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शर्मा एकेडमी®

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MPPSC Mains Paper-1 Part-A



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Paper- 1 Part A Unit 1

Ancient History

Introduction

It is a very extraordinary fact that though Indian Civilization is the most ancient in the world, it is one of the world's youngest nations. The name of the country, India, is of recent origin, it pays testimony to the country's long historical existence.

The term 'India' has been derived from the appellation used by the Persians. They used the term 'Hindu' to refer to the land, across the river Sindhu or Indus, which was located to the east of their empire. It was for the river Indus again that the Greek used to call the inhabitants living across it as Indoi.

The great Indian epics and other mythological texts suggest the origin of the country in a remote past as Aryavrata or Bharat. India's past is ancient, while its present is new. India had to face numerous trials throughout the course of history spanning well over 5,000 years. It shows the country's exemplary cultural stamina. All the known art and cultures of the world have been woven together in the cultural web of India. India has been the place of origin of many religions, saints and cults.

Note:

Pre-history

Pre-history is the term used to refer to the periods of remote antiquity before the existence of written records. Some scholars believe that pre-history is virtually synonymous with the pre-historic archaeology. It is a branch of archaeology in which the principles and methods of the discipline have evolved without the need of texts, epigraphy or numismatics. The various stages of human progress towards becoming civilised can be broadly divided into the Palaeolithic Age, the Mesolithic Age, the Neolithic Age and the Metal Age. The Metal Age has been further divided into the Copper and Bronze Age, and the Iron Age. Historians have preferred to divide the history of human progress on the basis of stone and metal tools/implements technology.

Pre-history: Important Terms

Pre-history: It is the period for which we do not have any written records.

Proto-history: This is the period for which we have written records, but we are still unable to decipher the script.

Historic period: This is the period for which we have written records in the form of inscriptions and other texts.

Palaeography: It is the study of old writings used in inscriptions and other ancient records.

Assessment of Pre-history

We live in the geological period known as Cenozoic. It started nearly 65 million years ago when the landmasses on the earth got the shape that we at present know. Before it, different landmasses or continents were almost united to constitute one large land mass termed Pangea. The historians have sub-divided the Cenozoic period into two periods—Tertiary and Quaternary.

The Tertiary period involves five epochs:

- (i) Palaeocene (65–56.5 million years ago);
- (ii) Eocene (56.5–35.4 million years ago);
- (iii) Oligocene (35.4–23.3 million years ago);

(iv) Miocene (23.3–5.2 million years ago); and

(v) Pliocene (5.2–1.64 million years ago)

Primates started emerging nearly 70 million years ago at the start of the Cenozoic. Bipedalism started taking shape during the Miocene resulting into the rise of Australopithecus. The genus Homo emerged during the Pliocene. This was the time that Hominids started making tools.

The Quaternary period witnessed a major development in tool technology. This period is further divided into two geological epochs:

(i) Pleistocene (1.64 million–12,000 years ago), and

(ii) Holocene (12,000 years ago to the present).

We are now living in the Holocene geological epoch. The Palaeolithic Age of pre-history falls in the Pleistocene geological epoch. During the Pleistocene period, the temperature across the world fell considerably. This caused a series of ice ages. The last known ice age started nearly 1,18,000 years ago and was the most widespread. This Ice Age attained the greatest intensity about 20,000 years ago. The ice ages ended 12,000 years ago, with which began the Holocene (or postglacial) geological epoch.

During the Pleistocene epoch, there started biological evolution of humans. They were now able to adapt themselves culturally. The temperatures in Europe, Asia and North Africa have dropped considerably because of the last Ice Age. Stone tool technology improved significantly in this period.

Assessment of Pre-history

The Palaeolithic Man (Approximately 5,00,000–8,000 BC)

In India, the earliest evidence of the existence of humans can be traced back to the Palaeolithic Age roughly between 5,00,000 and 8,000 BC. In many regions of South Asia, stone tools and cave paintings belonging to this period have been discovered.

The word 'Palaeolithic' has been taken from two Greek words which mean 'old stone'. Chipped stones have been discovered in large numbers in various parts of India. These have been of hard rock called quartzite. Therefore, humans in Palaeolithic India are also called Quartzite men. Palaeolithic men did not know the use of fire and did not practise any form of agriculture. They led a savage life, using stone weapons for hunting. They did not know about family life and lived in caves and wandered in jungles like other animals. According to historians, Palaeolithic men belonged to the Negrito race such as the modern people living on the Andaman Islands. They were short in stature and had dark skin, curly hair and flat noses.

Punjab Plains and the Kashmir Valley

Until 1939, the evidence of three or four stone age cultures had been found in only a part of Punjab (now in Western Pakistan). These cultures have been called Pre-Sohan, Early-Sohan,