

SEMESTER : 1

HISMAJ 1014 : INTRODUCTION TO THE ANCIENT INDIAN CIVILISATION

UNIT-I :: Paleolithic Period

Palaeolithic Age (Old Stone Age):

The term 'Palaeolithic' is derived from the Greek word 'palaeo' which means old and 'lithic' meaning stone. Therefore, the term Palaeolithic age refers to the old stone age. The old stone age or palaeolithic culture of India developed in the Pleistocene period or the Ice Age, which is a geological period of the age when the earth was covered with ice and the weather was so cold that human or plant life could not survive. But in the tropical region, where ice melted, the earliest species of men could exist.

Characteristics of the Palaeolithic age –

1. The earliest Indian people are believed to have belonged to the 'Negrito' race, and lived in the open air, river valleys, caves and rock shelters.
2. They were food gatherers, hunters, ate wild fruits and vegetables.
3. They have no knowledge of houses, pottery, and agriculture. It was only in later stages they discovered fire.
4. In the upper palaeolithic age, there is evidence of art in the form of paintings.
5. They used unpolished, rough stones like hand axes, choppers, blades, burins and scrapers.

The palaeolithic age in India is divided into three phases according to the nature of the stone tools used by the people and also according to the nature of the change of climate.

1. Lower Palaeolithic Age: beginning to 100,000 BC
2. Middle Palaeolithic Age: 100,000 BC – 40,000 BC
3. Upper Palaeolithic Age: 40,000 BC – 10,000 BC

Lower Palaeolithic Age (Early Palaeolithic Age)

- It covers the greater part of the Ice Age.
- Hunters and food gatherers; tools used were hand axes, choppers and cleavers. Tools were rough and heavy.
- One of the earliest lower Palaeolithic sites is Bori in Maharashtra.
- Limestone was also used to make tools.
- Major sites of lower Palaeolithic age
 - Soan valley (in present Pakistan)
 - Sites in the Thar Desert
 - Kashmir
 - Mewar plains
 - Saurashtra
 - Gujarat

- Central India
- Deccan Plateau
- Chotanagpur plateau
- North of the Cauvery River
- Belan valley in UP
- There are habitation sites including caves and rock shelters.
- An important place is Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh.

Middle Palaeolithic age:

- Tools used were flakes, blades, pointers, scrapers and borers.
- The tools were smaller, lighter and thinner.
- There was a decrease in the use of hand axes with respect to other tools.
- Important middle Palaeolithic age sites
 - Belan valley in UP
 - Luni valley (Rajasthan)
 - Son and Narmada rivers
 - Bhimbetka
 - Tungabhadra river valleys
 - Potwar Plateau (between Indus & Jhelum)
 - Sanghao cave (near Peshawar, Pakistan)

Upper Palaeolithic age

- The upper palaeolithic age coincided with the last phase of the ice age when the climate became comparatively warmer and less humid.
- Emergence of *Homo sapiens*.
- The period is marked by innovation in tools and technology. A lot of bone tools, including needles, harpoons, parallel-sided blades, fishing tools and burin tools.
- Major sites of Upper Palaeolithic age
 - Bhimbhetka (South of Bhopal) – hand axes and cleavers, blades, scrapers and a few burins have been found here.
 - Belan
 - Son
 - Chota Nagpur plateau (Bihar)
 - Maharashtra
 - Orissa and
 - The Eastern Ghats in Andhra Pradesh
 - Bone tools have been found only at cave sites of Kurnool and Muchchatla Chintamani Gavi in Andhra Pradesh.
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