ANCIENT HISTORY OF INDIA

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1. Stone Age

Geographical and Climatic Context of Stone Age India

- Earliest fossil remains of archaic Homo sapiens in India have been found in the Narmada Valley.
- Humans appeared in the Cenozoic Era of the Geological Time Scale.
- Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) discovered an ancient pre-historic camping site at an altitude of 4,200 metres in Nubra Valley, Ladakh (part of the erstwhile state of Jammu & Kashmir).

Lower Palaeolithic Cultures: Core tools, key sites (e.g., Soan, Acheulian)

- Lower Palaeolithic Age: Earliest period of the Stone Age in India.
- Core Tools: Dominant tool type, made by flaking away outer parts of a stone nodule. Examples include Handaxes and Cleavers.
- Chopper-Chopping Tools: Made on pebbles, characteristic of the Soanian culture.
- Raw Materials: Primarily Quartzite; also Jasper, Chert, and Sandstone.
- Paleolithic Blade: A flake tool with length more than twice its width.
- Acheulian Culture (Handaxe-Cleaver Culture): Characterized by bifacial handaxes and cleavers, dominant in Peninsular India.
- Soanian Culture (Pebble Culture): Characterized by chopper-chopping tools, dominant in Punjab (Potwar Plateau, Soan Valley).
- Key Sites & Locations:
  - Isampur: Gulbarga district, Karnataka. A stone tool manufacturing center, located along the Kamta Halla stream.
  - Nevasa: Maharashtra.
  - Didwana, Jayal, Singhitalav: Rajasthan.
  - Lalitpur: Uttar Pradesh (Bundelkhand region).
  - Gudiyam Cave: Tamil Nadu.
  - Attirampakkam: Tamil Nadu.
  - Soan Valley: Punjab (now Pakistan).
  - Bhimbetka: Madhya Pradesh (rock shelters).
  - Hunsgi: Karnataka.
- General Characteristics: Tools often found in areas with brown-red soil.

Major Neolithic Sites and Cultures (e.g., Mehrgarh, Burzahom, Chirand, Sanganakallu)

- Mehrgarh: Neolithic site in Bolan Valley, Balochistan (Pakistan). Earliest evidence of agriculture (wheat, barley) and animal domestication.
- Burzahom: Neolithic site in Kashmir (J&K, India). Known for pit dwellings and dog burials with masters. Not associated with rock-cut shrines.
- Chirand: Prominent Neolithic site in Bihar. Noted for a rich assemblage of bone tools (made of antlers).
- Sanganakallu: Neolithic site in Karnataka. Associated with ash mounds (burnt cow dung, indicative of pastoralism).
- Hallur: Neolithic site in Karnataka.
- Brahmagiri: Neolithic and Megalithic site in Karnataka.
- Koldihwa: Neolithic site in Uttar Pradesh (Belan Valley). Earliest evidence of rice cultivation.
- Navdatoli: Chalcolithic site located in Madhya Pradesh.
- Ganeshwar: Chalcolithic site in Rajasthan. Known for rich copper artefacts.
- Adichanallur: Megalithic burial site in Tamil Nadu.
- Kurnool: Palaeolithic/Mesolithic cave sites in Andhra Pradesh.
- Budihal: Neolithic site in Karnataka, also known for ash mounds.
- Senuaar: Neolithic and Chalcolithic site in Bihar.
- Chandra-ketugarh: Historical period site in West Bengal, known for terracotta art.
- Ahar (Dhoolkot): Chalcolithic site in Rajasthan, known for the Ahar-Banas culture; Dhoolkot is an archaeological mound within the Ahar complex.

Major Palaeolithic Sites in India (e.g., Bhimbetka, Hunsgi, Kurnool Caves)

- Bhimbetka (Madhya Pradesh):
  - Discovered by Dr. Vishnu S. Wakankar (V.S. Wakankar).
  - Discovery period: 1957-1958.
  - Known for rock shelters and prehistoric rock paintings, spanning Palaeolithic to Mesolithic periods.
  - Features the 'Auditorium Cave'.
  - Rock Shelter III F-23 is a significant site within Bhimbetka, associated with Wakankar's work.
- Palaeolithic Sites in Rajasthan:
  - Singi-Talav.
  - Indargarh.
  - Luni Basin (e.g., Didwana, Budha Pushkar) – source of Palaeolithic tools.
- Palaeolithic Sites in Gujarat:
  - Examples: Kot, Hirpura, Hadol.
  - Indargarh is NOT located in Gujarat.
- North to South Arrangement of Major Palaeolithic Sites:
  - Bhimbetka (Madhya Pradesh)
  - Nevasa (Maharashtra)
  - Hunsgi (Karnataka)
  - Renigunta (Andhra Pradesh)

Mesolithic Age: Transition, microliths, hunter-gatherer societies

- Mesolithic Age (Middle Stone Age): Represents a transitional period between the Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age) and Neolithic (New Stone Age).
- Defining Characteristic: Marked by the widespread use of microliths, which are extremely small, often geometric, finely flaked stone tools.
- Tool Materials: Microliths were typically crafted from fine-grained siliceous rocks such as chalcedony, chert, agate, jasper, flint, and quartz, replacing the coarser quartzite used in earlier periods.
- Economy & Society: Primarily continued a hunter-gatherer subsistence strategy, but also saw the beginning of animal domestication.
- Earliest Animal Domestication Evidence: Found at Bagor (Rajasthan) and Adamgarh (Madhya Pradesh), dating to the Mesolithic period.
- Burial Practices: Mesolithic people generally practiced inhumation (burying the dead), sometimes with grave goods; cremation was not a common practice.

- Key Mesolithic Sites & Findings:
  - Bagor (Rajasthan): One of the largest and most significant Mesolithic sites, known for rich microlithic assemblages and the earliest evidence of animal domestication. Excavated by V.N. Misra (Deccan College, Pune). An 'Engraved Upper-Palaeolithic/ Mesolithic Core' has also been reported.
  - Adamgarh (Madhya Pradesh): Another important site with early evidence of animal domestication.
  - Mahadaha (Uttar Pradesh - Ganga Plain): Renowned for multiple human burials (including collective burials) with associated grave goods (e.g., bone tools, ornaments). Often studied through salvage excavations.
  - Sarai Nahar Rai (Uttar Pradesh - Ganga Plain): Contains human burials, evidence of communal hearths, and indications of violent death.
  - Damdama (Uttar Pradesh - Ganga Plain): Features numerous burials, hearths, and bone tools.
  - Lekhahia (Uttar Pradesh - Vindhyas): A site yielding microliths and burials.
  - Paisra (Bihar): A Mesolithic site with microlithic tool findings.
  - Theri Sites (Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu): Distinctive microlithic sites found on red sand dunes (called 'teri' in Tamil) in South India.
  - Tilwara (Rajasthan), Sojat (Rajasthan), Dhaneri (Rajasthan): Other notable sites for microlithic culture.
  - Bhimbetka (Madhya Pradesh): Famous for Mesolithic rock shelters and vibrant rock paintings depicting animals and human activities.
- Salvage Excavation: A type of archaeological excavation conducted rapidly and under challenging conditions, typically to rescue and document archaeological remains from sites facing imminent destruction (e.g., by dam construction like Nagarjunakonda, or urban development).
- Geographical Order of Selected Sites (West to East): Birhanpur (Madhya Pradesh) -> Mahadaha (Uttar Pradesh) -> Lekhahia (Uttar Pradesh) -> Paisra (Bihar).

Mesolithic Rock Art and Burial Practices (e.g., Adamgarh, Bagor, Langhnaj)

- Mesolithic Rock Art Discovery: Archibald Carlleyle discovered the first rock paintings in India in 1867-68 at Sohagighat, Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh.
- Bhimbetka Rock Paintings: Discovered by archaeologist V.S. Wakankar (1957-58) who noticed rocks from a train window. It is a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- Mesolithic Art Characteristics: Depict hunting, gathering, fishing, dancing, social life. Common colors: red (ochre), white, yellow, green. Animals are often naturalistic; humans are more stylistic.
- Orissa Rock Art: Paintings and engravings typically exist in the same shelters.
- Bagor (Rajasthan):
  - Large Mesolithic site in Rajasthan.
  - Located on the Kothari River (a tributary of Banas).
  - Associated with the Mahasati dune (Mahasatyea), where remains were found.
  - Evidence of planned burials, some with microliths and early copper objects.
- Adamgarh (Madhya Pradesh): Significant Mesolithic rock art and habitation site.
- Langhnaj (Gujarat):
  - Important Mesolithic site.
  - Yielded multiple human skeletons (at least 14) in flexed positions.
  - Grave goods included microliths, shell beads, and animal teeth.
- Burial Practices - Uttar Pradesh Sites:
  - Damdama: Recovered 41 human burials; notable for a grave with three human skeletons and another with four human skeletons in a single grave.
  - Mahadaha: Discovered multiple burials with bone artifacts (e.g., harpoons, arrowheads, ornaments) as grave goods.

- Sarai Nahar Rai: Features distinct extended burials and evidence of dog burials with humans.
- Lekhahia (Vindhyas): A rock shelter yielding the maximum number of human skeletons (approx. 17) from the Vindhyas region.

- Megaliths: Primarily identified as ancient burial sites, often marked by large stones.
- Belan Valley: Known for an Upper Palaeolithic bone-made idol of a mother goddess.
- Archaeological Sites and Districts (Rajasthan):
  - Singhi Talav - Nagaur
  - Tilwara - Barmer
  - Bijak ki Pahari (part of Bairat) - Jaipur
  - Nagari - Chittorgarh

Middle Palaeolithic Cultures: Flake tools and regional variations

- Middle Palaeolithic Period: c. 150,000 BP to c. 40,000 BP (dates vary regionally and chronologically).
- Key Characteristic: Dominance of flake tools, representing a technological advancement over the core tools of the Lower Palaeolithic.
- Primary Raw Materials: Finer-grained stones like chert, jasper, chalcedony, and sometimes quartzite, which allowed for better control and sharper edges.
- Tool Types: Primarily scrapers (side, end, round), points, borers, and awls. Handaxes and cleavers from the Lower Palaeolithic largely disappeared or became less significant.
- Levallois Technique: A distinctive method of prehistoric stone flaking where a tortoise-shaped core was carefully prepared, and then a pre-determined shape and size flake was struck off. This technique was crucial for producing sharp, efficient flake tools.
- Major Sites in India: Nevasa (Maharashtra), Didwana (Rajasthan), Belan Valley (Uttar Pradesh), Son Valley (Madhya Pradesh), Luni Valley (Rajasthan), and various sites in the Narmada Valley.
- Cultural Evolution: Often seen as a cultural phase that evolved from the Acheulian tradition of the Lower Palaeolithic, with a shift towards more specialized and lighter tools.

Neolithic Revolution: Origin of agriculture, animal domestication, settled life

- Neolithic Age is also known as the New Stone Age.
- Characteristic features included ground & polished stone tools, agriculture, animal domestication, pottery, and settled life.
- Cultivation of cereals first started in the Neolithic Age.
- The earliest evidence of agriculture and animal domestication in the Indian subcontinent has come from Mehrgarh (Balochistan, Pakistan).
- Evidence from Mehrgarh dates back to around 8000 BCE, showing cultivation of wheat and barley, along with animal domestication, indicating settled life.
- The earliest evidence of rice cultivation in the Indian subcontinent is found at Lahuradeva (Uttar Pradesh, c. 9000-8000 BCE), and earlier accepted at Koldihwa (Belan Valley, Uttar Pradesh, c. 6500 BCE).
- Lahuradeva is also recognized as an early farming site located near a lake.
- Neolithic features like agriculture and settled life did not appear simultaneously across all parts of the subcontinent, exhibiting regional variations.
- The first metal used by man, marking the transition from the Neolithic to the Chalcolithic period, was Copper.

Neolithic Tools, Pottery, and Habitations

- Neolithic tools primarily consisted of highly polished stone tools (celts), often ground and pecked, used for agriculture and other purposes.
- Bone tools were also a feature of the Neolithic period, notably found at Burzahom in Kashmir.
- Neolithic pottery was initially handmade, later wheel-made, characterized by coarse grey, red, and black burnished wares, sometimes with incised designs.

- Neolithic habitations indicate settled village life, with constructions of wattle-and-daub houses or mud-brick structures.
- Pit-dwellings are a distinctive habitation feature of the Neolithic site of Burzahom (Kashmir).
- Ash mounds, often associated with cattle-penning and seasonal occupation, are characteristic of Neolithic sites in South India.
- The first metal used by humans was copper, leading to the Chalcolithic (Copper-Stone) Age.
- The Jorwe culture, a significant Chalcolithic culture, covered most of modern Maharashtra, with the notable exception of the coastal Konkan region.
- The Pravara-Godavari valleys are considered the nuclear zone of the Jorwe culture.
- Jorwe culture sites practiced settled agriculture (cultivating cereals like wheat, barley, rice) and animal husbandry, rather than shifting agriculture.
- Key Chalcolithic sites in Maharashtra include Jorwe, Nevasa, Daimabad, Chandoli, Songaon, Inamgaon, Prakashe, and Nasik.
- Prominent Chalcolithic sites in Rajasthan include Ahar (Banas culture) and Gilund.
- Important Chalcolithic sites in Madhya Pradesh include Malwa, Kayatha, and Eran.

Palaeolithic Age: Periodization and Chronology

- Stone Age periods are primarily identified and differentiated based on the type and technology of stone tools used.
- Stone Age cultures in India exhibited significant regional variations and did not evolve uniformly or in a neat unilinear fashion across the subcontinent.
- Robert Bruce Foote, a geologist and archaeologist, discovered the first Palaeolithic tool (a handaxe) in India at Pallavaram near Madras in 1863.
- The 'Three Age System' (Stone, Bronze, Iron) was coined by C.J. Thomsen based on the collection in the Copenhagen Museum.
- Palaeolithic Age Key Sites & Characteristics:
  - Sohan/Soan River Valley in Punjab is a prominent site for Lower Palaeolithic pebble tools.
  - Bhimbetka Caves in Madhya Pradesh contain evidence from Lower Palaeolithic through Mesolithic periods, famous for rock shelters and early rock art.
  - Hathnora, located in the Narmada Valley, is the site where the partial skull fossil of Homo erectus (known as Narmada Man) was discovered in India.
  - Homo sapiens first appeared during the Upper Palaeolithic period.
  - Lakhu Udyar in Uttarakhand is a significant prehistoric rock art site.
- Key Dating Methods & Related Disciplines:
  - Radiocarbon (^{14}C) dating: Measures the decay of Carbon-14 in organic materials to determine their age. It was pioneered by Willard Libby (W.F. Libby) and is primarily used for dating archaeological materials.
  - Dendrochronology: A dating method based on the analysis of tree-ring patterns.
  - Archaeological Stratigraphy: Governed by the Law of Superposition, which states that in any undisturbed sequence of deposits, older layers lie beneath younger ones.
  - Palaeobotany: The scientific study and analysis of prehistoric plants and vegetation.
  - Palaeography: The study of ancient and historical writing systems and scripts.
- Other Stone Age Period Sites (for general context):
  - Mesolithic Age: Bhimbetka Caves (also particularly noted for Mesolithic period habitation and art).
  - Neolithic Age: Burzahom (Kashmir) is a key site.
  - Chalcolithic Age: The Banas Valley (Ahar-Banas culture) is a major Chalcolithic region.