Prehistory, Indus Valley & Vedic Period

HC01 · Ancient India – I · Chapter 1 of 3

CDS Level

1. Stone Ages — Overview

The prehistoric period in India is divided into four broad phases based on the type of tools used and the mode of subsistence. These are frequently confused in exams, so memorise the defining features of each.

Age	Period (Approx.)	Tools / Features	Key Sites
Paleolithic *(Old Stone Age)*	500,000 – 10,000 BCE	Unpolished, rough stone tools; hand-axes, cleavers; hunter-gatherers; no agriculture; cave paintings	**Bhimbetka** (MP) – cave art; Attirampakkam (TN); Hunsgi (Karnataka); Belan Valley (UP)
Mesolithic *(Middle Stone Age)*	10,000 – 4,000 BCE	Microliths (tiny blades); semi-nomadic; domestication of animals begins; rock paintings	**Bagor** (Rajasthan) – largest Mesolithic site; Adamgarh (MP); Langhnaj (Gujarat)
Neolithic *(New Stone Age)*	7,000 – 1,000 BCE	Polished stone tools; agriculture, pottery; settled life; domestication of animals; wheel used	**Mehrgarh** (Balochistan) – earliest farming; Burzahom (Kashmir) – pit-dwellings; Chirand (Bihar)
Chalcolithic *(Copper-Stone Age)*	3,000 – 700 BCE	Copper + stone tools; pottery; pre-Harappan and contemporary with IVC; black-and-red ware	**Jorwe** (Maharashtra); Ahar (Rajasthan); Kayatha (MP); Malwa (MP)

⭐ **Memory Trick: P-M-N-C** = *Please Make No Confusion!* — Paleolithic → Mesolithic → Neolithic → Chalcolithic. Each stage refines tools and advances society.

🔺 **Exam Trap: Bhimbetka** is Paleolithic (cave paintings). **Mehrgarh** is Neolithic (earliest farming in South Asia, not India's IVC). Both appear as distractors. **Bagor** is the largest Mesolithic site, NOT a Neolithic site.

2. Indus Valley Civilization (IVC)

📌 **Also called:** Harappan Civilization or Bronze Age Civilization. **Period:** ~3300–1300 BCE (Mature phase: 2600–1900 BCE). **Discovery:** Harappa excavated in 1921 by *Daya Ram Sahni*; Mohenjo-Daro in 1922 by *R.D. Banerji*. Named after river *Indus* (Sindhu).

2.1 Major Sites

High Frequency

Harappa

Punjab, Pakistan · First discovered

First excavated IVC site (1921). Had large granaries, workers' quarters. Evidence of planned city. Gave name to civilization.

First site | Punjab, Pakistan | Granary

Mohenjo-Daro

Sindh, Pakistan · Mound of the Dead

Largest city of IVC. Has the famous *Great Bath* (ritual purification), Great Granary. Priest-King statue and Bronze Dancing Girl found here.

Great Bath | Dancing Girl | Priest-King

Dholavira

Rann of Kutch, Gujarat · Largest in India

Largest IVC site in India. Unique *three-part city* (citadel + middle town + lower town). Water management system. Large inscription/signboard.

Largest in India | Water Reservoirs | 3-part city

Lothal

Gulf of Cambay, Gujarat

Known for its *dockyard* (oldest known tidal dockyard). Evidence of maritime trade with Mesopotamia. Rice husk found here — earliest evidence of rice cultivation in India.

Dockyard | Rice husk | Trade

Kalibangan

Rajasthan, India

Ploughed field (earliest evidence in the world). Both pre-Harappan and Harappan layers. Fire altars (evidence of fire worship). Bones of camel found.

Ploughed field | Fire altars | Rajasthan

Rakhigarhi

Haryana, India · Overall Largest

Currently considered the *largest IVC site overall* (surpassing Mohenjo-Daro). Located in Hisar district, Haryana. DNA studies conducted here.

Overall Largest Site | Haryana | DNA studies

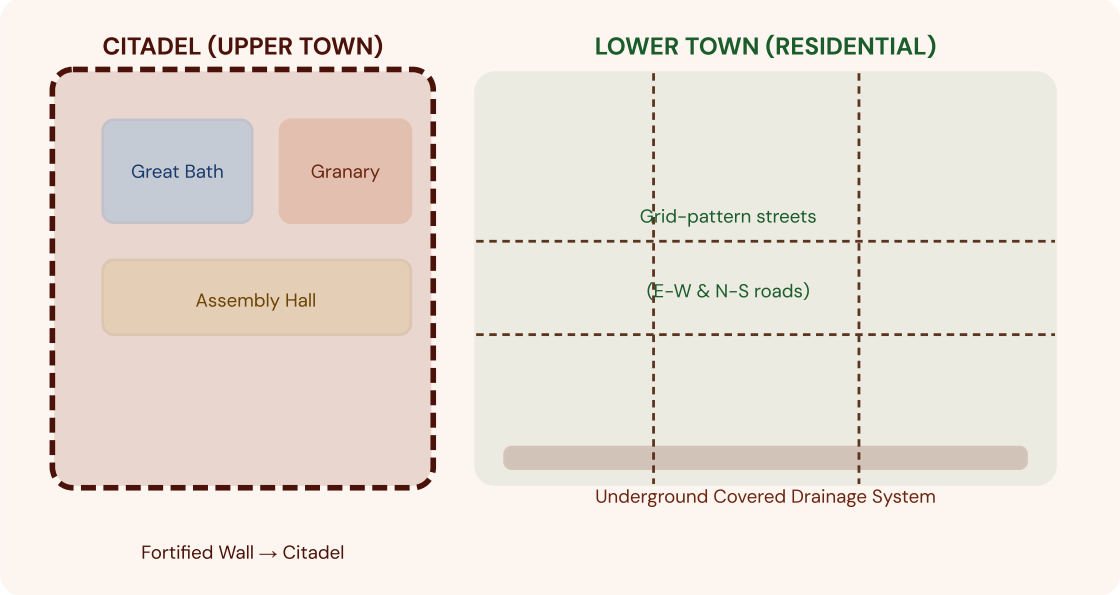
▲ **Critical Distinction: Rakhigarhi** (Haryana) = largest overall IVC site. **Dholavira** (Gujarat) = largest in India among frequently listed sites. **Mohenjo-Daro** = historically called "largest" in old textbooks. CDS now follows Rakhigarhi. **Lothal** = dockyard, NOT granary.

2.2 Town Planning

High Frequency

IVC town planning is one of the most distinctive features, frequently tested in CDS. The cities showed remarkable urban sophistication for their era.

📐 IVC CITY LAYOUT — SCHEMATIC DIAGRAM



🏙️ Urban Features

🚰 Drainage System

- Grid-pattern streets (East-West & North-South)
- Two-storeyed brick houses with bathrooms
- Citadel (upper town) + Lower Town
- Great Bath — ritual bathing (Mohenjo-Daro)
- Large Granaries for grain storage
- Standardised burnt brick (4:2:1 ratio)
- Doors/windows facing lanes (not main streets)

- Underground covered drains — most advanced of ancient world
- Connected house drains to street drains
- Drains had manholes at regular intervals
- Soakage pits outside city
- Shows civic planning and sanitation awareness
- Not found in any other contemporary civilization

2.3 Economy, Trade & Society

Aspect	Key Details
Agriculture	Wheat, barley, cotton (first in world), dates, mustard, peas. Evidence from Lothal, Kalibangan.
Animals	Ox, buffalo, goat, elephant (unknown whether tamed). Horse not conclusively found — major debate.
Trade	Trade with Mesopotamia (called *Meluhha* in Sumerian records), Persia. Items: beads, copper, cotton, ivory.
Weights & Measures	Standardised — cubical stone weights in binary (1,2,4,8...) and decimal ratios. No coins — barter system.
Crafts	Bead-making, bronze casting, pottery (wheel-made), weaving cotton cloth.
Social Structure	No evidence of monarchy or temples. Possible merchant oligarchy or priest-king ruling class. Egalitarian city planning.

2.4 Art, Religion & Script Frequent in PYQs

🎨 Art & Artefacts

🕉 Religion & Script

- **Bronze Dancing Girl** — Mohenjo-Daro (lost-wax / cire perdue technique)
- **Priest-King statue** — Mohenjo-Daro (steatite)
- **Pashupati Seal** — proto-Shiva figure, surrounded by animals
- Terracotta figurines of Mother Goddess
- Bull, unicorn, rhinoceros seals
- Faience objects — turquoise-blue pottery

- Mother Goddess worship — fertility cult
- Pashupati (proto-Shiva) worship
- Tree worship (Pipal) and animal worship
- **No temples found** — Great Bath = ritual purification
- Script: **Pictographic, undeciphered**, ~400 signs, written right to left (boustrophedon)
- Seals used for trade/identification

2.5 Decline of IVC

📌 **Multiple Theories — No Single Cause Agreed Upon:**

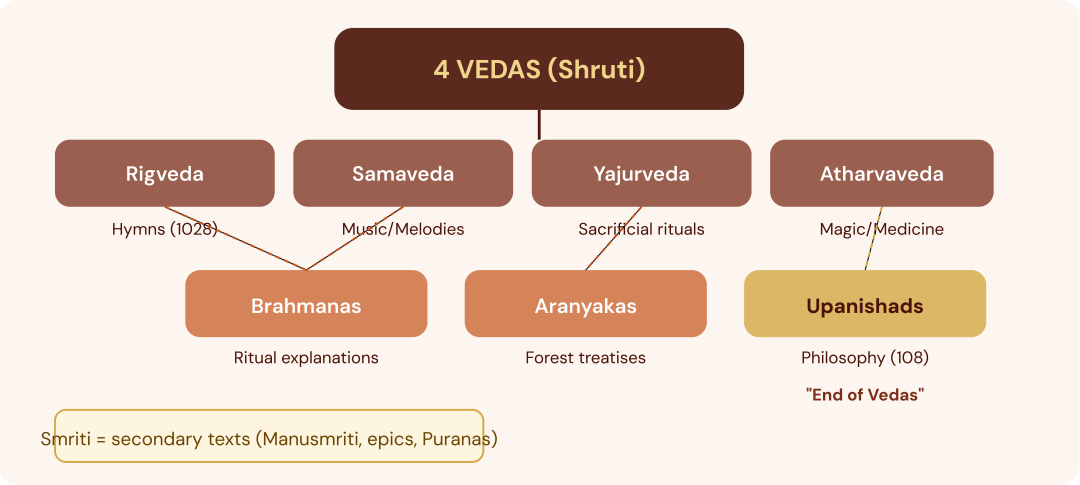
- **Aryan Invasion Theory** — Wheeler's theory (largely discredited now)
- **Climate Change / Drought** — drying of Ghaggar-Hakra (Saraswati) river — most accepted
- **Floods** — repeated floods at Mohenjo-Daro (Raikes)
- **Tectonic Activity** — earthquake changing river courses
- **Epidemic** — skeletons found in Mohenjo-Daro suggest mass death

3. Vedic Period

📌 **Overview:** The Vedic Period (1500–600 BCE) marks the coming of the Aryans into the Indian subcontinent. It is divided into *Early Vedic (Rigvedic)* and *Later Vedic* periods based on the literature and socio-economic conditions.

3.1 Vedic Literature — Hierarchy

📚 VEDIC LITERATURE HIERARCHY



3.2 Early Vedic vs. Later Vedic

Comparison — High Priority

Aspect	Early Vedic (1500–1000 BCE)	Later Vedic (1000–600 BCE)
Geography	Sapta Sindhu (Seven Rivers region — northwest India/Pakistan)	Expanded eastward to Gangetic plains (Aryavarta)
Economy	Pastoral; cattle = chief wealth; limited agriculture	Agriculture primary; iron tools introduced (Painted Grey Ware)
Society	Tribal; Varna based on occupation (flexible); women had good status	Varna becomes rigid (birth-based); child marriage, women lose freedoms
Polity	Tribal; Raja (elected, weak king); Sabha, Samiti, Gana, Vidatha assemblies	Powerful kingdoms; Rajasuya/Ashvamedha sacrifices; Raja becomes hereditary
Religion	Nature worship (Indra, Agni, Varuna, Surya); few rituals	Complex rituals; Brahmin dominance; Upanishadic philosophy emerges
God most prayed	*Indra* (god of thunder/rain — 250 hymns in Rigveda)	*Prajapati* (lord of creatures) — Indra declines
Key Texts	Rigveda (only text of this period)	Samaveda, Yajurveda, Atharvaveda, Brahmanas, Upanishads

3.3 Varna System & Social Life

📌 **Four Varnas (Later Vedic): Brahmin** (priests, scholars) → **Kshatriya** (warriors, rulers) → **Vaishya** (farmers, traders) → **Shudra** (servants). The Purusha Sukta hymn of Rigveda mentions this classification. In Early Vedic, Varna was occupational (flexible); it became birth-based in the Later Vedic period.

📘 **Notable Women Scholars of Vedic Period: Gargi** (debated with Yajnavalkya in Upanishads), **Maitreyi** (wife of Yajnavalkya — philosophical discussions), **Lopamudra** (composed Rigvedic hymns), **Viswavara** and **Apala** (Rigvedic poetesses). Women could attend Sabha/Samiti in Early Vedic period.

3.4 Megalithic Cultures

Megalithic cultures (1500–300 BCE) are associated with large stone monuments (megaliths) used as burial markers. Found mainly in South India, Vidarbha (Maharashtra) and northeastern India.

KEY FEATURES

- Types: Dolmens, Cairn circles, Cists, Menhirs, Burial urns (Black-and-Red Ware)
- Iron Age culture — use of iron tools and weapons
- Associated with Deccan plateau and South India
- Brahmagiri (Karnataka) — important megalithic site excavated by Wheeler

📋 Memory Chart — Quick Revision Sheet

🗺️ IVC Sites — One-liners

- **Harappa** — First excavated (1921)
- **Mohenjo-Daro** — Great Bath, Dancing Girl
- **Dholavira** — Largest in India, water mgmt
- **Rakhigarhi** — Overall largest IVC site
- **Lothal** — Dockyard, rice husk

🧱 IVC — Must-Know Facts

- Brick ratio: **4 : 2 : 1**
- Script: **Undeciphered**, ~400 signs
- Horse: **Not conclusively found**
- Metal: **Bronze Age** (no iron)
- No temples found; Great Bath = ritual

📖 Vedas — Quick Recall

- **Rigveda** — Oldest; 1028 hymns; praises gods
- **Samaveda** — Melodies; musical recitation
- **Yajurveda** — Sacrificial formulae
- **Atharvaveda** — Magic, medicine, spells
- Brahmanas → ritual prose

- **Kalibangan** — Ploughed field, fire altars
- **Banawali** — Haryana; toy cart

- Trade with **Meluhha** = Mesopotamia
- Cotton: **First cultivated here**

- Upanishads → philosophy (108)
- Aranyakas → "Forest Books"

⚡ Early Vedic Gods (Priority)

- **Indra** — Most hymns (250); rain/thunder
- **Agni** — Fire god; second most (200)
- **Varuna** — Guardian of cosmic order (Rta)
- **Surya** — Sun god
- **Soma** — Sacred plant/drink
- No idol worship in Early Vedic
- Later Vedic: Prajapati rises

🏛 Stone Ages — Exam Points

- Bhimbetka → Paleolithic cave art, MP
- Mehrgarh → Earliest farming (Neolithic)
- Bagor → Largest Mesolithic site, Rajasthan
- Burzahom → Neolithic, Kashmir; pit dwellings
- Chirand → Neolithic, Bihar
- Jorwe → Chalcolithic, Maharashtra
- Microliths → Mesolithic tools

🏛 Vedic Assemblies (Early)

- **Sabha** — Council of elders
- **Samiti** — General assembly of people
- **Gana** — Military assembly
- **Vidatha** — Oldest; cultural/religious
- Sabha and Samiti → daughters of Prajapati
- Women attended Sabha in early Vedic
- Raja = elected/chosen; not hereditary

📝 Topic-wise PYQs & Tricky Questions

Q1. The Great Bath of the Indus Valley Civilization was discovered at which site?

PYQ Type

(A) Harappa (B) Lothal (C) Mohenjo-Daro (D) Kalibangan

✓ Answer: (C) Mohenjo-Daro

The Great Bath is located in the Citadel (upper town) of Mohenjo-Daro. It measures 11.8m × 7m × 2.4m deep. Surrounding rooms suggest a religious/ritual use — possibly for priests. It is considered one of the earliest public water tanks. Harappa had a Granary. Lothal had a Dockyard. Kalibangan had fire altars and a ploughed field.

Q2. Evidence of a dockyard has been found in the Indus Valley Civilization site of:

PYQ Type

(A) Kalibangan (B) Dholavira (C) Harappa (D) Lothal

✓ Answer: (D) Lothal

Lothal (Gujarat) is the only IVC site with a **dockyard** — the oldest known tidal dockyard in the world. It connected to the Bhogava river and allowed ships to dock for loading/unloading goods. This confirms maritime trade with Mesopotamia. Rice husk was also found at Lothal — evidence of early rice cultivation in India.

Q3. Which of the following statements about the Indus Valley Civilization is INCORRECT? ⚠ Tricky

(A) The script has not been deciphered (B) Horse was a common domestic animal

(C) Cotton was cultivated (D) Standardised weights were used

✓ Answer: (B) Horse was a common domestic animal

Tricky! There is no conclusive archaeological evidence of horse domestication in the IVC. A few disputed bone fragments have been found, but horse is NOT considered a common domestic animal of the IVC. This is why Aryan Invasion Theory gained ground — Aryans brought the horse. CDS exams have repeatedly tested this. Options A, C, D are all correct facts about IVC.

Q4. The earliest evidence of agriculture in the Indian subcontinent is found at: PYQ Type

(A) Harappa (B) Mehrgarh (C) Burzahom (D) Lothal

✓ Answer: (B) Mehrgarh

Mehrgarh (now in Balochistan, Pakistan) is a Neolithic site dated to ~7000 BCE and contains the earliest evidence of agriculture and domestication of animals in the Indian subcontinent (including wheat and barley cultivation). It predates the IVC and is considered a precursor to Harappan civilization. Burzahom is Neolithic Kashmir; Harappa/Lothal are IVC period.

Q5. In the Early Vedic period, which god received the maximum number of hymns in the Rigveda? PYQ Type

(A) Varuna (B) Agni (C) Indra (D) Soma

✓ Answer: (C) Indra

Indra, the god of thunder and rain, received about 250 hymns in the Rigveda — the highest for any single deity. Agni (fire god) received about 200 hymns. Varuna (cosmic order) was morally the most important but had fewer hymns. Soma (sacred plant) also had an entire Mandala dedicated to it. In the Later Vedic period, Prajapati rose to prominence as Indra declined.

Q6. The Purusha Sukta, which mentions the origin of the four Varnas, is found in which Veda? PYQ Type

(A) Samaveda (B) Yajurveda (C) Atharvaveda (D) Rigveda

✓ Answer: (D) Rigveda

The Purusha Sukta is the 90th hymn of the 10th Mandala of the Rigveda. It describes how Brahmin emerged from the mouth, Kshatriya from the arms, Vaishya from the thighs, and Shudra from the feet of the cosmic being (Purusha). This is the earliest textual reference to the Varna system. However, in the Early Vedic period, Varna was occupational, not birth-based.

Q7. Which IVC site has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2021 for its unique water management system? ⚠ Tricky

(A) Rakhigarhi (B) Mohenjo-Daro (C) Dholavira (D) Lothal

✓ Answer: (C) Dholavira

Current Affairs + History combined! Dholavira (Gujarat) was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2021. It is the 40th site from India on the list. It is particularly noted for its sophisticated **water conservation and management system** — 16 reservoirs found around the city. It also has a unique three-part city layout (Citadel + Middle Town + Lower Town). Mohenjo-Daro is a UNESCO site in Pakistan.

Q8. 'Sabha' and 'Samiti' in Early Vedic period are described as two daughters of: ⚠ Tricky

(A) Varuna (B) Prajapati (C) Indra (D) Brahma

✓ Answer: (B) Prajapati

Tricky — often confused! The Atharvaveda describes Sabha and Samiti as the "two daughters of Prajapati." Sabha was the council of elders/nobles, and Samiti was the general assembly of the people. Both were important democratic institutions of the Early Vedic period. This question tests knowledge of Vedic literature beyond just the basics. Women could attend both Sabha and Samiti in the Early Vedic period.

📋 Quick Reference — Exam Booster

🏺 IVC Art — Who Found Where

🌾 IVC Crops & Animals

📅 Key Dates (Stone Ages)

- Dancing Girl → Mohenjo-Daro
- Priest-King → Mohenjo-Daro
- Pashupati Seal → Mohenjo-Daro
- Granary → Harappa & Mohenjo-Daro
- Dockyard → Lothal
- Ploughed field → Kalibangan
- Fire altars → Kalibangan

- Crops: Wheat, barley, cotton (1st in world)
- Cotton → IVC = first cultivators
- Rice husk → Lothal (earliest in India)
- Animals: Ox, buffalo, goat, sheep
- Elephant — may have been domesticated
- Horse — NOT conclusively found
- Camel — found at Kalibangan

- Paleolithic: 500,000–10,000 BCE
- Mesolithic: 10,000–4,000 BCE
- Neolithic: 7,000–1,000 BCE
- Chalcolithic: 3,000–700 BCE
- IVC Mature Phase: 2600–1900 BCE
- Early Vedic: 1500–1000 BCE
- Later Vedic: 1000–600 BCE

▲ Common Exam Traps

- Bhimbetka = Paleolithic (NOT Neolithic)
- Mehrgarh = Neolithic (NOT IVC)
- Lothal = Dockyard (NOT Granary)
- Rakhigarhi = Largest (NOT Mohenjo-Daro)
- IVC script = Undeciphered
- Early Vedic → Indra = top god
- Upanishads = "End of Vedas" (Vedanta)

📖 Vedic Economy

- Early Vedic: Pastoral; cattle = wealth
- Cow = Aghnya (not to be killed)
- Bali = tax (voluntary gift to king)
- Later Vedic: Agriculture primary
- Iron tools introduced → Painted Grey Ware
- Trade guilds (Shrenis) appear
- Money economy (Nishka, Satamana coins)

🌍 IVC Trade — Key Points

- Mesopotamia called IVC = "Meluhha"
- Dilmun = Bahrain (transit port)
- Exports: Cotton, beads, ivory, copper
- Imports: Gold, silver, lapis lazuli
- No coins — barter system used
- Lothal: Gateway for maritime trade
- Standardised weights & measures

📝 Mock Tests
🎯 Subject Quiz
✈️ Telegram

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