

THE PALAEOLITHIC MAN

(APPROXIMATELY 500000-8000 BC)

In India, the earliest evidence of the existence of humans can be traced back to the Palaeolithic Age roughly between 500000 and 8000 BC. In many regions of South Asia, stone tools and cave paintings belonging to this period have been discovered. The word 'Palaeolithic' has been taken from two Greek words which mean 'old stone'. Chipped stones have been discovered in large numbers in various parts of India. These have been of hard rock called quartzite. Therefore, humans in Palaeolithic India are also called **Quartzite men**. Palaeolithic men did not know the use of fire and did not practise any form of agriculture. They led a savage life, using stone weapons for hunting.

They did not know about family life and lived in caves and wandered in jungles like other animals. According to historians, Palaeolithic men belonged to the Negrito race such as the modern people living on the Andaman Islands. They were short in stature and had dark skin, curly hair and flat noses.

Punjab Plains the Kashmir Valley

Until 1939, the evidence of three or four Stone Age cultures had been found in only a part of Punjab (now in Western Pakistan). These cultures have been called Pre-Sohan, Early-Sohan, Late-Sohan and Evolved Sohan (named after Sohan, a tributary of the river Sindhu) and Flake and Blade industries.

Many studies have been conducted in the foothills of the south-western Himalayas. These include the Shivaliks and the Potwar Plateau. Potwar Plateau is a part of the ancient Pan Canada, drained by the Sindhu, districts of Sulej and Beas. Rawalpindi and other modern districts of Western Punjab (now in Pakistan) lie in this region.

It is believed that the existence of human being in Punjab was noticed for the first time in Boulder Conglomerate which forms the top most surface in the Sindhu, Sohan and other rivers. It is suggested that during the Second Ice Age in the Kashmir Valley, the

Potwar Plateau experienced heavy rains and the rivers carried away boulders which formed the Boulder Conglomerate. This formation had huge flakes of quartzite. Many of these were thought as artefacts, as they had traces of chipping on the sides.

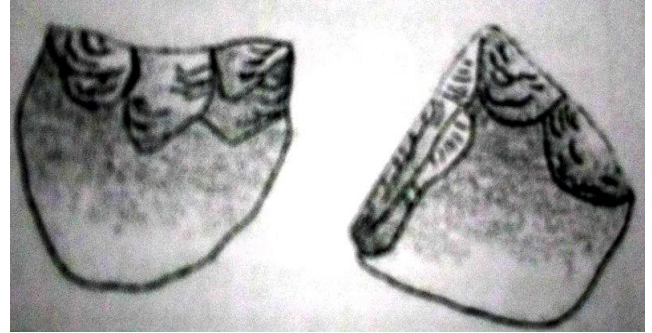


Fig1.1 palaeolithic age (Not well shaped)

Peninsular India

The real home of the Handaxe Culture seems to be, according to the present knowledge, Peninsular India, the region towards the south of the Ganges Plains. Because the types of tools of this culture were first found near Chennai, it is also called the Chennai Culture. This is purely a regional name which should, be given up, as the latest researches show that the Handaxe Culture covered almost the whole of the India—Andhra Pradesh, Chennai, Mysore, Maharashtra, Gujarat, eastern Rajasthan, the plateau regions of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal except Western Rajasthan, Sindh, Kashmir, Assam and the coastal strips of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The relics of the early Stone Age man are mainly confined to the middle reaches of the rivers, and to some distance, away from their basin. Altitudes, higher than 750 m and heavily forested regions were avoided by man. No early Stone Age tools have been found in Mount Abu (Rajasthan), Mahabaleshwar (Maharashtra), Nilgiris (Tamil Nadu) and Mysore (Karnataka), Hand axes and other associated tools were first found in the deposits of the Second Interglacial Age in Western Punjab, while in Peninsular India, they were found in the earliest pebble conglomerate bed in Narmada, which overlies the basal rock or laterite. In this conglomerate, are also found remains of extinct animals such as wild

elephant, wild horse, and wild ox. Hippopotamus, alaeindicus F. and C., Stegodon insignis F. and C., Rhinocerus unicornis Lim.,

Trionyx species, stegodon ganesa F. and C., Emys species, Ursus namadius F. and C., Leptobos frazerirut, Cravus duvancelli.



MAP 1.1 Stone Age Sites of India

Latest studies conducted in the Mahi and Narmada basin show that this period could not be before early upper Pleistocene. The initial Stone Age tools in the peninsular region of India include different types of hand axes, cleavers, choppers and chopping tools prepared out of pebbles or pebble halves, and scrapers. Some of the tools are regular, having placed to help in holding, and some are two-ended and beaked tools. These types of tools could have been used only for cutting or engraving. Such tools were discovered in the regions of the Krishna Basin in Karnataka.

Assessment of Pre-history

We live in the geological period known as **Cenozoic**. It started nearly 65 million years ago when the landmasses on earth got the shape that we at present know. Before it, different landmasses or continents

were almost united to constitute one large land mass termed Pangea. The historians have subdivided the Cenozoic period into two periods—Tertiary and Quaternary. The Tertiary period involves five epochs: (i) Palaeocene (65-56.5 million years ago); (ii) Eocene (56.5-35.4 million years ago); (iii) Oligocene (35.4-23.3 million years ago); (iv) Miocene (23.3-5.2 million years ago) and (v) Pliocene (5.2-1.64 million years ago). Primates started emerging nearly 70 million years ago at the start of the Cenozoic. Bipedalism started taking shape during the Miocene resulting into the rise of Australopithecus. The genus Homo emerged during the Pliocene. This was the time that Hominids started making tools. The Quaternary period witnessed a major development in tool technology. This period is further divided into two geological epochs: (i) Pleistocene (1.64 million—12,000 years ago) and (ii) Holocene (12,000 years ago to the present). We are now living in the Holocene geological epoch. The Palaeolithic Age of pre-history falls in the Pleistocene geological epoch. During the Pleistocene period, the temperature across the world fell considerably. This caused a series of ice ages. The last known ice age started nearly 118,000 years ago and was the most widespread. This ice age attained the greatest intensity about 20,000 years ago. The ice ages ended 12,000 years ago, with which began the Holocene (or postglacial) geological epoch. During the Pleistocene epoch, there started biological evolution of humans. They were now able to adapt themselves culturally. The temperatures in Europe, Asia and North Africa have dropped considerably because of the last ice age. Stone tool technology improved significantly in this period.

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