



**MANIKA IAS**

TURNING ASPIRANTS INTO ACHIEVERS

# ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY

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## FOR UPSC PRELIMS & MAINS

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EXAM-ORIENTED

CONCEPT -CENTRIC

STRUCTURED & SIMPLIFIED

*“Ancient India: Foundations of civilization, thought, and culture.”*



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## Ancient Indian History

## 1. STONE AND METAL AGE

India's prehistory marks the foundational stage of its civilizational journey, beginning with stone tools and ending with the early use of metals. Spanning from the Paleolithic to the Megalithic period, it reflects gradual transformations in tools, lifestyle, settlements, and culture.

### 1.1 Palaeolithic Age (Old Stone Age): ~2 Million–10,000 BCE

#### Chronology and Phases:

- Longest prehistoric phase, covering the Pleistocene Epoch (Ice Age), characterized by cold, dry climates with glaciation and inter-glaciation phases.
- Divided into three sub-phases based on tool types and physiological changes:
  - **1st Phase: Lower Palaeolithic** (~2 million–100,000 BCE): Associated with Homo erectus (e.g., Narmada Man at Hathnora, Madhya Pradesh, discovered in 1962).
  - **2nd phase: Middle Palaeolithic** (~100,000–40,000 BCE): Associated with early Homo sapiens.
  - **3rd phase: Upper Palaeolithic** (~40,000–10,000 BCE): Associated with Homo sapiens sapiens (modern humans).

#### Tools:

- **Lower Palaeolithic:** Heavy, crude core tools (e.g., choppers, hand axes, cleavers) made of quartzite, forming the Soan (Riwat, Potwar Plateau) and Madrasian industries (Pallavaram, Tamil Nadu, discovered by Robert Bruce Foote in 1863, known as the "Father of Indian Prehistory").
- **Middle Palaeolithic:** Flake-based tools (e.g., scrapers, borers, points), first identified at Nevasa, Maharashtra, by H.D. Sankalia in 1956.
- **Upper Palaeolithic:** Sharper, more sophisticated blade and burin tools.

#### Sites:

- Pahalgam (Kashmir), Bhimbetka, Adamgarh, Honsangabad (Madhya Pradesh), Narmada Valley, Soan Valley (Pakistan), Belan Valley (Uttar Pradesh), Kurnool Caves, Borra Caves (Andhra Pradesh), Nagarjunakonda (Telangana), Attirampakkam, Pallavaram (Tamil Nadu), Jalore, Pushkar (Rajasthan), Nivasa (Maharashtra), Gulbarga, Bagalkot (Karnataka).
- Bhimbetka (discovered by V.S. Wakankar in 1957) is a major site with rock shelters showing Palaeolithic and Mesolithic art.

#### Subsistence Pattern:

Hunter-gatherer lifestyle, relying on hunting large animals, food gathering, and scavenging. No surplus production, limiting craft specialisation or trade networks.

#### Settlement Pattern:

- Sites located near water sources (rivers, lakes) or hill terraces, avoiding alluvial plains (Indus, Ganges) and dense vegetation areas (Malabar Coast, Northeast).
- Temporary open-air camps or natural cave/rock shelters (e.g., Bhimbetka, Kurnool's Muchchatla Chintamani Gavi cave with evidence of hearth fire).

#### Art and Culture:



- Upper Palaeolithic rock paintings at Bhimbetka depict group hunting, dancing, and community life, using lining and morphing techniques with dark red and green colours (plant-based, mixed with mud).
- Themes of group hunting and community life influence modern folk and tribal art.

**Human Evolution:**

- **First hominids:** Australopithecus (Ethiopia), Ramapithecus (Shivalik Mountains, India), Sinanthropus (China, first to discover fire).
- Homo erectus (Hathnora specimen), Homo sapiens, and Homo sapiens sapiens mark evolutionary progression.

**Climate:**

- Harsh, cold, dry Ice Age conditions; human habitation is viable near the equator. Limited floral/faunal resources due to ice cover.

## 1.2 Mesolithic Age (Middle Stone Age): ~12,000–6,000 BCE

**Chronology:**

- Transitional phase between Palaeolithic and Neolithic, coinciding with the Holocene Epoch (warm, wet climate due to glacier melting).
- Shortest Stone Age phase, lasting until ~5,000 BCE in India (earlier in Sri Lanka, ~32,000 BP).

**Tools:**

- Microliths (small, geometric stone tools, typically <5 cm), first discovered by A.C.L. Carlleyle near Mirzapur (Kaimur Hills, Uttar Pradesh).
- Introduction of composite tools (e.g., bow and arrow, missile technology) and bone tools.

**Sites:**

- Adamgarh, Bhimbetka (Madhya Pradesh), Bagor (Rajasthan), Mahagraha, Sarai Nahar Rai, Chopani Mando (Uttar Pradesh), Paisra (Bihar), Langhanj (Gujarat), Lakhudiyar Caves (Uttarakhand), Orvakalu Village (Andhra Pradesh).
- Bagor: Well-developed microlith industry and evidence of animal domestication.
- Sarai Nahar Rai: Early evidence of house construction.
- Chopani Mando: Earliest handmade pottery.

**Subsistence Pattern:**

- Shift from big game hunting to smaller animals (deer, cattle, sheep, goats) and fishing due to new water bodies.
- Earliest evidence of animal domestication at Adamgarh and Bagor; plant cultivation near Sambhar Salt Lake (Rajasthan).

**Settlement Pattern:**

- Semi-nomadic, with settlements near lakes, rivers, or plains (e.g., Belan Valley between Prayagraj and Varanasi).
- Evidence of semi-permanent wattle-and-daub huts with paved floors and post-holes (Belan Valley).

**Art and Culture:**

- **Mesolithic rock paintings** (petroglyphs) at Bhimbetka, Adamgarh, and Mirzapur depict hunting (e.g., rhino at Adamgarh), group dancing, household chores, celebrations, sexual union, phallus/yoni worship, and animal riding, indicating taming.
- Themes suggest division of labour, community sense, primitive marriage, and worship practices.
- **Colours:** Red (animal blood, mud) and vegetable/mineral-based hues.

**Other Developments:**

- **Open burial systems** with grave goods, indicating belief in the afterlife (Mirzapur).
- Double burials suggest familial bonds or early socio-religious practices (e.g., marriage, sati precursors).
- Increased population and demographic shifts due to a favourable climate.

**1.3 Neolithic Age (New Stone Age): ~7,000–1,500 BCE****Chronology:**

- Known as the "Neolithic Revolution" (termed by V. Gordon Childe) for transformative changes in agriculture, settlement, and technology.
- Varies by region: Mehrgarh (Baluchistan, ~7,000 BCE), Kashmir (~2,500 BCE), Central India (~4,000 BCE), South India (~2,500 BCE).

**Tools:**

- Polished and ground stone tools (celts), first discovered by Le Mesurier in Raichur Doab (Karnataka).
- Improved efficiency and raw material economy compared to earlier tools.

**Sites:**

- **Northwest:** Mehrgarh (Baluchistan, oldest Neolithic site, ~7,000 BCE), known for wheat, barley, cotton cultivation, and Mesopotamian contact.
- **North (Kashmir):** Burzahom (pit dwellings, double burials with dogs), Gufkral ("potter's cave," bone tools).
- **Central India (Belan Valley):** Chopani Mando (wheel-made pottery), Koldihwa (earliest rice cultivation), Mahagraha (rice), Sarai Nahar Rai (early warfare evidence).
- **East:** Chirand (Bihar, bone tools), Pandu Rajar Dhibi (West Bengal), Daojali Hading (Assam), ~2,500 BCE.
- **South:** Maski, Brahmagiri, Hallur, Kodekal, Sanganakallu, Takkalikota (Karnataka), Paiyampalli (Tamil Nadu), Utnur, Kurnool, Kalyanpur (Andhra Pradesh), Nagarjunakonda (Telangana).
- **Unique Features:** Ash mounds in South India (land reclamation by burning forests), Ragi cultivation.

**Subsistence Pattern:**

- Shift from hunter-gathering to food production through agriculture (wheat, barley, rice, cotton) and established animal domestication (sheep, goats, cattle).

- Agriculture began in Nile Valley (~8,000 BCE), entered India via Central Asia; women-led, fostering matriarchal societies.

### **Settlement Pattern:**

- Permanent village settlements with mud-brick houses (replacing grass huts).
- Evidence of carts with buffalo/oxen for transport.

### **Art and Technology:**

- Wheel-made pottery (ceramic cultures) for cooking, storage, and burials (large urns as coffins). Some aceramic cultures existed.
- Potter's wheel used for pottery and transportation.
- Spinning and weaving (cotton, wool clothing).

### **Cultural Developments:**

- Emergence of peasant communities, village life, and cultural exchanges leading to advanced cultures (e.g., Chalcolithic, Indus Valley Civilization).
- Elaborate burials with religious significance.

## **1.4 Chalcolithic Age (Copper-Stone Age): ~3,500–700 BCE**

### **Chronology:**

- Transition from Neolithic to Metal Age, characterised by copper and stone tool use.
- Oldest sites in Northwest (~3,500 BCE), linked to early Indus Valley Civilisation (e.g., Amri-Nal, Kot Diji, Sothi-Siswal).

### **Tools:**

- Copper tools (e.g., cast copper axes at Kayatha, Malwa) alongside stone tools.
- Evidence of metallurgy (copper smelting at Ahar, Rajasthan) and painted pottery.

### **Sites:**

- **Rajasthan:** Ahar-Banas (copper smelting, black-and-red ware pottery), Gilund (stone structures), Ganeshwar (copper supply to Indus), Kalibangan (Sothi culture).
- **Madhya Pradesh:** Kayatha, Malwa, Eran (fortified settlements), Navadatoli (extensive crop cultivation).
- **Gujarat:** Prabhas culture.
- **Maharashtra:** Jorwe culture (Inamgaon, Daimabad, semi-urban settlements with ~100 houses, mother goddess worship, humped bull images, small dam).
- **Eastern India:** Scattered copper hoard sites (e.g., Bithur, Hungeria), Ochre Coloured Pottery (OCP) sites.

### **Subsistence Pattern:**

- Advanced agriculture with diverse crops (wheat, rice, barley, legumes) at Navadatoli.
- Animal husbandry (cattle, sheep, goats, buffalo) and fishing.

### **Settlement Pattern:**

- Larger rural settlements with hierarchy (e.g., Jorwe culture's Inamgaon with craft specialization zones).
- Circular huts and fortified settlements (Eran).

### **Cultural Developments:**

- Social differentiation (differential burials, urn burials), suggesting chiefdoms.
- Painted pottery, terracotta figurines, and early supernatural beliefs.
- Contact with the Indus Valley Civilisation (e.g., Daimabad's semi-urban features).

## **1.5 Megalithic Culture: ~1,000 BCE Onwards**

**Definition:** Burial grounds with large stone structures (dolmens, menhirs, cists, taulans, stone alignments), indicative of early cultural formations in South India.

### **Chronology:**

- **Earliest in the Indian subcontinent:** Afghanistan, c. 3000 BCE.
- Predominantly in South India, coinciding with the Iron Age (~1,000 BCE).
- In mainland India: Junapani (near Nagpur, Maharashtra), the largest site with cist and stone-circle burials.

### **Characteristics:**

- Named after megaliths (large stone graves), with no known habitation sites.
- Familiar with agriculture but primarily relied on cattle rearing.
- Used Black and Red Ware (BRW) pottery and iron tools (hoes, sickles, small weapons).
- Found near lakes and river systems, not in the Indo-Gangetic basin.
- Small settlements reliant on pastoralism with limited agriculture.
- Burials contained skeletons, iron tools, and weapons, suggesting frequent conflicts.

### **Sites:**

Hallur, Maski (Karnataka), Nagarjunakonda, Utnur (Andhra Pradesh), Adichchanallur (Tamil Nadu).

### **Cultural Practices:**

- Burial pits covered with large stones, containing grave goods (pottery, iron artefacts).
- Indicates belief in the afterlife and social organisation.

**Significance:** Laid the material foundation for state formation by enabling settled communities and resource accumulation.

The prehistoric period in India, though without written records, reveals a rich story of human ingenuity, adaptation, and cultural evolution. From nomadic hunter-gatherers to settled agriculturists and metal users, it set the stage for urban civilisations like the Indus Valley. These early developments provided the material, technological, and social foundation for India's historical transition into state societies.