



People lived in the South Asia subcontinent as early as two million years ago. They did not have a wide range of skills as the people today. But they were very skilled to find their food from the surroundings. The South Asia subcontinent is a tropical land with monsoons so it had a dense vegetation with a vast variety of plants and wildlife. Through experience and regular practice their knowledge about their food increased.

The Earliest People were Hunter-Gatherers

To obtain food and save themselves from the fierce animals was their main motive. As hunger was the chief stimulus, at times they risked their life too for obtaining food. The way of obtaining their food was hunting and gathering. They hunted wild animals, caught fish and birds, gathered fruits, seeds, nuts, leaves, stalks, roots and eggs. So, these earliest people are called as **hunter-gatherers** by the historians.

The work of hunting needed physical as well as mental power. To chase the animals running faster and face the stronger was a challenge to their body power. To hunt or catch, people had to be alert and quick with presence of mind else the hunt may escape or attack back. To collect plant produce, one must know which plants or plant parts are edible, that is, can be eaten safely. Many plants could be poisonous. They had to be aware of the ripening seasons of different seeds and fruits. Thus, their life was neither easy nor peaceful. Their children too acquired the knowledge and skills from their parents and the elders.

Why were the Earliest People on the Move ?

The earliest people could not stay at one place for longer. Whenever they would have eaten up all the edible plants and easily caught animals, they would have to go elsewhere to find food. If they did not have a variety of food in the surroundings, they would move. Plants and trees bear fruit in different seasons. So, they moved from season to season in search of different kinds of plants.

Deer and wild cattle move in search of grass and leaves. Hunter animals move in search of smaller prey. Therefore, the hunter people had to follow the movement of these animals.

Water is essential to survive for all living beings. Earliest people used to live along the rivers, streams or near the lakes. If the rivers, streams or lakes were seasonal, people had to move in search of water during the dry seasons (winter and summer), that is, in search of perennial rivers and lakes (with water throughout the year).

These were the chief reasons why hunter-gatherers moved from place to place. Besides, people moved for safety from a group of fierce animals or natural disasters like floods or droughts. But after all, they had to travel on foot. They had not domesticated animals to ride yet. People's way of life resembled that of the animals, who also moved in small groups.

Stone Tools

The stone tools used by the early hunter-gatherers have been found. It is likely that these people made and used tools of stone, wood and bone, of which stone tools have survived best. The greatest invention of the early man was perhaps the stone tools. In due course of time, spread over thousands of years, the stone tools appear to have reduced in size from big boulders to mere pebbles. Tools had sharp edges of different types. The archaeologists grade these stone tools according to the stages of progress.



These sharpened tools could be used for digging the ground and hunting. Some tools were used to chop fruits and roots, scrape bark from trees and hides

from dead animals or to cut meat. Some pointed tools were attached to handles of wood or bone to make spears or arrows for hunting. Tools were also used to chop wood for fuel. Hand axe of chipped stone was also made.

Making Stone Tools

Stone tools were made using two different techniques :

- 1. Stone on Stone Technique :** The pebble from which the tool was to be made is called a core. Another stone used as a hammer is called hammer stone. The core was held in one hand. The hammer stone was held in the other hand. The hammer stone was used

to strike off flakes from the first, till the required shape was obtained .

- 2. Pressure Flaking Technique :** The core was placed on a firm surface. The hammer stone was used to remove flakes gradually to shape the core into a tool.

Sites

Sites are the places where the remains of things (tools, pots, buildings, etc.) were found. (A site is a place where a particular event took place). These things were made, used and left behind by people. These remains could be found on the surface of the earth, buried under the earth or sometimes even under water.

Habitation Sites of Early People



A natural cave

Archaeologists have found the sites where hunter-gatherers used to live. Many sites were located near sources of water, such as rivers and lakes. **Habitation sites** are places where early people lived. These include caves and rock shelters. People chose these natural caves because they provided shelter from the rain, heat and wind. Natural caves and shelters are found in the Vindhyas and the Deccan plateau. These rock shelters are close to the Narmada Valley. People chose to live here for the water from the river and forest produces nearby.

As stone tools had become important, people chose places where good quality stone was easily available. Places where such stone

was found and where people made tools are called as **factory sites** by the archaeologists. Usually their habitation and factory was the same. Archaeologists found blocks of stone, discarded tools and chips of waste stone left behind at these sites. **Bhim betka** (in present-day Madhya Pradesh) is such a site. It is called a palaeolithic site— 'palaeo', meaning old, and 'lithos', meaning stone, that is, old stone age. Archaeologists call the earliest period the **Palaeolithic**. **Megalithic** sites are those where huge stones were placed at the burial site. **Neolithic** period pertains to new stone age. The new tools were smaller, lighter, sharper and more refined. They had a fine cutting edge compared to the blunt edge of the palaeolithic tools. Look at the map and find different types of sites. All the places marked with red triangle are palaeolithic sites from which archaeologists have



found evidence of hunter-gatherers.

Learning the Uses of Fire

Locate the Kurnool Caves. This is a palaeolithic site . Traces of ash have been found here. This suggests that early people here were familiar

with the use of fire. Fire could have been used for many things : as a source of light, for keeping warm during winter and to cook food. It was also used to frighten away animals.

Major Changes in the Climate of the World

About 12,000 years ago, there were major changes in the climate of the world. It became warmer. In many areas this led to the development of grasslands. Due to reduced precipitation forests cannot survive but grasses develop in moderate rainfall. This led to an increase in the population of grass eating animals like deer, antelope, goat, sheep and cattle. The hunter people followed these animals and learnt about their food habits, breeding season and timidity. They thought and learnt to herd and rear these animals themselves. At this time, grain bearing grasses like wheat, barley, and rice grew naturally in different parts of the subcontinent. As gatherers, people collected these grains as food. Gradually they learnt how and where they grew. So they got an idea to grow these plants on their own. After learning to grow agricultural crops, the early people also thought of growing other plants, especially fruits bearing plants. The human response to environmental changes led people to ripen fruits and store grains to meet the demands of difficult times.



Early men using fire

Names and Dates

The **Palaeolithic period** (old stone age) extends from 2 million years ago to about 12,000 years ago. The name points to the importance of finds of stone tools. The **Mesolithic** (middle stone) **period** extends from 12,000 years ago till about 10,000 years ago. Stone tools found during this period are tiny, called **microliths**. Microliths were stuck on handles of bone or wood to make tools such as saws and sickles. The next stage, from about 10,000 years ago, is known as the **Neolithic period** (new stone age). The new tools were finer. In this period man became a food producer.

Rock Paintings

The earliest people usually lived in the caves. Many of these caves have paintings on the walls. These paintings were made from charcoal, ochre, etc. Some of the best paintings are found in Madhya Pradesh and southern Uttar Pradesh.

Work Division between Men and Women

There are no proofs if a work division existed. But it is understood that the suckling mothers may not run fast with their baby for hunting so they would have been better gatherers. Even today we find women and children working in the fields. However, there could have been different practices in different parts of the subcontinent. But, it is evident, that both men and women may have done many of the tasks like hunting, gathering plant produce, making stone tools and painting on the cave walls.

Ostriches in India !

Today ostriches are not found in India. But large quantities of ostrich egg shells were found at Patne in Maharashtra. It proves that ostriches were found in India during the Palaeolithic period. People used to make beads out of their bones and engrave designs on shells.

Hunggi in Deccan —A Palaeolithic Site

Observe the map in Fig. 10.5. Find Hunggi in the southern part. A number of early palaeolithic 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. In some of the other smaller sites, tools were made. Some sites were close to springs. Most tools were made from limestone, a hard sedimentary rock. It was locally available.

In Other Parts of the World



In your atlas find France in the map of Europe. In 1940, four school children discovered a cave site there. It had paintings of animals on walls. Paintings like this were made between 20,000 and 10,000 years ago. Many of these were of animals like wild horses, cattle, bison, reindeer, bear and woolly rhinoceros. The colours used were bright like ochre and charcoal. The purpose of paintings may be ceremonial or special rituals done by the hunters before they went in search of prey. They may have been made as a past time activity.



Key Words

- » Site : a place, where a particular event took place, and where the remains of things (tools, pots, buildings, etc.) were found.
- » Palaeolithic period : old stone age.
- » Mesolithic period : middle stone age when environmental changes took place.
- » Neolithic period : new stone age when more finer tools were made.
- » Microliths : lighter, finer and tiny tools.

Time Line

- ◆ *the Palaeolithic period* (2 million to 12,000 years ago)
- ◆ *the Mesolithic period* (12,000 to 10,000 years ago)
- ◆ *the beginning of the Neolithic period* (10,000 years ago)

SUMMARY

- ▶ People lived in the South Asia subcontinent as early as two million years ago.
- ▶ To obtain food and save themselves from the fierce animals was the main motive of the earliest people.
- ▶ The work of hunting needed physical as well as mental power.
- ▶ The earliest people were always on the move in search of new sources of food and water.
- ▶ Stone tools made by the earliest people had sharp edges of different types.

- ▶ Stone tools were put to various uses : to chop fruits and roots, scrape bark from trees and hides from dead animals or cut meat.
- ▶ Stone tools were made by stone on stone technique or pressure flaking technique.
- ▶ Habitation sites are places where early people lived.
- ▶ Places where good quality stone was found and where people made tools are called factory sites.

Exercise Time

A. Tick (✓) the only correct choice amongst the following :

1. The major environmental change took place in the :
 a. mesolithic period b. palaeolithic period c. neolithic period d. modern period
2. The earliest invention of man was :
 a. fire b. wheel c. agriculture d. stone tools
3. People lived in South Asia subcontinent as early as _____ years ago.
 a. 12,000 b. 10,000 c. 1 million d. 2 million
4. The early people used fire to :
 a. keep warm b. cook food
 c. frighten away animals d. all of these
5. Major changes in the environment 12,000 years ago led to the development of :
 a. deserts b. grasslands c. forests d. none of these

B. Fill in the blanks :

1. Lighter, sharper and tiny tools are called _____.
2. Natural caves and rock shelters saved from rain, heat and _____.
3. Grasslands developed around _____ years ago.
4. In Hunsgi, tools were made of _____.
5. Early people painted on the _____ of caves.

C. Match the following :

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Factory site | a. lighter, finer, tiny tools |
| 2. Microliths | b. middle stone age |
| 3. Palaeolithic period | c. where people made tools |
| 4. Mesolithic period | d. new stone age |
| 5. Neolithic period | e. old stone age |

D. Write true (T) or False (F) against the following statements in given brackets :

1. Sites are the places where the remains of the things are found.
2. Stone tools were not used to chop wood for fuel.
3. Large quantities of ostrich egg shells have been found at Patna in Bihar.
4. Middle stone age is also called palaeolithic period.
5. Fire was also used to frighten animals.



E. Answer in one word or one phrase :

1. What colours early people used to make paintings on cave walls ?
2. How many years ago, major changes in the environment took place ?
3. At which palaeolithic site in Deccan, a variety of tools were found ?
4. At which site ostrich egg shells are found in Maharashtra ?
5. Which age Bhimbetka site in Madhya Pradesh belong to ?

F. Answer these questions briefly :

1. Give two features of the palaeolithic age.
2. Why did the hunter-gatherers travel from place to place ?
3. Describe the techniques used by early people to make stone tools.
4. How did archaeologists distinguish between habitation sites and factory sites ?
5. How were tools improved with every successive phase of human progress ?

G. Answer these questions in detail :

1. Why were the earliest people on the move ? In what ways were these similar to/different from the reasons for which we travel today ?
2. What happened to the environment about 12,000 years ago ? How did it affected the life of early people ?

PROJECT WORK

- List the foods hunter-gatherers ate. Also list the foods you eat. Compare and find the similarities and differences.