

## 6<sup>th</sup> – History - On The Trail of Earliest People



People who lived in the subcontinent as early as two million years ago. We were described as hunter-gatherers. The name comes from the way in which they got their food. Generally, they hunted wild animals, caught fish and birds, gathered fruits, roots, nuts, seeds, leaves, stalks and eggs. The immense variety of plant in a tropical land like India meant that gathering plant produce was an extremely important means of obtaining food. There are at least four reasons why hunters-gatherers moved from place to place.

- First, if they had stayed at one place for a long time, they would have eaten up all the available plant and animal resources. Therefore, they would have had to go elsewhere in search of food.
- Second, animal move from place to place- either in search of smaller prey, or in the case of deer and wild cattle, in search of grass and leaves.
- Thirdly, plants and trees bear fruit in different seasons. So, people may have moved from season to season in search of different kinds of plants.
- Fourth, people, plants and animals need water to survive. Water is found in lakes, streams and rivers. While many rivers and lakes are perennial (with water throughout the year) others are seasonal. People living on their banks would have had to go in search of water during the dry seasons (winter and summer).

**How do we know about these people?:** Archaeologists have found some of the things hunter-gatherers made and used. It is likely that people made and used tools of stone, wood and bone, of which stone tools have survived best.

Some of these stone tools were used to cut meat and bone, scrape bark (from trees) and hides (animal skins), chop fruit and roots. Some may have been attached to handles of bone or wood, to make spears and arrows for hunting. Other tools were used to chop wood, which was used as firewood. Wood was also used to make huts and tools.

**Choosing a place to live in:** As stone tools were important, people tried to find places where good quality stone was easily available. Places where stone was found and where people made tools are known as factory sites. Usually, we find blocks of stone, tools that were made and perhaps discarded because they were not perfect, and chips of waste stone left behind at these sites. Sometimes, people lived here for longer spells of time. These sites are called habitation-cum-factory sites.

**Making stone tools:** Stone tools were probably made using two different techniques:

1. The first is called stone on stone. Here, the pebble from which the tool was to be made (also called the core) was held in one hand. Another stone, which was used as a hammer was held in the other hand. The second stone was used to strike off flakes from the first, till the required shape was obtained.
2. Pressure flaking: here the core was placed on a firm surface. The hammer stone was used on a piece of bone or stone that was placed on the core, to remove flakes that could be shaped into tools.

**Finding out about fire:** Ash have been found in Kurnool caves. This suggests that people were familiar with the use of fire. Fire could have been used for many things: as a source of light, to cook meat, and to scare away animals.

**A changing environment:** Around 12,000 years ago, there were major changes in the climate of the world, with a shift to relatively warm conditions. In many areas,



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this led to the development of grasslands. This in turn led to an increase in the number of deer, antelope, goat, sheep and cattle. i.e. animals that survived on grass. Those who hunted these animals now followed them, learning about their food habits and their breeding seasons. It is likely that this helped people to start thinking about herding and rearing these animals themselves. Fishing also became important.

This was also a time when several grain bearing grasses, including wheat, barley and rice grew naturally in different parts of the subcontinent. Men, women and children probably collected these grain as food, and learnt where they grew, and when they ripened. This may have led them to think about growing plants on their own.

**Who did what?** The earliest people hunted, gathered plant produce, made stone tools, and painted on cave walls. Is there any way of finding out whether women hunted, or men made stone tools, whether women painted or men gathered fruits and nuts? It is likely that both men and women may have done many of these things together. It is also possible that some tasks were done only by women and others only by men. And again, there could have been different practices in different parts of the subcontinent.

**A closer look- Hunsgi:** A number of early Old Stone Age sites were found here. At some sites, a large number of tools, used for all sorts of activities, were found. These were probably habitation -cum factory sites.

The period of human history from around 500,000 BCE to 4,000 BCE, when humans used mainly stone tools, is known as the stone age. The stone age is further divided into the old stone age or the Palaeolithic age, the middle stone Age or the Mesolithic and the new stone age or the Neolithic age. The period of transition, or change, from the use of stone to the use of metals is known as copper -stone age or the chalcolithic age.

**The Old Stone Age, Or the Paleolithic Age (Around 500,000 - 10,000 BCE):** During the old stone age, human beings were mainly nomads, i.e., wanderers or people without a permanent home. And had a diet of raw meat along with vegetables and fruits. Hunting could not support a growing population in one place, so the choice for the hunters was rather brutal- starve or move. Therefore, they moved over great distances.

**Tools And weapons:** In order to protect themselves, and to make their lives easier, the Paleolithic humans made simple and crude stone tools and weapons (e.g., axe-heads, hammers and choppers).

**Shelter and clothing:** They used animal skins, barks of trees and leaves to make their clothing. They lived in caves, trees or natural rock shelters.

**Art:** Towards the end of old Stone Age, vivid and beautiful cave paintings started appearing in various sites around the world, like Altamira in Spain and Lascaux in France.

**Discovery of fire:** Fire is the most important discoveries made by humans. Fire could protect them from wild animals. They must also have found cooked food softer and easier to eat, and may be tastier.

**Invention of the wheel:** The wheel which is believed to have been invented during the Old Stone Age, was one of the most important inventions in history.



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**Paleolithic sites in India:** Paleolithic sites in India include Attirampakkam in Tamil Nadu, Hunsgi in Karnataka and Bhimbetka and Baghor in Madhya Pradesh.

**The Middle Stone Age, or the Mesolithic Age (10,000-8000 BCE):** The Mesolithic or Middle stone age was a period of transition between the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic Age. This period lasted from around 10,000 to 8000 BCE. We come to know about the Mesolithic people from three sources, namely, tools, cave and rock paintings and burial sites.

**Changing lifestyles:** By around 9000 BCE, the climate became warmer and drier. A greater variety of plants and animals now became available. So, both hunting and gathering became easier. The people continued to hunt, fish and gather food. They probably discovered the value of seeds of some grasses like barley and wheat. Many humans continued to live in rock shelters, some build their own houses of sticks, twigs and mud.

Rock paintings from Mesolithic period have been found in Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. Remains of human burial have also been found. There are evidences of food and ornaments at these burial sites.

**Tools And Implements:** Microliths, or very small stone tools, are the main type of tools found at Mesolithic sites. Tools at this time were also made of bone, wood, or the tusks and horns of animals. These new, lighter tools helped quicker movement, and hunting became easier. The bow and arrow made it easy to hunt fast-moving animals.

**The New Stone Age, Or the Neolithic Age (8000- 4000<sub>BCE</sub>):** Around 8000<sub>BCE</sub>, the Mesolithic Age ended and the new stone age or the Neolithic Age started. Humans evolved from being hunters and gatherers to being farmers and herders.

**Chalcolithic Age (4000, 2000<sub>BCE</sub>):** Chalcolithic Age is also called the copper - Stone Age. Implements made of both stone and copper were used during this period. People invented the plough, the wheeled cart and the sail boat. They discovered how to mix metals and get stronger tools, vessels and weapons.

The availability of a perennial water source in the form of spring, the availability of raw material in the form of limestone for tool-making, the protected nature of the valley, and the availability of a wide variety of plant and animal foods, ensured continuous human occupation of this valley from the earliest time.

