

The Earliest People: The Stone Age

Chapter-The Earliest People: The Stone Age

Early man was a hunter-gatherer. It means that he moved from place to place in search of food. He depended on nature for all his needs. Early man was also a nomad. He travelled great distances to find food. He fished, hunted for wild animals, and gathered berries, nuts, wild roots and fruits.

There were many reasons for his moving from place to place.

- If he stayed at one place for a long time all the available food would have been eaten up.
- Animals move from place to place in search of grass and water. Early man, who was a hunter, had to follow their movements.
- Plants and trees bear fruits in different seasons. So, early man had to move in search of different fruits and other plant products.
- People, plants and animals need water to survive. All rivers are not perennial. People living on the banks of seasonal rivers had to go in search of water during the dry seasons.

It was not easy for early man to hunt. He needed special skills to hunt and gather food. He had to have proper tools, a quick and alert mind, and knowledge of the animals he hunted.

To gather food, he had to know which food to gather, which food to eat, and the knowledge of the season when he could gather a particular fruit or food. In short, he needed skills and knowledge.

Early man initially used tools such as sticks to dig up wild roots. Gradually, he started making tools out of stone. This led to the beginning of the Stone Age.

The Stone Age :

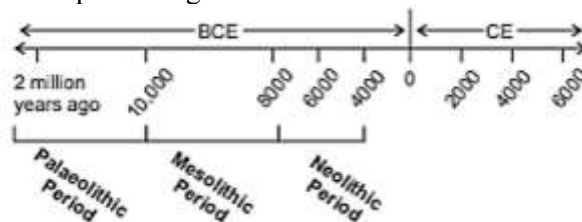
The Stone Age is divided into three periods :

- Paleolithic Period
- Mesolithic Period
- Neolithic Period

Palaeolithic Period: The Palaeolithic period began about two million years ago and lasted till about 10,000 BCE.

Mesolithic Period: The Mesolithic period lasted from 10,000 BCE till 8000 BCE.

Neolithic Period: The Neolithic period began around 8000 BCE and lasted till about 4000 BCE.



The palaeolithic period :

The Paleolithic period or the 'Old Stone Age' roughly began about two million years ago. During this period, man hunted and gathered food. He moved from place to place in search of food and wild animals. He ate whatever he could find. He did not wear anything in summers. In winters he covered himself with animal skins and leaves to keep himself warm. As he was a wanderer he moved in search of food from place to place. He had no home. At night he slept on trees or hide in caves.

Lower Palaeolithic Period :

During this period, most of the Earth's surface was covered with thick sheets of ice. The climate was very cold. This period was also called the 'Ice Age' or 'Pleistocene Period'. Hand axes made of stone were used by early man during this age.

Middle Palaeolithic Period :

The tools used during the Middle Palaeolithic Period were scrapers and borers made of stone flakes. Something like needles were used to sew furs and skins for body coverings.

Upper Palaeolithic Period :

During the Upper Palaeolithic Period, the climate became slightly warmer. Tools such as flint, blades and projectile points were used for hunting and skinning wild animals.

Use of Tools

Tools were used by early man for different purposes.

- They were used as weapons for hunting wild animals.
- They were used for shaping or cutting materials.
- They were used for digging the ground for cutting edible roots.
- They provided a sense of security and protection from wild beasts and enemies.

KEY LEARNINGS

- The stone Age is divided into three periods-Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic.
- Early man (Old Stone Age) was a hunter-gatherer. He hunted animals and ate their raw flesh.
- He used crude stone tools.
- He was a wanderer who moved from place to place in search of food.

Mesolithic period :

Mesolithic Period or the Middle Stone Age was the period in history that existed between the Palaeolithic Period and the Neolithic Period. Mesolithic People used tools made of bones, antler and wood for hunting, fishing and gathering food.

Later, they used tools formed from chips like blades, points, borers and scrapers known as microliths.

The people living during the Mesolithic Period were hunter-gatherers. Gradually, towards the end of this period, they moved on from being food gatherers to food growers. They experimented with seeds by dropping them on the ground and seeing them grow. They realised that by growing plants they received food in sufficient quantity. They made attempts to domesticate animals like goats, sheep and cattle which provided them with milk and food.

Mesolithic sites

Mesolithic sites in India are spread across various regions, with notable examples including Bhimbetka, Adamgarh, Panchmarhi (Madhya Pradesh), Bagor and Tilwara (Rajasthan) and Langhnaj (Gujarat).

Tilwara :

- Westernmost Mesolithic site in India.
- It has two phases-The first phase is mesolithic and is characterised by the presence of Microliths (small polished stones). The second phase has yielded wheelmade pottery, some pieces of iron, glass beads and microliths.
- Circular arrangement of stones on the ground indicate habitation structure.
- The diet of people included both meat and vegetable food.
- Fire hearths, and charred bones indicate the settlement of Mesolithic culture.
- Stone working sites found.

Bagor (the largest mesolithic site of India)

- Located in Bhilwara district of Eastern Rajasthan, near the Kothari river.
- One of the best documented microlithic sites.
- Three occupational levels: Mesolithic, Chalcolithic and evidence of iron.
- Microliths made of locally available chert and quartz were found alongwith a large number of geometric microliths such as triangles and trapezes.
- House floors paved with stone slabs were found.
- Stone-paved areas with a large number of animal bones found.
- Animal bones of domesticated animals such as sheep, goats, cattle have been found.
- Important discoveries include ring stones (used as hammer stones to make microliths, and rubbing stones (for grinding food).

Langhnaj :

- Situated in Mehsana district, Gujarat.
- It is the most extensively studied site in Gujarat.
- Important discoveries were-microliths, human burials, bones of wild animals and some potsherds.
- 14 human skeletons with cut marks on fore head were found.
- A symbiotic relationship with Harappan urban culture was found. Honey and hunted meat were sent to Harappan centres.

KEY LEARNINGS

- Mesolithic period (Middle Stone Age) was a transition period between Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods.
- Mesolithic people used small polished stone tools, which were sharp and pointed, called microliths.
- Notable examples of Mesolithic sites in India are Bhimbetka, Adamgarh and Panchmarhi (M.P.) Bagor and Tilwara (Rajasthan) and Langhnaj (Gujarat).

Neolithic period :

The Neolithic Period began around 8000 BCE and lasted till about 4000 BCE. The Neolithic people learnt to make more polished tools. One of the major developments of this period was the adoption of agriculture. They moved to larger settlements and realised the importance of domestic animals like dogs, sheep and cattle. They used them as means of transport and for providing them with milk and meat.



Neolithic tools

The Neolithic Revolution :

The Neolithic Revolution (8,000-4000 BCE) was a foundational shift from nomadic hunting and gathering to settled agriculture. It featured the domestication of plants and animals, permanent settlements, use of polished stone tools, pottery, population growth and societal complexity. Humans began cultivating crops such as wheat, barley, rice and domesticating animals such as sheep, goats and cattle for food, labour, and resources like milk and wool. Instead of migrating, people established permanent villages with improved housing. The period is marked by the use of polished stone tools (sickles, axes), wearing of textiles, and the development of pottery for storing food.

Development of Agriculture :

The emergence of agriculture was the most important development of the Neolithic Age. Early man turned from a food gatherer to a food producer. Agriculture led to a settled life. Man moved into larger settlements. He cultivated the fields, grew crops and stayed in one place. He did not have to move from place to place in search of food. He started living in huts made of dried leaves and mud.

The first cereals to be grown were wheat and barley. Later, he learnt to domesticate animals like dogs, goats, sheep and cattle.

Agriculture was first practised by the people of the Near East (Modern Iran, Iraq, Turkey) and the Levant (Lebanon, Palestine and Southern Syria) as early as 7000 BCE.

Many Neolithic sites have been discovered where traces of wheat, millets, lentils, grains and animal bones have been found. They are

- Mehrgarh in Pakistan.
- Koldihwa and Mahagara in Uttar Pradesh.
- Gufkral and Burzahom in Kashmir.
- Hallur in Karnataka and Paiyampalli in Tamil Nadu.

Domestication of Animals :

The first domesticated animal was the dog. Dogs were most probably used for guarding caves and for pulling loads. Cattle, goat and sheep provided meat, milk and wool. The domestication of animals gave rise to pastoralism. But what is pastoralism? Pastoralism is a form of farming in which animals such as camels, goats, cattle and sheep move in herds in search of fresh pastures and water.

Pottery :

Once early man learnt how to grow food, he also developed the art of storing food. He needed vessels for it. Neolithic man needed vessels to store food grains and water. He learned to make clay pottery with his hands. Later, these pots were decorated with various designs of animal figures on them.

With the invention of the potter's wheel, various types of pottery could be made easily and more quickly.

Invention of the Wheel :

One of the major achievements of the Neolithic period was the invention of the wheel. The potter's wheel enabled him to make pots of different shapes and sizes. The use of wheels made transportation easier and faster. The invention of the wheel led to the invention of carts and then to bullock-driven carts. Man could now move heavy loads easily and go from one place to another faster. Subsequently, the invention of the wheel led to the invention of spindle whorls for weaving cloth of wool and cotton. Various types of pottery enabled early men to store grains and seeds for the next season. Thus, the invention of wheel quickened the march of civilisation.

- Domestication is a name given to a process in which people grow plants and look after animals.
- In domestication a selection of plants and animals are made by the people.
- Plants which are healthy, can bear and yield grains, are chosen.
- Domestication began 12,000 years ago.

Neolithic Site	Location	Remains of Bones	Remains of Grains
Mahagara	Uttar Pradesh	Marks of cattle hoof	Rice
Koldihwa	Uttar Pradesh	Bone fragments of animals	Rice
Chirand	Bihar	Bones of buffalo and ox	Wheat, barley and peas
Mehrgarh	Pakistan	Bones of sheep, goat, cattle	Wheat, barley
Burzahom	Kashmir valley	Bones of buffalo, cattle, dog, sheep, goat	Lentil, wheat
Gufkral	Kashmir valley	-	Lentil, wheat
Hallur	Karnataka	Bones of cattle, pig, goat and sheep	Millet
Paiyampalli	Tamil Nadu	Bones of cattle, pig and sheep	Millet, black gram

Findings at Various Neolithic Sites in India : Neolithic Tools

Tools of the Neolithic Period included agricultural implements like sickles, digging sticks, hoes and grinding tools like mortar and pestles.

1. Polished stone tools with fine cutting edge were used for grinding grains and other products. Some tools were made of bones too.
2. Stone axes found from the Bellary district (Karnataka) and the Santhal Parganas (Jharkhand) also belonged to this period.

KEY LEARNINGS

- Neolithic Revolution refers to the period or era when early man became a food-producer from being a food-gatherer.
- Early man began farming, started domestication of animals such as sheep, goat and cattle.
- He learnt to make pottery to store grains and started living in permanent houses near the banks of rivers.

Mesolithic	: The Middle Stone Age when men started making advanced stone tools.
Neolithic	: The New Stone Age when men began to grow plants and domesticate animals.
Nomad	: One who moves from place to place in search of food.
Palaeolithic	: The Old Stone Age when men used only stone tools and were food gatherers.
Sites	: Places where material remains of the past are found
Microliths	: Small tools used by people of the Mesolithic period.
Revolution	: A period of tremendous transformation from the previous one.