

Indian Stone Age- Ancient India- Chapter 1/Indian History

Description

The word “**history**” originates from the **Greek word “historia”** (ἱστορία), meaning “inquiry” or “knowledge acquired by investigation.” It was first used by the ancient Greek historian **Herodotus** around 5th century BCE, who is often called the “Father of History.” Over time, the term evolved to refer to the study and recording of past events. Here in this chapter we will delve in to Ancient Indian History about Stone Age.



Prehistory

- **Prehistory** refers to the period of human history **before written records**. This era covers everything from the emergence of humans up to the development of writing systems. Prehistoric knowledge is derived from **archaeological discoveries**, such as tools, cave paintings, and fossils. The **Stone Age**, **Bronze Age**, and **Iron Age** are examples of prehistoric periods.

Protohistory

- **Protohistory** is the transitional phase between **prehistory** and **history**. During this time, certain cultures may have developed **writing systems** or were mentioned in the writings of other cultures, but they may not have had their own written records or comprehensive historical accounts. Protohistory usually includes early civilizations that are recorded in **external sources**, such as those from neighboring literate societies.

History

- **History** begins with the development of **writing systems** that allow societies to record events, laws, and traditions. Written records are used as the primary source for reconstructing the past. History is generally divided into different periods, such as:
- **Ancient history** (e.g., early civilizations like Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome)
- **Medieval history** (e.g., the Middle Ages)
- **Modern history** (from the Renaissance onwards)

In summary:

- **Prehistory**: Before written records.
- **Protohistory**: Transitional phase with limited written references.
- **History**: When societies developed writing, allowing for detailed documentation of events.

Indian Stone Age– Ancient India

The **Indian Stone Age** refers to the period of human prehistory in the Indian subcontinent, characterized by the use of stone tools. It is divided into three main phases (additional one Copper age), similar to other parts of the world:

1. Paleolithic Age (Old Stone Age): Hunters and Food Gatherers

- **Timeframe**: Roughly **2.5 million years ago to around 10,000 BCE**. Developed in the **Pleistocene period** or the **Ice Age**.
- **Key Features**:
 - The earliest and longest phase of the Stone Age.
 - Paleolithic man of India said to have belonged to the **Negrito race**. Lived in caves and rock shelters.
 - Humans lived as hunter-gatherers, using rudimentary stone tools for hunting and food gathering.
 - Have **no knowledge** of agriculture, house building, pottery or any metal.
 - In the later stage attained the knowledge of **Fire**.
 - Evidence of **choppers, hand axes, blades, burin, flakes, borers, points, scrapers and cleavers** has been found at various sites.
 - The tools are made of a hard rock called “**quartzite**”, hence they are called “**Quartzite men**” of India.
 - The earliest human settlements in India during the Paleolithic are mostly found along rivers and in caves.
 - **Homo sapiens** first appeared at the end of this phase.
- **Sites**:
 - Spreads all parts of India **except** the alluvial plains of Indus and Ganga.

- Notable sites include **Bhimbetka (Madhya Pradesh)**, **Belan Valley Mirzapur (UP)**, **Son, Narmada and Tungabhadra valley**, **Potwar plateau (between Indus and Jhelum)**, **Sanghao cave (Pakistan)** where ancient rock shelters with Paleolithic rock art have been discovered, and **Kurnool Caves (Andhra Pradesh)**.
- **Climate:** The period experienced multiple ice ages, which impacted human migration and settlement.

2. Mesolithic Age (Middle Stone Age): Hunters and Herders

- **Timeframe:** Around **10,000 BCE to 6,000 BCE**. Both Mesolithic and Neolithic culture belongs to **Holocene era**.
- **Key Features:**
 - This phase marked the transition from large stone tools to smaller, sharper tools called **microliths**. Made of crypto-crystalline silica, chalcedony or chert (both of geometrical and non-geometrical shapes).
 - The Mesolithic period also saw the development of **bow and arrow**, indicating advancements in hunting techniques. Other tools like spearheads, arrowheads and sickles (composite tools combined with wooden or bone handles)
 - Domestication of animals and the beginnings of **primitive agriculture** started in this phase (hunting, fishing and food gathering).
 - Initiated rock art in pre-history.
 - Mesolithic humans in India still led a nomadic lifestyle but began settling near water sources for longer periods.
- **Sites:**
 - Important sites include **Bagor (Rajasthan)**, **Langhnaj (Gujarat)**, and more rock art at **Bhimbetka. Chhotnagpur**, Central India.
 - **Adamgarh (MP)** and **Bagor** provide evidence of **domestication of animals**.
 - **South of river Krishna, Tinnevely (TN)**, **Birbhanpur (WB)**, **Sarai nahar, Pratapgarh**.
 - At **Mahadaha (UP)**, bone artifacts and arrowheads are found.
- **Rock Art:**
 - Rock paintings at **Sohagighat (UP)**, **Bhimbetka caves**, **Kharwar, Jaora, Kathotia (MP)**, **Sambalpur (Odisha)**, **Ezhuthu Guha (Kerala)**.
 - Mesolithic people are known for the extensive rock art they created, often depicting daily life, hunting scenes, and animals (except snakes).

3. Neolithic Age (New Stone Age): Food Producers

- **Timeframe:** Around 6,000 BCE to 2,000 BCE.
- **Key Features:**
 - The Neolithic period in India saw the transition to **agriculture (Fruits, corn like Ragi and Horsh gram)**, **domestication of animals**, and **settled communities**.
 - Humans began making **polished, pecked and ground stone tools**, which were more effective for farming and construction.
 - Pottery also became widespread (made by hand with the help of Potter's wheel).
 - Early forms of **village settlements** emerged.

- **Division of labour** based on sex and age.
- **Terracotta** and **earthenware pottery** were used to store food and water.
- Significant advancement in tool-making techniques, with ground and polished tools like **axes** and **adzes**.
- **Sites:** Major Neolithic sites in India include:
 - **Mehrgarh (Balochistan)** – one of the earliest sites showing evidence of agriculture and animal domestication.
 - **Burzahom (Kashmir) & Gufkraal (J&K)** – known for pit dwellings and early evidence of farming. Domestic dogs buried with their masters.
 - **Garo Hills (Meghalaya), Chirand (Bihar)** – an important site with evidence of Neolithic life and burial practices and bone implements.
 - **Piyampalli (TN), Utnur (AP), Maski, Bramhagiri, Pikhlihal (proof of cattle herding), Budihal (feasting) and Tekkalakota (Karnataka).**
 - **Belan Valley** (earliest evidence of pottery) on the northern spurs of the Vindhyas.

4. Chalcolithic Age (Copper Stone Age): Metal Age

- **Timeframe:** Around 3,000 BCE to 1,000 BCE.
- **Key Features:**
 - This stage largely applies to the pre-Harappans, but in various parts of the country it applies to the bronze Harappan culture.
 - The Chalcolithic period represents the use of both **stone and copper** tools.
 - This phase marked the beginning of **metallurgy in India**, where copper tools were made alongside stone tools.
 - Domesticated **Cows, Sheep, Goats, Pigs, Buffaloes (not Horses)** and hunted deer.
 - Ate beef but not pork. Animals were **slaughtered for food** but not milked for dairy products (still **Gond people of Bastar** practice this).
 - Practiced **Jhum Cultivation** (slash and burn).
 - They knew **spinning and weaving**. Not acquainted with **burnt Brick**.
 - Cultures like the **Jorwe** and **Ahar-Banas** flourished during this period.
- **Sites:**
 - **Inamgaon (Maharashtra),**
 - **Ahar, Khatri mines, Kalibagan (Rajasthan)**– Smelting of Copper, stone houses.
 - **Gilund (Banas Valley)**– Occasional use of burnt bricks.
 - **Jorwe (Maharashtra), Navdatoli** (all food grains), Daimabad (largest jorwe culture site, bronze goods).
 - **Bonawali (HR), Kot Diji (Sindh, Pakistan).**
 - **Chirand, Senuar, Sonpur (Bihar).**
 - **Kayatha (mud plastered floors).**
 - **Malwa (richest chalcolithic ceramics).**

Significance of the Indian Stone Age:

The Indian Stone Age, spanning from the **Paleolithic to the Chalcolithic** periods, laid the foundation for the development of agriculture, domestication of animals, and early forms of human settlements. It also highlights the evolution of tool-making skills and the cultural practices of early humans in the



Indian subcontinent.

Also Read: [Ecology: Chapter-1 of Environment](#)

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