

6th – From Gathering to Growing Food



Stone Age: the stone age man lived in hilly areas by the side or rivers and lakes. In the beginning, he took shelter in the caves, rock shelters, in mud huts. The three stages of the Stone Age are:

1. **Paleolithic Age:** in this period, man used crude stone tools and weapons and led a nomadic life. It was also known as Old Stone Age.
2. **Mesolithic Age:** in the age, man used microliths stone tools which were binded or joined to handles or sticks of wood/bamboo. In this age, man started domesticating animals. It is also known as Middle Stone Age.
3. **Neolithic Age:** in this age, man used polished stone tools, domesticated animals, used tools for agriculture and led a settled life. It was also known as New Stone Age. The period from around 8000 to 4000_{BCE} is known as the Neolithic Age. During this period, humans changed from hunters and gatherers to farmers and herders. Around 8000_{BC}, the ice which had covered large parts of the earth during the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic Age started to melt. The warmer climate encouraged the spread of plants and animals to previously cold regions. People learnt to grow crops of grains, and vegetables. This resulted in development of agriculture. People also started taming animals as they realized how useful they were.

Varieties of food: After centuries of practicing food gathering, humans learnt to plant their own crops and plan their harvests. They learnt to select the best quality seeds. Humans learnt to plough the land before planting seeds. Due to these improvement agricultural practices, there was an explosion in agricultural output. This agricultural revolution brought many changes and improvement in the way people lived. More food could now be produced than was required for the people. This led to methods of saving for the future. Food could be stored till the next harvest. Fruit, vegetables, grain, milk and meat comes from plant that are grown and animals that are reared. Different plants grow in different conditions different animals too, prefer different environments

The beginning of farming and herding: During the Neolithic period, humans started domesticating animals. Remains of animal bones and shelters found at Neolithic sites tell us what kinds of animals were domesticated. The climate of the world was changing and so were plants and animals that people used as food men, women and children probably observed several things the places where edible plants were found, how seeds broke off stalks, fell on the ground and new plants sprouted from them women, men and children could also attract and then tamed animals by leaving food for them near their shelters the first animal to be tamed was the wild ancestor of the dog. People encouraged animals that were relatively gentle to come near the camps where they lived. These animals such as sheep, goat, cattle and also the pig lived in herds and most of them ate grass. Often, people protected these animals from attacks by other wild animals. With the domestication of animals like oxen, pigs and sheep, there was a regular supply of meat. Goats also gave milk. Some of the animals like horses, oxen and bulls could be used to plough the land. Thus, Neolithic humans became herders. Herding is the management of domesticated animals. This is how they became herders. Herding is the management of domesticated animals. The animals domesticated by the humans needed to be moved from place to place in search of fresh pasture or grass.

A new way of life: When people began growing plants, it meant that they had to stay in the same place for a long time looking after the plants, watering, weeding driving away animals and birds – till the grain ripened. And then, the grain had to be used carefully. As grain had to be stored for both food and seed, people had to think of ways of storing it. In many areas, they began making large clay pots, or move basket, or dug pits into the ground.

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Storing animal: Animal multiply naturally. Besides, if they are looked after carefully, they provide milk, which is an important source of food, and meat, whenever required. In other words, animals that are reared can be used as a “store of food.”

Towards a settled life: Settle community living was another result of agriculture. Settle life would also have needed a leader and someone to maintain law and order. This period probably saw the beginning of division of labour. Some people would have made tools, some would have taken the animals for grazing, and some would have been involved in agriculture. The population increased rapidly because large quantities of food were available, and the agricultural revolution provided the means for a secure life in the future.

A burial is an arrangement made by people for their relatives and friends. When people die, generally respect is paid to them. Dead people are looked after perhaps because of the belief that there is some form of life after death. Neolithic people buried their dead. Objects used by the dead persons, like tools, weapons and pottery, were buried with them. In many parts of South India, burial places have been marked with huge rectangular blocks of stone. They are called megaliths (mega means ‘large’ in Greek). Archaeologists have found traces of huts or houses at some sites, people-built pit-houses, which were dug into the ground, with steps leading into them. These may have provided shelter in cold weather, Archaeologists have also found cooking hearths both inside and outside the huts, which suggests that, depending on the weather, people could cook food either indoors or outdoors.

Tools: With farming as an activity growing in importance, there was a demand for better and more effective tools. Sickles and reaping knives were developed to harvest crops. Heavy tools were used for digging and leveling the land. Grinding stones were invented for processing cereals and other plant food. Stone axes were used to cut down trees and mattocks to break up the soil. Stone tools have been found from many sites as well. Many of these are different from the earlier Paleolithic tools and that is why they are called Neolithic. These include tools that were polished to give a fine cutting edge, and mortars and pestles used for grinding grain and other plant produce.

Pottery: Pots were needed for storing excess grain and milk and water. During the Neolithic Age, humans learnt to make vessels of clay and bake them on fire.

Many kinds of earthen pots have also been found. These were sometimes decorated, and were used for storing things. People began using pots for cooking food, especially grains like rice, wheat and lentils that now became an important part of the diet. They began weaving cloth, using different kinds of materials, for example cotton, that could now be grown. In many areas, men and women still continued to hunt and gather food and elsewhere people adopted farming and herding slowly, over several thousand years.

Invention of the Axle: One of the greatest inventions of the Neolithic humans was the wheel with an axle. An axle is a shaft on which the wheel rotates. The invention of the axle allowed the wheel to turn freely. It had various uses.

- The potter’s wheel was used to work clay to make better pots.
- Heavy objects could be transported on wheels.
- It improved transport and quickened the pace of development.
- Possibly, the wheel was used to spin cotton thread which could then be woven into cloth.

Religion: Not much is known about the religion of the early humans. They must have been awed by nature and its mysteries. Probably nature was worshipped in different forms. The cave painting of old Stone Age hunters may have had magical or religious significance. Several statues and figurines of mother goddesses have been found at Neolithic sites, suggesting the prevalence of goddess-worship. Over a period of the dead and their worship assumed importance.

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What about other customs and practices?

Scholars have studied the lives of present-day farmers who practice simple agriculture. They have also studied the lives of herders. Many of these farmers and herders live in groups called tribes.

Tribes: Usually two to three generations live together in small settlements or villages. Most families are related to one another and groups of such families form a tribe.

- Members of a tribe follow occupations such as hunting, gathering, farming, herding and fishing. Usually women do most of the agricultural work, including preparing the ground, sowing seeds, looking after the growing plants and harvesting grain. Children often look after plants, driving away animals and birds that might eat them. Women also thresh, husk and grind grain. Men usually lead large herds of animals in search of pasture. Children often look after small flocks. Both women and men make pots, baskets, tools and huts. They also take part in singing, dancing and decorating their huts.

- Tribes have rich and unique cultural traditions, including their own language, music, stories, and painting. They also have their own gods and goddesses.

Living and dying in Mehrgarh: This site is located in a fertile plain, near the Bolan Pass, which is one of the most important routes into Iran. Mehrgarh was probably one of the places where woman and men learnt to grow barley and wheat and rear sheep and goats for the first time in this area. Archaeologists who excavated the site found evidence of many kinds of animal bones. These included bones of wild animals such as the deer and pig. Mehrgarh include remains of square or rectangular houses. Each house had four or more compartments, some of which may have been used for storage. When people die, their relatives and friends generally pay respect to them. People look after them, perhaps in the belief that there is some form of life after death. Burial is one such arrangement. Several burial sites have been found at Mehrgarh. In one instance, the dead person was buried with goats, which were probably meant to serve as food in the next world.

Daojali Hadig: This is a site on the hills near the Brahmaputra valley, close to routes leading into china and Myanmar. Here stone tools, including mortars and pestles, have been found. These indicate that people were probably growing grain and preparing food from it. Other finds include jadeite, a stone that may have been brought from china.

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