

INTRODUCTION

For a very long time, extending roughly between 2,00,000 B.C to 10,000 B.C, man led a nomadic life. He was then a food-gatherer and a hunter. But after the lapse of a long period in about 10,000 B.C he began to produce his own food and lead a settled life. He began to domesticate and herd those animals which he formerly used to hunt and kill. This new stage in his life is known as the New Stone Age. Evidences of the New Stone Age have been found in India at several places in South India and Uttar Pradesh.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Archaeological evidences of the Neolithic Age, when man became a farmer and a herder, have been found in different parts of India, especially In the north-western and north-eastern parts of the country.

Now man had begun to live in villages; so the archaeologists have found many remains of those villages in north-western and North eastern parts of the country alongwith specimens of houses, tools, pottery etc. Some of the important sites connected with the Neolithic Age are the following

- 1) Mehrgarh situated In Baluchistan province of Pakistan.
- 2) Burzahom, a place about 20 km from Srinagar in Kashmir.
- 3) Chirand a place about 40 km west of Patna on the norther side of the Ganga.
- 4) Sarutaru situated In the hills of Assag.
- 5) Kuchal situated In the modern Orissa State.
- 6) Various sites like Maski, Brahmbabin, Halla Koriipkal, T. Nashipur and Tekkalakoda all in Karnataka.
- 7) Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh.

THE NEOLITHIC OR THE STONE AGE

(10,000 B.C. to 4,000 B.C.)

(Its Chief Features or Characteristics)

Man realised that seeds, if dropped on the ground, watered well and received enough sunshine, would grow into plants that would bear grains.

The Old Stone Age lasted till about 10,000 B.C The discovery of agriculture marks the end of the Old Stone Age and the beginning of the New Stone Age.

The change from Old Stone Age to New Stone Age was gradual. It was marked by several characteristics which are as follows.



DOMESTICATION OF PLANTS AND ANIMALS

With the passage of time, man learnt about the domestication of plants and animals which were quite useful to him. This process began roughly 12,000 years ago or about 10,000 B.C.E. He grew those plants which were not prone to disease, had strong stalks, capable of bearing the weight of the ripe fruit and grains and could provide him grains for food. He gradually came to know that there were some plants and even animals which were wild in nature and could serve no useful purpose for him.

Implication of Farming: The man of the New Stone Age discovered farming which changed his life. Man now became a food-producer instead of a foodgatherer and thus began to lead a settled life. He now grew corn, vegetables and fruits near his hut and harvested them. Gradually, he improved upon his tools and ploughed the land before sowing seeds.

Because of farming, he also began to domesticate animals which gave him milk and meat. Not only this, he began to make cloth out of cotton and jute that he cultivated.

Implications of Herding: With the beginning of a settled life, man came to know that certain animals could be easily tamed. He tamed dogs, sheep, goats, cows, horses and camels, etc.

Domestication and herding of animals had a great impact on his life.

The taming or domestication of animals solved his food-problem to a great extent. He could now get fresh milk in addition to getting meat from them.

He could now use some animals like horses, bulls and camels for riding and ploughing the field.

These animals also helped him in solving his problem of clothing. He could get wool and skins for covering himself in the winter season.

Waste of these animals was of great use for man. He used it as manure in his fields. The cow dung greatly increased the fertility of the soil.

INVENTION OF THE WHEEL

The discovery of the wheel was an important achievement of the man in the Neolithic Period.

Big round trunks of trees began to be used for moving heavy loads. The wheel was used in horse carts and bullock-carts which made transport quite easy and quick. The wheel was also used for spinning, weaving and in the potter's wheel. The invention of the wheel was thus a great achievement of man in his march towards civilisation.

Man needed to store grains and milk. Baskets were used to store grains. Milk needs a different kind of vessel. Hence mud pots were made.

INVENTION OF POTTERY

The invention of the potter's wheel facilitated the making of earthenwares. Now man began to design different types of pots for his daily use made his life easier in many ways. He could not store foodgrains which were in surplus. He also stored water. He now cooked food in vessels.

Importance of Using Tool and Weapons

The Neolithic man greatly improved his tools and weapons. His tools and weapons were still made of stone but now they were far better and sharper. He also polished them so that they could last longer. Besides hunting, he used these tools for other purposes as well. While man in the Palaeolithic Age or the Old Stone Age used hand axes, choppers and flake implements as his tools, he, however, developed and used axes, sickles and bows and arrows in the Neolithic Period or the New Stone Age. Stone-axes with wooden handles were undoubtedly a remarkable example of workmanship which not only led to the growth of carpentry but also helped man to clear the land for agriculture. Sickle also helped him in cutting and gathering crops.

Man made two types of tools - core tools and flake tools. Core tools were used for making other tools and flake tools were made from smaller pieces of stone.

BEGINNING OF SETTLED LIFE: PIT HOUSES

Now man did not live in caves. He began to lead a settled life. The discovery of agriculture, coupled with the domestication of animals, helped him a lot in this direction. He now began to live in huts. Archaeologists, with great efforts have been successful in tracing out huts and even houses at certain places. In certain hilly areas, such as Burzahom in Kashmir, people built pit houses dug into the earth to cope with the cold climate. In normal climate they could look outside the huts but in cold weather they could even cool with the huts especially in the pit-houses.

He was no more a wanderer in search of food. His life became settled and the hunting man of the Old Stone Age became a shepherd who tamed a few of the wild animals. He had domesticated such cattle as cows, sheep and goats. He used the horse for riding and carrying the load. The dog became his faithful friend and guarded his herd of cattle and his hut. Now he moved not in search of food, but in search of pastures for his herds.

Comparison of the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic Periods

The Paleolithic Period

1. **Age:** It started about 2 million years ago upto 12,000 years ago. In other words we can say that it extended roughly from 20,00,000 to 10,000 B.C.E
2. **Food:** Man gathered and hunted his food.
3. **Animals:** He did not tame animals. He only hunted them.
4. **Shelter:** Man lived in caves or hid himself among the branches of trees.
5. **Clothing:** He remained naked or covered his body with the bark of trees or skin of animals.
6. **Tools and Implements:** He made crude stone tools like hand-axes, choppers and flake implements.
7. **Discoveries and Inventions:** Man invented crude tools and implements and discovered the use of fire.
8. **Way of Life:** Man led a nomadic life: He was still a wanderer and a food gatherer.

The Neolithic Period

1. **Age:** It lasted from about 12,000 years ago upto 6,000 years ago. In other words, we can say this it extended roughly between 10,000 and 4,000 B.C.E.
2. **Food:** Man produced his food. From a food gatherer he became a food producer.
3. **Animals:** He began the domestication of animals for cultivation, riding and carrying the loads.
4. **Shelter:** He gave up his cave dwellings and made huts of straw and mud near his fields.
5. **Clothing:** He cultivated Jute and cotton and got wool from animals and wove them to produce cloth.
6. **Tools and Implements:** He made better tools and implements like axes, sickle, bow and arrow. They were beautiful, well-grooved and more useful.
7. **Discoveries and Inventions:** Man made finer and more useful tools and implements. The discovery of agriculture and invention of the wheel were his great achievements.
8. **Way of Life:** He had begun to lead a settled life. He made his hut near his fields and in this way village life developed.

Tools, still others made pots and such other things as were required by the people.

People now began to cook their food instead of eating raw food.

People had learnt to wear cotton and woollen clothes to cover and protect their bodies.

THE EARLY VILLAGES

From settled life rose early villages where many families chose to live together for mutual cooperation and better protection. In villages, they lived in families and cultivated land. They learnt how to grow rice and barley, vegetables and fruit, and cotton. They settled in groups beside a river or a lake. Many such settlements have been discovered in various parts of India, especially in the Malabar Region.

TRIBES: THEIR CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES

The early villages were very small and usually two to three generations lived together in these villages. Most of the families were related to each other and a group of such families formed a tribe. These members of the tribe followed different occupations such as foodgathering, farming, herding, hunting and fishing etc. Women often did the farming including preparation of the ground, sowing seeds, growing plants and reaping the grain. Men usually led large herds of cattle in search of pastures. There were certain jobs like making pots and tools, erecting huts etc. which were done both by men and women. Children also helped their families by looking after plants and driving out the animals that might eat or destroy the growing plants. All members of the family-men, women and children- took part in the festivals like singing and dancing.

Man discovered things by chance. Even the discovery of copper might have been a chance discovery. While baking pots and other pieces of pottery the furnace might have melted copper near the ground. Man realised that the hot metal could be given any shape and form. He also realised that when it cooled it retained its shape and was much stronger than stone.

In order to make the community life smooth, there had to be a leader in the village who could give commands to others. Such a leader was generally the oldest man, though sometimes the strongest among them acted as the leader.

DISCOVERY OF METALS

The march from the Old Stone Age to the New Stone Age, as we call it, was a process of gradual evolution, that is an improvement in the technique of living with such discoveries as that of fire and cultivation of crops. But one major discovery, that proved a vital leap in the direction of modern civilisation, was the discovery and use of metals. In India, the first metal discovered by our ancestors was copper, followed by zinc and tin. Bronze, an alloy obtained by mixing copper with tin, was used for making tools, weapons and utensils.

The Metal Age in India is well-marked by the use of copper and subsequently of bronze. Axes and knives made of copper and bronze have been found in many places in South India. This age is, therefore, called the Copper Age or the Bronze Age. Brahmagiri in Mysore and Navada Toli on the Narmada are some of the sites where copper and bronze implements have been discovered. Then there was the Iron Age in India. The Aryans used iron in so many ways.

The discovery and use of metals is an event of great importance in the history of mankind. Metals were definitely more durable than stone. So, they could be used for making stronger tools and implements.

RELIGIOUS FAITHS

In the Old Stone Age man was always busy in gathering his food and hunting animals. He had no time to think about religion. But in the Chalcolithic Age things had greatly changed. He began to worship the benevolent powers of nature like the Sun-God, the Sky-God and the Earth Goddess. Priests offered prayers and sang hymns in their praise. Death was still a mystery. Some regarded it as a journey into other world from where nobody ever returned. The dead men were buried with all such things that a man would need during his long journey.

As discussed above, sites of Neolithic cultures have been found in many parts of India, particularly in the north-east and north-west parts of the country.

In the north-west parts of the country Neolithic sites have been found in Baluchistan (Pakistan), West Punjab and Kashmir Valley. These sites are :

1. Mehrgarh and Oila Gul Mohammad in Baluchistan.
2. Sarai Khola and Chaligai in West Punjab.
3. Burzahom in Kashmir.

In the north-east the Neolithic sites have been found at the following place.

1. Sarutaru
2. Daoja. Hading

We shall discuss below some of the most important settlements.

Mehrgarh: The settlement found at this site is attributed to 7000 B.C. This place lies in Baluchistan, a province of Pakistan. It is located near the Bolan Pass which for centuries served as an important route between India and Iran. These people were well advanced. They produced wheat, cotton, etc. and lived in mud-brick houses. According to some scholars, Mehrgarh was probably one of those places where men learnt to grow barley and wheat and rear sheep and goats for the first time. It is also one of the earliest villages to be discovered by archaeologists while excavating this settlement they found the skeleton or bones of different animals both tamed and wild like deer, pigs, sheep, goats and cattle. Remains of both square and rectangular houses have been found at Mehrgarh. Each house had many compartments to live and store grains.

Several burial sites have also been found at Mehrgarh which suggest that people paid respect to their dead relatives and ancestors. From the excavations of this site it has been found that in the initial stages, before 5000 B.C. these people did not use any pottery.

Burzahom: This site lies 16 km north-west of Srinagar in Kashmir. Some of the distinguished characteristics of this Neolithic culture are its dwelling pits, a great variety of stone and bow tools, a large range of ceramic (clay pottery) but complete absence of microliths (small stone implements). They lived on a lake side in pits, and depended on hunting, fishing and agriculture. These people used not only polished tools of stone but, what is more interesting, they used numerous tools and weapons made of bones.

Another interesting thing about these people was that they used to bury domestic dogs with their master in the graves. Pit dwellings and placing of dogs in the graves of the master were not the practice of the Neolithic people in any other part of India. The earliest date of Burzahom is placed by the archaeologists in about 2400 B.C.

Sarutaru: This site lies near Guwahati in north-eastern parts of India. A large number of Neolithic tools have been recovered in Sarutaru and the adjoining hills of Assam and Garo hills of Meghalaya. The north-eastern tools show polished stone axes with rectangular butts and occasional shoulder hoes.

A close study of these and other sites in the northwestern and north-eastern areas show that the Neolithic settlers were the earliest farming communities in India. They dug the ground with stone hoes and digging sticks fixed with ring-stones. They lived in rectangular or circular houses made of mud and reed. They led a settled life and produced different kinds of crops like wheat, rice, barley, ragi, horsegram and also cotton.

These people were now on the threshold of civilisation.