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Ancient History of Meghalaya

Prehistoric Period

The northeastern state of Meghalaya is renowned for its lush landscapes and unique cultural heritage. This region also holds a rich prehistoric past, as evidenced by early human settlements, stone tools, and megalithic structures that date back thousands of years. The prehistoric period of Meghalaya reveals the existence of early human communities that adapted to the region's challenging terrain and utilized its abundant resources for survival.

Evidence of Early Human Settlements

Archaeological Discoveries

Archaeological findings suggest that early human settlements in Meghalaya were established during the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods. Excavations at various sites, including the Garo Hills, Khasi Hills, and Jaintia Hills, have unearthed tools and artifacts that provide insights into the lives of prehistoric communities.

1. **Caves and Rock Shelters**
    - Meghalaya's limestone caves, such as those in the Siju and Nongkhlieh areas, have yielded evidence of prehistoric habitation.
    - These caves were likely used as shelters by early humans, offering protection from harsh weather and predators.
2. **Pottery and Artifacts**
    - Pottery fragments discovered in these settlements indicate the development of sedentary lifestyles and the beginning of agricultural practices.
    - Tools crafted from stones and bones suggest advanced skills in hunting and food preparation.
3. **Microlithic Tools**
    - Microliths, small stone tools often used as spearheads and arrows, have been found in several locations across Meghalaya. These tools were instrumental in hunting and gathering activities.

Stone Tools and Megalithic Structures

Stone Tools of Meghalaya

The discovery of stone tools in Meghalaya highlights the ingenuity of prehistoric communities in adapting to their environment.

1. **Types of Stone Tools**
    - **Hand Axes and Scrapers**: Used for cutting, scraping, and processing food or materials.

- **Polished Stone Tools**: Indicative of the Neolithic period, these tools reflect advancements in tool-making techniques.
- **Querns and Grinding Stones**: Used for grinding grains, indicating an agricultural lifestyle.

2. **Materials Used**
   - Locally available stones such as basalt, quartzite, and sandstone were predominantly used.
   - The tools exhibit high levels of craftsmanship, reflecting the technical knowledge of the prehistoric inhabitants.

Megalithic Structures of Meghalaya

The megalithic culture of Meghalaya is one of its most remarkable prehistoric legacies. These structures, composed of massive stones, are still visible in the region, especially in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

1. **Types of Megaliths**
   - **Menhirs (Standing Stones)**: Often erected as commemorative or burial markers, these stones can be found in clusters or as solitary monuments.
   - **Dolmens (Table Stones)**: Horizontal stone slabs supported by vertical stones, likely used for burial or ceremonial purposes.
   - **Stone Circles**: Formed by placing stones in circular arrangements, these structures possibly had astronomical or ritualistic significance.
2. **Significant Megalithic Sites**
   - **Nartiang in Jaintia Hills**: Known as the largest collection of monoliths in Meghalaya, this site showcases a wide variety of megalithic structures, believed to have been erected as memorials.
   - **Mawkyrduk in Khasi Hills**: Another prominent site with numerous standing stones and dolmens, reflecting the complex societal practices of the time.
3. **Cultural Significance**
   - The megalithic structures are often associated with ancestor worship and community rituals.
   - These monuments reflect the social stratification and communal efforts of prehistoric societies.

Construction Techniques

The methods used to construct these massive megalithic structures remain a subject of research and fascination. Theories suggest that simple tools, combined with communal labor and ingenuity, allowed these early societies to transport and erect large stones.

Lifestyle of Prehistoric Communities

1. **Hunting and Gathering**
   - The abundance of flora and fauna in Meghalaya provided a rich hunting ground for early humans.
   - Tools and skeletal remains suggest reliance on hunting, fishing, and gathering for sustenance.