

History

Lesson-2

The Hunter Gatherers

In the beginning the earth was very dull and lifeless as there were no trees on the land except for a few that grew in the sea while the rest of the land was rocky. As time passed the air became breathable making it possible for life to survive. The first human beings which appeared on the earth had ape like features. About 300,000 years ago these humans evolved into what we call **Homo sapiens** or the “thinking man”. The study of this period is based entirely on the material remains left by these humans.

The Stone Age

During the pre historic period, life was **primitive**. Prehistoric people lived in caves and were hunter-gatherers. They ate the meat of animals which they hunted and gathered vegetables and fruits and caught fish. However plants and animals were not always available to them in one place. Some plants grew only in some seasons and would not be available through out the year. Animals had to move from place to place in search of food. Usually they would move to places where there is water easily available. If humans stayed in one place for too long they would finish all the food available in that area. Sometimes due to the change of seasons they had to go out in search of better places to live in. Therefore they had to move from one place to another.

Early humans wore animal skin for clothes and used tools made of stone for tools and weapons. Archaeologist have uncovered some of these stone tools, it is likely that early humans used animal bones and wood too. They used these tools for cutting meat and hides and for chopping fruits and roots. Based on the type of tools used the stone age was divided into three periods- the **Palaeolithic Age**, the **Mesolithic Age** and the **Neolithic Age**.

The Palaeolithic Age

The Palaeolithic period is the longest in the prehistoric era and dates from approximately 5, 00,000 BCE to 10,000 BCE. During this period

humans were **nomadic** and wandered from place to place in groups that included men, women and children. They collected fruits, roots and honey and hunted animals for food.

The Discovery of Fire

Fire was the most spectacular discovery of the Palaeolithic period. How was fire discovered? There are several theories regarding this. Early humans might have noticed sparks while striking two stones together. They found fire useful in scaring away wild animals and keeping themselves warm during the winter months. They also discovered that it was a source of light for them in darkness. Soon after they found that plants and meat tasted better after being cooked on fire, there by discovering the art of cooking. Eventually early humans learnt to use fire to make better tools and weapons.

Fire was very important during the ice age as without fire the humans couldn't have survived.

Stone Tools

Archaeologists have divided prehistoric tools into three categories. They are Core tools, Flake tools and Blade tools.

Core tools- were the largest and most primitive. One of them was a fist-sized piece of rock and was generally used for hitting and smashing. Large stones were chipped to get the required shape. These stones had sharp edges. Examples of Core tools are hammer and hand axes.

Flake tools- these were created by striking flakes from a stone core. Early humans found it easy to use these tools because they could be made and repaired easily.

Blade tools- these tools were created by striking a long narrow flake from a stone core. In this process the stone was reduced till it formed the shape of a sharp blade. The blade had sharp sides and was at least twice as long as they were wide. These blades were used mostly during the upper Palaeolithic period. At times they were mounted on top of bamboo sticks to use as spears.

The Palaeolithic Artist

Cave paintings were drawings made on the walls or ceilings of the caves, made by the people living in them with sharp tools or blades or even branches of trees. Early humans painted on caves. Historians are not clear as to why these paintings were made but they assumed that these paintings may have been associated with some kind of ritual or a way of communicating with each other. These paintings show hunting scenes, animals, human figures, and everyday things the artist would see around him. These paintings also tell us that prehistoric humans moved in small nomadic groups, hunting and gathering food. Natural colours like yellow, hematite, manganese oxide and charcoal were used.

Prehistoric rock paintings were found all over the earth. In India, there are around 150 painting sites been discovered? The most famous one is locate in Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh.

These cave paintings are good source of information in prehistoric life. These paintings tell us that the prehistoric humans lived in that area, which was perfectly suited to their needs.

Location of Palaeolithic sites

Palaeolithic sites have been found in places where good quality stones were found as stone tools were significant to the early humans. These sites were the earliest workshops and were known as **factory sites**. When the early humans stayed in these factory sites for a longer period, they became habitation sites.

Archaeologists have discovered most of these Palaeolithic sites near river banks. They had easy access to water and food. Fishing became an important activity. Also, people did not know how to store water and so, had to live near water sources.

The banks of the river Tapi, Godavari and Krishna have yielded a large number of Palaeolithic sites. In Tamil Nadu, Palaeolithic sites have been discovered near river such as palar, penniyar and Kaveri.

Mesolithic Age

The Mesolithic Age was a period when many transformations took place. It was, very brief, and lasted from 10,000 BCE to 8000 BCE. While man continued to hunt and gather, domestication too became an important feature of the period. The wild dog was the first animal to be domesticated, which was followed by domestication of sheep, goats and cattle. People started making tools which were sharper and more effective during this age. These tools came to be known as microliths. This was also the time when climatic changes took place all over the world. The weather became warmer, which led to the emergence of grasslands and eventually, herbivorous animals. The early humans started observing animal behaviour and habits and the idea of rearing and taming then came to their minds. They also observed the growth of grasses like wheat and barley.

Neolithic Age

The Neolithic Age is also known as the New Stone Age and it took place approximately nearly 10,000 years ago. It is the last stage of the cultural evolution of early humans. The emergence of grasslands led to the beginning of farming. By observing the environment and nature, early humans learnt to cultivated food and began living settled lives. The populations also increased during this period.

The stone tools belonging to this period were more refined and polished. The early human's dependence on animals increased in this period as advancements in agriculture were made. Humans learnt to grow crops. As a result, dependence on hunting, gathering of wild plants and fishing reduced. New crafts such as pottery and the art of weaving develop around this time period.