

SEMESTER : 1

HISMAJ 1014 : INTRODUCTION TO THE ANCIENT INDIAN CIVILISATION

UNIT-I :: Mesolithic Period

Mesolithic Period (Middle Stone Age):

The term Mesolithic is derived from two Greek words – ‘meso’ and ‘lithic’. In Greek ‘meso’ means middle and ‘lithic’ means stone. Hence, the Mesolithic stage of prehistory is also known as the ‘Middle Stone Age’.

Both Mesolithic and Neolithic phases belong to the Holocene era. In this era, there was a rise in temperature, the climate became warm which resulted in melting of ice and also brought changes in flora and fauna.

Characteristic Features of the Mesolithic Era:

- The people of this age lived on hunting, fishing and food gathering initially but later on they also domesticated animals and cultivated plants, thereby paving the way for agriculture.
- The first animal to be domesticated was the wild ancestor of the dog. Sheep and goats were the most common domesticated animals.
- The Mesolithic people lived in semi-permanent settlements along with occupying caves and open grounds.
- The people of this era believed in life after death and hence they buried the dead with food items and other goods.
- The characteristic tools of this era were **microliths** – the miniature stone tools usually made of crypto-crystalline silica, chalcedony or chert, both of geometrical and non-geometrical shapes. They were not only used as tools but were also used to make composite tools, spearheads, arrowheads, and sickles after hafting them on wooden or bone handles. These microliths enabled the Mesolithic man to hunt smaller animals and birds.
- The Mesolithic men started to wear clothes made of animal skin.
- The Mesolithic people were art lovers and initiated rock art. The subject matter of these paintings was mostly wild animals and hunting scenes, dancing and food collection were also depicted in such paintings. These rock paintings give an idea about the development of religious practices and also reflect the division of labour on the basis of gender.
- The first human colonization of the Ganga Plains happened during this period.

Important Mesolithic Sites:

- Bagor in Rajasthan is one of the biggest and best-documented Mesolithic sites in India. Bagor is on river Kothari where microliths along with animal bones and shells have been excavated.
- Adamgarh in Madhya Pradesh provides the earliest evidence for the domestication of animals.
- There are about 150 Mesolithic rock art sites across India, with a rich concentration in Central India such as Bhimbetka caves (Madhya Pradesh), Kharwar, Jaora and Kathotia (M.P), Sundargarh and Sambalpur (Odisha), Ezhuthu Guha (Kerala).
- Microliths have also been found in some valleys of river Tapi, Sabarmati, Narmada, and Mahi.
- Langhnaj in Gujarat and Biharanpur in West Bengal are also important Mesolithic sites. Bones of wild animals (rhinoceros, blackbuck, etc.) have been excavated from Langhnaj. Several human skeletons and a large number of microliths have been recovered from these places.

- Though pottery is absent at most Mesolithic sites, they have been found in Langhnaj (Gujarat) and in the Kaimur region of Mirzapur (U.P).