state  
Early state -> Urban surplus office  
Harappan and mahajanapada -> Early state

## Conclusion

The origin of state societies is the appearance of durable, surplus-extracting offices beyond kinship. Service, Fried, Childe and Carneiro give the toolkit. Harappan cities and later mahajanapadas illustrate it in India; many tribal polities show that the state is not universal or automatic.

## Facts & figures

### Service / Fried

Classic neo-evolutionary sequence: band, tribe, chiefdom, state, distinguished by kinship versus specialised office.

### Early state

Claessen and Skalník: sacral kingship, tribute and incomplete bureaucracy as a type between chiefdom and mature state.

### Harappan urbanism

Craft, weights, drainage and long-distance trade without a decoded royal archive; political form remains debated.