APPSC GROUP-I MAINS — STUDY NOTES

PRE-HISTORIC CULTURES IN INDIA

Palaeolithic • Mesolithic • Neolithic • Chalcolithic • Megalithic

Paper II — History, Culture & Geography | Day 1 (30 Mar 2026)

SECTION 1: SUMMARISED NOTES

1.1 Introduction

Pre-history refers to the period of human existence before the invention of writing. In the Indian context, this spans from approximately 20 lakh years ago (Lower Palaeolithic) to about 1000 BCE when the earliest scripts appeared. The study of pre-history relies entirely on archaeological evidence — stone tools, pottery, burial remains, cave paintings, and skeletal fragments. India's pre-historic cultures reveal a long and continuous evolutionary trajectory from nomadic hunter-gatherers to settled agricultural communities.

The pre-historic period is broadly divided into: Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age), Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age), Neolithic (New Stone Age), Chalcolithic (Copper-Stone Age), and the Megalithic/Iron Age phase. Each period is distinguished by changes in tool technology, subsistence patterns, settlement types, and social organization.

1.2 Palaeolithic Age (20 lakh – 10,000 BCE)

The Palaeolithic is the longest phase of human history. Humans were nomadic hunter-gatherers who lived near river valleys, rock shelters, and caves. They had no knowledge of agriculture, pottery, or metal. Tools were made by flaking and chipping stones (primarily quartzite). The Palaeolithic is sub-divided into three phases:

1.2.1 Lower Palaeolithic (20 lakh – 1 lakh BCE)

Characterised by heavy, crude tools such as hand-axes, cleavers, and choppers. These are bifacial tools associated with the Acheulian tradition. Early humans (Homo erectus) used these for cutting, digging, and skinning animals. Key sites include Attirampakkam (Tamil Nadu, oldest dated tools in

India at ~1.5 million years, discovered by Robert Bruce Foote in 1863), Hunsgi and Isampur (Karnataka), Bhimbetka (Madhya Pradesh), Didwana (Rajasthan), and Pahalgam (Kashmir).

In Andhra Pradesh, lower Palaeolithic tools including hand-axes and cleavers have been found at Amarabad (currently Telangana Mahabubnagar district) and in the Kurnool region.

1.2.2 Middle Palaeolithic (1 lakh – 40,000 BCE)

Marked by smaller, more refined tools — flakes, scrapers, borers, and points. The Levallois technique (prepared core technique) appeared, allowing more controlled tool production. Sites include the Narmada Valley, Nevasa (Maharashtra), and Bhimbetka (middle levels). Attirampakkam has also yielded Middle Palaeolithic tools dated to approximately 3.85 lakh years ago, challenging earlier assumptions about the timeline of technological transitions in India.

1.2.3 Upper Palaeolithic (40,000 – 10,000 BCE)

Characterised by blade-based tools, burins, and bone tools. Homo sapiens fully replaced earlier species. Evidence of symbolic behaviour emerged — cave paintings and ornaments. Important sites include Bhimbetka (UNESCO World Heritage Site, over 700 rock shelters with paintings spanning Palaeolithic to medieval periods), the Kurnool Caves (Billasurgam and Billa Surgam caves in AP — among the most important Upper Palaeolithic cave sites in South India, yielding stone tools, bone tools, and evidence of fire use), Belan Valley (UP), and Patne (Maharashtra).

The Kurnool cave deposits (Billa Surgam complex near Betamcherla, Kurnool district) were first explored by Captain Newbold in 1844 and later extensively excavated by Robert Bruce Foote (1884). They have yielded Upper Palaeolithic stone tools, bone artifacts, ash deposits (indicating controlled use of fire), and animal remains dated to approximately 25,000–10,000 years BP. This makes them critical for understanding late Pleistocene human habitation in Peninsular India.

1.3 Mesolithic Age (10,000 – 5,000 BCE)

The Mesolithic represents a transitional phase between the Palaeolithic and Neolithic. Climate change after the last Ice Age led to warmer conditions, and humans adapted with smaller, more specialised tools called microliths — tiny stone blades, scrapers, crescents, and triangles that were hafted onto wooden or bone handles to create composite tools (arrows, sickles).

Subsistence shifted from pure hunting-gathering towards a broader spectrum: fishing, fowling, plant collection, and early animal domestication. The earliest evidence of animal domestication in India comes from Adamgarh (MP) and Bagor (Rajasthan). Other important Mesolithic sites include Sarai

Nahar Rai and Mahadaha (UP — earliest evidence of human burials in India), Langhnaj (Gujarat), and Tilwara (Rajasthan).

In AP, Mesolithic sites have been identified in the Kurnool district (particularly around the Billasurgam caves where microlithic tools and backed blades were found in upper layers), and at sites along the Godavari and Krishna valleys. Rock paintings of the Mesolithic period, featuring human and animal figures in red ochre, have been found in caves at Akkampalle (Kurnool), dating to approximately 5,000–7,000 years ago.

1.4 Neolithic Age (7,000 – 2,000 BCE)

The Neolithic revolution — the shift from hunting-gathering to settled agriculture — was the most transformative event in pre-history. Humans began cultivating crops (wheat, barley, rice, millets), domesticating animals (cattle, sheep, goat, dog), making pottery (handmade and later wheel-turned), and living in permanent settlements.

Key Neolithic sites: Mehrgarh (Balochistan, c. 7000 BCE — earliest known farming community in South Asia), Burzahom and Gufkral (Kashmir — pit dwellings, polished tools, bone tools, dog burials), Chirand (Bihar), Koldihwa (UP — earliest evidence of rice cultivation), Utnur and Nagarjunakonda (AP), and Piklihal and Sanganakallu (Karnataka — ash mound sites linked to pastoralism).

South Indian Neolithic is distinctive for its ash mound sites, where large accumulations of cattle dung ash indicate pastoral communities. In AP, Neolithic sites include Utnur (Mahabubnagar), Nagarjunakonda (Guntur), and sites excavated at Guttikonda (Guntur district). Polished stone axes, handmade grey ware pottery, and evidence of millet cultivation have been found.

1.5 Chalcolithic Age (3,000 – 1,000 BCE)

The Chalcolithic (Copper-Stone Age) is characterised by the use of copper alongside stone tools. Communities practised mixed farming and animal husbandry, lived in small rural settlements, and produced distinctive painted pottery. This phase is largely confined to regions outside the Indus Valley (which had moved to a full Bronze Age).

Major Chalcolithic cultures: Ahar-Banas culture (Rajasthan — black-and-red ware, copper smelting), Kayatha culture (MP), Malwa culture (MP/Maharashtra), Jorwe culture (Maharashtra — Inamgaon is the most extensively excavated Chalcolithic site), and the Savalda culture (Maharashtra).

Key features include painted pottery (black-on-red designs), flat copper axes, evidence of public granaries and storage structures (Inamgaon), and elaborate burial practices (including child urn burials). In the AP-Telangana region, Chalcolithic remains have been found at sites like Chinnamarur and Karapakala (Mahabubnagar), often overlapping with Neolithic deposits.

1.6 Megalithic Culture (1,000 BCE – 200 CE)

The Megalithic culture refers to the practice of erecting large stone (mega = large, lithos = stone) burial monuments for the dead. This coincides with the introduction of iron technology in Peninsular India. Megalithic sites are widespread across South India — Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, AP, and Telangana.

Types of megaliths include: dolmens (stone tables), cists (stone-lined burial chambers), menhirs (upright stones), stone circles, and urn burials. Grave goods typically include iron tools and weapons, Black-and-Red Ware (BRW) pottery, gold ornaments, horse equipment, and occasionally Roman coins in later phases.

In AP, megalithic sites are found in almost all districts except the Godavari delta region. Important sites include Nagarjunakonda (which has both Megalithic and later Buddhist layers), Yelesvaram, Pochampad, Kadambapur, Agiripalli, Peddamarur, Chinnamarur, and Chagatur. These sites reveal an agro-pastoral economy with knowledge of iron smelting, rice cultivation, and horse rearing.

1.7 Pre-Historic Sites in Andhra Pradesh — Summary

Period	Key Sites in AP	Key Finds	Significance
Lower Palaeolithic	Amarabad, Kurnool region	Hand-axes, cleavers	Earliest human presence in Deccan
Upper Palaeolithic	Kurnool Caves (Billa Surgam, Billasurgam)	Stone & bone tools, ash, animal remains	Longest cave archaeological record in India
Mesolithic	Kurnool caves (upper layers), Akkampalle	Microliths, rock paintings	Rock art ~5,000–7,000 years old
Neolithic	Utnur, Nagarjunakonda, Guttikonda	Polished axes, grey ware, millet	South Indian ash mound tradition
Chalcolithic	Chinnamarur, Karapakala	Copper tools, painted pottery	Overlap with Neolithic layers

Period	Key Sites in AP	Key Finds	Significance
Megalithic	Nagarjunakonda, Yelesvaram, Peddamarur, Agiripalli	Iron tools, BRW, cists, urn burials	Agro-pastoral Iron Age; link to later dynasties

SECTION 2: KEY DIMENSIONS TO COVER

These are the important sub-topics and angles an examiner can frame questions from. Ensure you can confidently address each dimension.

1. **Chronology & Periodization:** Clear timeline from Lower Palaeolithic (~20 lakh years) to Megalithic (~200 CE). Understand what defines each period — tool type, subsistence, settlement pattern.
2. **Tool Technology Evolution:** Core tools → flake tools → microliths → polished stone → copper → iron. Acheulian → Levallois → blade technology progression. This is a frequent Prelims question.
3. **Key Sites & Their States:** Map-based questions are common. Know exact locations: Bhimbetka (MP), Burzahom (J&K), Mehrgarh (Pakistan), Attirampakkam (TN), Kurnool Caves (AP), Inamgaon (Maharashtra).
4. **Subsistence Patterns:** Hunting-gathering → broad-spectrum foraging → food production (farming + pastoralism). This transition is a key Mains essay angle.
5. **AP-Specific Pre-History:** Kurnool caves, Amarabad, Utnur, Nagarjunakonda, Akkampalle rock art. Examiners can ask AP-specific questions combining pre-history + later Buddhist/dynastic layers.
6. **Art & Expression:** Rock paintings (Bhimbetka — UNESCO; Akkampalle in AP), burial practices (Mesolithic burials at Sarai Nahar Rai; Megalithic cists and urns), and personal ornaments.
7. **Neolithic Revolution:** Why was the transition to agriculture the most important event in human history? Surplus → social stratification → settlements → civilization. Write this as a Mains essay anchor.
8. **South Indian Distinctiveness:** Ash mound sites (pastoral Neolithic), Megalithic iron-using communities, Black-and-Red Ware — South India followed a different trajectory from the Gangetic/Indus zones.
9. **Chalcolithic Regional Cultures:** Ahar, Kayatha, Malwa, Jorwe — know the pottery types, regions, and how they connect to later historical cultures.
10. **Pre-History to History Transition:** How megaliths link to early historical dynasties (Satavahanas, early Andhra kingdoms). Iron technology enabled agricultural expansion and state formation.

SECTION 3: PRELIMS MUST-REMEMBER FACTS

Crisp factual points for MCQ-based Prelims.

1. Robert Bruce Foote — 'Father of Indian Pre-history.' Discovered first Palaeolithic tool in India at Pallavaram near Chennai (1863) and explored Attirampakkam and Kurnool caves.
2. Attirampakkam (Tamil Nadu) — Oldest stone tools in India (~1.5 million years). Type-site for Madrasian Acheulian culture. Middle Palaeolithic Levallois tools dated to ~3.85 lakh years.
3. Bhimbetka (MP) — UNESCO World Heritage Site. Over 700 rock shelters with paintings from Upper Palaeolithic to medieval period. Discovered by V.S. Wakankar in 1957.
4. Mehrgarh (Balochistan, Pakistan) — Earliest farming community in South Asia (c. 7000 BCE). Crops: wheat, barley. Animals: sheep, goat, cattle.
5. Burzahom (Kashmir) — Pit dwellings, polished tools, bone tools (harpoons, needles), dog buried with master. Neolithic.
6. Koldihwa (UP) — Earliest evidence of rice cultivation in India.
7. Bagor (Rajasthan) — Largest Mesolithic site in India. Adamgarh (MP) — earliest evidence of animal domestication.
8. Sarai Nahar Rai and Mahadaha (UP) — Earliest evidence of human burials in India (Mesolithic).
9. Inamgaon (Maharashtra) — Most extensively excavated Chalcolithic site. Jorwe culture. Evidence of public granary, child urn burials.
10. Kurnool Caves (AP) — Billa Surgam complex near Betamcherla. Upper Palaeolithic bone and stone tools, ash deposits. First explored by Newbold (1844), then Foote (1884).
11. Nagarjunakonda (AP) — Has both Megalithic burials and later Buddhist remains. Key multi-period site for AP history.
12. Microliths = Mesolithic hallmark. Hand-axes & cleavers = Lower Palaeolithic. Blades & burins = Upper Palaeolithic. Polished stone = Neolithic.
13. Black-and-Red Ware (BRW) — signature pottery of Megalithic culture across South India.
14. Five Prayags of Pre-history (tool evolution): Core tools → Flake tools → Microliths → Polished tools → Copper/Iron tools.
15. Ash mound sites (Neolithic) — Found in Karnataka and AP. Utnur, Piklihal, Sanganakallu. Accumulated cattle dung burned periodically.

16. Akkampalle rock art (Kurnool, AP) — Mesolithic rock paintings in red ochre. Crocodile figures, human forms. Dated ~5,000–7,000 years BP.
17. Chalcolithic cultures (region): Ahar-Banas = Rajasthan, Kayatha = MP, Malwa = MP/Maharashtra, Jorwe = Maharashtra, Savalda = Maharashtra.
18. Megalithic burial types: Dolmen (stone table), Cist (stone box), Menhir (upright stone), Stone circle, Urn burial.
19. Three-Age System (Stone → Bronze → Iron) proposed by Christian Jurgensen Thomsen (1836). India skipped a distinct Bronze Age in Peninsular regions.
20. Levallois technique — Prepared-core method to produce standardized flakes. Emerged in Middle Palaeolithic. Evidence at Attirampakkam challenges African-origin-only theory.

SECTION 4: MAINS MUST-WRITE POINTS

Structured points for descriptive answers. Each point can form a paragraph in your Mains answer.

1. **Cradle of Human Evolution in India:** India's pre-historic record stretches back approximately 1.5 million years (Attirampakkam), making it one of the earliest zones of human habitation outside Africa. The discovery of Acheulian tools contemporaneous with East African sites has challenged the idea of a simple, linear Out-of-Africa migration, suggesting that tool-making technologies may have developed independently or spread rapidly.
2. **Tool Technology as Civilisational Marker:** The progression from crude core tools (Lower Palaeolithic) to refined flake tools (Middle Palaeolithic) to specialised microliths (Mesolithic) to polished stone and copper (Neolithic/Chalcolithic) reflects not just technological advancement but increasing cognitive complexity, social organization, and environmental adaptation. Each phase represents a qualitative leap in problem-solving ability.
3. **The Neolithic Revolution — Most Transformative Event:** The transition from hunting-gathering to settled agriculture (beginning c. 7000 BCE at Mehrgarh) was the foundation of all subsequent civilization. Agricultural surplus enabled population growth, permanent settlements, social stratification, craft specialization, trade networks, and eventually state formation. In South India, the pastoral Neolithic (ash mound sites) represents a parallel pathway to sedentism through animal husbandry rather than crop cultivation alone.
4. **South Indian Pre-History — A Distinct Trajectory:** Unlike the Gangetic and Indus zones, Peninsular India followed a unique evolutionary path. The Neolithic here was primarily

pastoral (ash mounds), the Chalcolithic phase was less pronounced, and the Megalithic-Iron Age phase directly preceded the historical period. This has implications for understanding how the Satavahanas, Ikshvakus, and other early Andhra dynasties emerged from Iron Age foundations.

5. **Kurnool Caves — AP's Pre-Historic Heritage:** The Billa Surgam cave complex in Kurnool district represents one of the longest continuously studied archaeological cave systems in India (since 1844). The presence of Upper Palaeolithic tools, bone artifacts, evidence of fire use, and diverse animal remains makes it invaluable for reconstructing the late Pleistocene environment and human behaviour in South India. For AP-specific questions, this is a must-mention site.
6. **Rock Art as Historical Evidence:** Rock paintings at Bhimbetka (MP) and Akkampalle (Kurnool, AP) provide windows into the cognitive world of pre-historic humans — their hunting scenes, dance rituals, animal depictions, and geometric designs. These are not merely artistic expressions but evidence of symbolic thought, communication systems, and social rituals that preceded formal religion and literature.
7. **Megalithic Culture — Bridge to History:** The Megalithic-Iron Age phase (c. 1000 BCE – 200 CE) is the direct precursor to the historical period in South India. Iron technology enabled clearing of dense forests, expansion of agriculture, and surplus production — the prerequisites for state formation. Megalithic sites in AP (Nagarjunakonda, Yelesvaram) show continuity into the Buddhist and Satavahana periods, linking pre-history to recorded history.
8. **Challenges of Studying Pre-History:** Pre-historic evidence is fragmentary. Dating methods (radiocarbon, thermoluminescence, cosmic ray exposure) have limitations. Many sites remain unexcavated or inadequately documented. Climate change and modern construction threaten fragile sites. India needs greater investment in archaeological research, particularly in under-explored regions like Rayalaseema.
9. **Environmental Context:** Pre-historic cultures were shaped by climate — Ice Ages determined migration, monsoon patterns affected food availability, and river valleys provided habitable corridors. Understanding pre-history requires integrating archaeological data with palaeoclimate, palaeoecology, and geomorphology. This interdisciplinary approach is increasingly important for APPSC answers.
10. **Pre-History and Identity:** Pre-historic sites contribute to regional and national identity. Bhimbetka's UNESCO status has boosted heritage tourism. AP's Kurnool caves, Nagarjunakonda, and megalithic sites have similar potential. Linking pre-history to

contemporary heritage conservation and tourism policy demonstrates the contemporary relevance of this topic in your Mains answer.

SECTION 5: VALUE ADDITION

Use these to enhance your Mains answers with Constitutional, SDG, scheme, and comparative dimensions.

Constitutional & Legal Linkage

- Article 49: The State shall protect every monument or place or object of artistic or historic interest declared to be of national importance from spoliation, disfigurement, destruction, removal, disposal, or export.
- Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (amended 2010): Legal framework for protection of pre-historic sites. ASI is the custodial authority.
- Article 51A(f): Fundamental Duty to value and preserve the rich heritage of India's composite culture (includes pre-historic heritage).
- Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972: Regulates export and trade of antiquities including pre-historic artifacts.

SDG Linkage

- SDG 11.4: Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage — directly applicable to pre-historic sites.
- SDG 4 (Quality Education): Pre-historic heritage can be integrated into educational curricula to promote historical awareness and scientific temper.
- SDG 8 (Decent Work): Heritage tourism around pre-historic sites (Bhimbetka, Hampi-linked sites) can create local employment.

Scheme & Policy Evolution

- ASI (Archaeological Survey of India): Founded 1861. Protects and maintains nationally important pre-historic sites.
- National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities (NMMA, 2007): Documentation of all cultural heritage including pre-historic sites.

- UNESCO World Heritage: Bhimbetka inscribed in 2003. Nagarjunakonda is on India's tentative list. AP should push for more inscriptions.
- HRIDAY (Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana): While focused on historic cities, the framework can be extended to pre-historic heritage corridors.

Key Scholars & Expeditions

- Robert Bruce Foote (1834–1912): Father of Indian Pre-history. Discovered Palaeolithic tools at Pallavaram (1863), excavated Kurnool caves, Attirampakkam.
- V.S. Wakankar: Discovered Bhimbetka rock shelters (1957). Pioneer of Indian rock art studies.
- H.D. Sankalia: Major excavator of Chalcolithic sites (Nevasa, Jorwe). Wrote foundational texts on Indian pre-history.
- M.L.K. Murty: Excavated Kurnool cave sites extensively in the 1970s. His work established the Upper Palaeolithic chronology for AP.
- Shanti Pappu & Kumar Akhilesh: Contemporary archaeologists who re-dated Attirampakkam to ~1.5 million years (published in Science, 2011) and documented the Middle Palaeolithic transition.

Comparative Perspective

- India vs East Africa: Acheulian tools in India (Attirampakkam, ~1.5 Ma) are roughly contemporaneous with East African sites, suggesting rapid dispersal of Homo erectus from Africa or independent tool evolution.
- India vs Europe: European Neolithic arrived via Middle Eastern farming communities. Indian Neolithic had at least two independent centres — Mehrgarh (wheat-barley) and South India (millets + pastoralism).
- North vs South India: North India has a more developed Chalcolithic phase; South India went from pastoral Neolithic directly to Iron Age/Megalithic. This regional divergence is important for understanding different state-formation pathways.
- Indus Valley vs Peninsular Pre-History: When Harappa was at its peak (2600–1900 BCE), Peninsular India was in a Neolithic-Chalcolithic phase. Post-Harappan collapse, the Peninsular Megalithic-Iron phase was rising — a useful timeline contrast.

SECTION 6: QUICK REVISION BOX

Last-minute glance before the exam. Each line is a keyword trigger to recall the full concept.

▶ Lower Palaeo = Hand-axe, Cleaver, Acheulian	▶ Middle Palaeo = Flake, Scraper, Levallois
▶ Upper Palaeo = Blade, Burin, Bone tool	▶ Mesolithic = Microlith, Composite tool
▶ Attirampakkam = Oldest tools, 1.5 Ma, TN	▶ Bhimbetka = UNESCO, Rock art, MP
▶ Mehrgarh = Earliest farming, 7000 BCE	▶ Burzahom = Pit dwelling, Dog burial, J&K
▶ Kurnool Caves = Upper Palaeo, Bone tools, AP	▶ Akkampalle = Rock art, Mesolithic, AP
▶ Neolithic = Polished stone, Farming, Pottery	▶ Ash mounds = Utnur, Piklihal, Pastoral
▶ Chalcolithic = Copper+Stone, Ahar/Jorwe/Malwa	▶ Megalithic = Iron, BRW, Cists, Dolmens
▶ R.B. Foote = Father of Indian Pre-history	▶ Art. 49 = Protect monuments of national importance
▶ Nagarjunakonda = Megalithic + Buddhist, AP	▶ Inamgaon = Best excavated Chalcolithic site
▶ Rice = Koldihwa, UP	▶ Domestication = Adamgarh (MP), Bagor (Raj)

SECTION 7: RECOMMENDED SOURCES

Refer to these for deeper understanding. The notes above cover what you need, but these sources help for more depth on specific sub-topics.

Source	What to Read	Why
NCERT Class XI — Themes in Indian History Part-I	Ch. 1: Bricks, Beads and Bones; Timeline section	*Foundation for periodization and key sites*
R.S. Sharma — India's Ancient Past	Ch. 2–4: Stone Age to Chalcolithic	*Concise, exam-oriented coverage with site details*
Upinder Singh — A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India	Ch. 2: Understanding Early Humans; Ch. 3: Stone Age Cultures	*Most detailed academic reference; good for Mains depth*
V.D. Misra — Pre-history and Proto-history of India	Chapters on regional pre-historic cultures	*Specialist reference for South Indian pre-history and AP sites*
AP State Board History Textbook	Pre-history and early culture sections	*AP-specific sites, Kurnool caves, Megalithic sites*
NIOS Material — Indian Culture and Heritage	Module on Pre-Historic India	*Free, accessible summary; good for quick revision*