



**Sample
Handout**

**History
Optional Test
Series 2021**

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HISTORY OPTONAL TEST SERIES – MODEL ANSWER

1. Mesolithic rock cut architecture of India not only reflects the cultural life of the times but also a fine aesthetic sense comparable to modern painting. Critically evaluate this comment.

APPROACH:

Introduction:

- Give overview of Mesolithic architecture i.e. where it has been found, number of sites, name of significant sites etc.

Body:

- Explain how Mesolithic rock cut architecture represents cultural life.
- Explain how Mesolithic rock cut architecture represents a fine aesthetic sense comparable to modern painting

Conclusion:

- Conclude with remarking that Mesolithic art though developed in contemporary times, was just a beginning of rich tradition of art in India.

Prehistoric period which is ranging from Paleolithic to Harappan period marks the beginning of the artistic history in India. Within this era, the Mesolithic rock cut architecture saw the first use and modifications of the early caves, a fact manifested by archaeological evidences. The specific feature of the Mesolithic rock cut architecture is the paintings on rock and rock engravings (petroglyphs) done in rock shelters or natural caves.

In India over 150 Mesolithic rock art sites have been found. These rock art sites are concentrated in Central India. These sites can be found at Bhimbetka, Lakhajuar, Kharwar, Jaora and Kathotia in Madhya Pradesh. Further some are also found in Sundargarh and Sambalpur districts of Orissa, Ezhuthu cave of Kerala, Sohaghat of Uttar Pradesh etc. These paintings depict the life as well as culture in mesolithic ages and show striking thematic similarities across the country.

Mesolithic art reflects the Cultural Life of the times in the following ways:-

- **Significance of Animals:** Animals predominate in Mesolithic art. Some representations also indicate animals as the part of hunting rituals. For instance *Painting of Mythical Boar at Bhimbetka*. The Mesolithic people gave so much significance to animals because they played a crucial role in the subsistence economy.
- **Hunting Activities:** The Mesolithic art also depicted both the organization as well as tools used in the hunt. Some scenes of hunters hunting singly or in groups, sometimes wearing masks and head dresses crowned with antlers and horns. *The instruments used in hunting scenes were also depicted*. For example some men carry sticks, spears, bows and arrows, or slings. Whereas some men are also depicted unarmed. Another painting of hunter with basket/net filled with animals at **Jaora** has also been found.
- **Material culture and dressing:** Mesolithic art also indicates the ornaments and the dresses Mesolithic people wore. The hunting paintings reflected ornaments such as necklaces, bangles, wrist bands, elbow bands, and knee bands with tassels. Some men wear loincloths, probably made of leaves, animal skin, or pieces of tree bark. Men wear their hair loose, women braided.

- **Idea of Differentiation based upon status:** Mesolithic art shows that some figures are broad and decorated with geometric designs, and from their attitude seem to represent men of authority.
- **Rituals of the age: Masked dancers** (referred to by prehistorians as ‘dancing sorcerers’) may represent ritual specialists. Hand, fist, and finger prints are also found, similar to those that people make on their houses these days on auspicious occasions.
- **Division of labor based upon gender:** The Bhimbetka paintings reflect a division of labor on the basis of gender. Men hunt and women are shown gathering and preparing food, for instance grinding food on querns. For instance women have been depicted feeding a pig and preparing food in a painting at Kathotia.
- **Depiction of Dance:** Some paintings depict the dance activities as well. In a painting at Lakhajoor, dancers convey a sense of rhythmic movement occasionally they lose their balance and fall.
- **Domestication of Animals:** Paintings at Bhimbetka depict that hunters are sometimes accompanied by the dogs.

Along with this the Mesolithic sites paintings depict social life, sexual activity, child birth, rearing of children and burial ceremony. ***This makes it clear that Mesolithic man had developed an aesthetic sense, since most of the painting depicted the nature around the men.*** Depiction of emotions, unity and harmony are prime features of aesthetic arts.

Mesolithic art depicted Aesthetic Sense in Comparison to modern paintings in following manner:

- **Diversity of colors: Sixteen colours or shades** can be identified, with white and light red used most often. This kind of diversity of colours can be compared to modern paintings whereby multiple uses of colours can be seen.
- **Variety of paintings:** Some paintings are **monochrome**, while others are **polychrome** which shows the developed sense of art of prehistoric times.
- **Presence of both abstract and realistic paintings:** While some of the animal figures are rather abstract, many of them are very **realistic**. Animals are sometimes shown in outline; in other instances their bodies are decorated with designs. A few paintings are in the ‘**x-ray style**’, showing the inner organs, including fetuses in the womb of female animals.
- **Product of imagination:** There are also fantastic animals—the famous Bhimbetka ‘boar’ which has the body of a boar, but a snout like a rhinoceros, the underlip of an elephant, and the horns of a buffalo.
- **Coexistence of paintings with engravings:** An interesting feature of the rock art of Orissa is the co-existence of paintings and engravings in the same shelter. Also, the art is mostly **non-figurative, with an emphasis on abstract patterns and decorative designs, both geometric and non-geometric**.
- **Enigmatic painting:** An **abstract painting** has been found in a rock shelter at Jaora (MP) which reflects a view of the world consisting of air, earth, and fire.
- **Depiction of youthfulness:** Children are painted running, jumping and playing. Community dances provide a common theme.
- Though animals were painted in a **naturalistic style**, humans were depicted only in a **stylistic manner**. Mesolithic paintings at Bhimbetka and other sites also depict men and women, young and old. **Male figures** often look like **matchsticks**; **women** are sometimes given **fuller forms**.

All this shows that prehistoric art of the Mesolithic rock cut architecture reflected understanding of nature and reflected appreciation of beauty and artistic taste, **just like that of modern paintings.**

Due to these qualities of the Mesolithic art, there has been a growing interest in the exploration of the new sites. The work of **Vishnu Wakankar on Central India** prehistoric art sheds light on various qualities of the Mesolithic art. Further, the same significance has also been given by **Jean Clottes, French Prehistorian to the Mesolithic art.**

VALUE ADDITION BOX:

Representative Historians:

- **Vishnu Wakankar:** Also known as Pitamah of Indian rock art school & discovered the Bhimbetka site in 1957.
- **Jean Clottes:** According to him Mesolithic represents the fame that Indian rock art had just started to achieve.

Key Words/Points:

- Polychrome, Monochrome and Engraved Paintings
- Schemes of Hunting, Domesticated animals and women performing chores
- Mystical Boar at Bhimbetka
- Masked dancers
- X Ray style paintings