



HISTORY UNIT 1

EVOLUTION OF HUMANS AND SOCIETY – PREHISTORIC PERIOD

Dear students,

In the previous notes we discussed about Palaeolithic and Mesolithic Culture. Today we learn about Neolithic Culture and Prehistoric Tamil Nadu.

NEOLITHIC CULTURE AND THE BEGINNING OF AGRICULTURE

- Neolithic Age is called the 'new age', because of the new grinding and polishing techniques used for the tools.
- The Neolithic people also used the flaked stone tools.
- Until the Mesolithic period, people mainly hunted and gathered food for their subsistence.
- The introduction of domestication of animals and cultivating plants at home led to production and supply of large quantities of grains and animal food.
- The fertile soil deposited by the river on its banks helped the growth of agriculture.
- The development of this period is called Neolithic Revolution .

LOWER PALAEOLITHIC CULTURE IN TAMIL NADU

- In 1863, Sir Robert Bruce Foote, a geologist from England, first discovered Palaeolithic tools at Pallavaram near Chennai.
- They are the earliest finds of such tools in India. Hence, the hand axe
- The Palaeolithic people hunted wild animals and gathered the naturally available fruits, roots, nuts and leaves.
- Hand axes and cleavers are the important tool types of the Lower Palaeolithic period.
- These tools fitted with a wooden and bone handle were used for cutting, piercing and digging.
- The tools are found in the soil deposits and also in the exposed river side.
- They occur at Pallavaram, Gudiyam cave, Athirampakkam, Vadamadurai, Erumaivettipalayam and Parikulam.

MIDDLE PALAEOLITHIC CULTURE IN TAMIL NADU

- The tool types of this period underwent a change and smaller artefacts were used.



- Cores, flakes, scrapers, knives, borers, Levalloisian flakes, hand axes and cleavers are the artefact types of this period.
- Evidence for the Middle Palaeolithic Culture can be observed in some parts of Tamil Nadu. In the southern part of Tamil Nadu, at T. Pudupatti and Sivarakkottai, artefacts of the Middle Palaeolithic tools have been collected.
- Also near Thanjavur and Ariyalur, similar artefacts have been found.

MESOLITHIC CULTURE IN TAMIL NADU

- There is no evidence for the Upper Palaeolithic Culture in Tamil Nadu.
- But the people who used microliths or small-stone artefacts lived in many parts of Tamil Nadu.



- Since this cultural period occurs between Palaeolithic and Neolithic Culture, it is known as Mesolithic Culture or Middle Stone Age.
- Evidence for the existence of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers is found at Chennai, North Arcot, Dharmapuri, Salem, Coimbatore, Ariyalur, Tiruchirappalli, Pudukkottai, Madurai, Sivagangai, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari.
- Mesolithic people might have engaged in fishing activities. The microlithic artefacts of southern Tamil Nadu are also found in the coastal regions of Sri Lanka.
- The people of this period used small artefacts made of chert and quartz. The tool types are scrapers, lunates and triangles.
- **Scrapers** are tools used for scraping the surfaces.
- Scrapers are similar to the tools used in the kitchen for removing skin of vegetables.
- **Triangles** are tools in the shape of triangles.



- **Lunates** are tools in the shape of crescent.

NEOLITHIC CULTURE IN TAMIL NADU

- The culture that domesticated animals and cultivated crops is called Neolithic.
- It is known as the New Stone Age.
- The Neolithic people used polished stone axes called celts.
- Cattle rearing was their main occupation.
- Evidence of Neolithic village is found at Payyampalli in Vellore district and a few sites in the Dharmapuri
- The Neolithic people used stone axes fitted on a wooden handle.
- These polished stone axes are worshipped in many village temples of Tamil Nadu even today.

IRON AGE / MEGALITHIC PERIOD

- The **cultural period** that succeeded the Neolithic is called the **Iron Age**.
- The people of this age had knowledge of metallurgy and pottery making.
- They used iron and bronze objects and gold ornaments.
- The evidence for Iron Age is found at many sites including Adhichanallur in Tirunelveli district, Sanur near Madhuranthakam and Sithannavasal near Pudukkottai. Megalithic burial sites are found in the whole of Tamil Nadu.

MEGALITHIC BURIAL TYPES

- The Iron Age is also known as megalithic, since people created burials with large stones for the dead people.
- Within these burials, the skeletons or a few bones of the dead persons were placed along with grave goods.
- Some of the burials do not have human bones and they have only the grave goods.
- They may be called memorial burials.
- The burial types of Kodakkal (umbrella stone), Toppikkal (hatstone) and Paththikal (hoodstone) are found in Kerala.
- Dolmens, table-like stone structures, were erected as funerary monuments. Cists are stone enclosures buried under the earth. They were created by placing four stone slabs on the sides one on top of each other.



AGRICULTURE AND PASTORALISM

- The people in the Iron Age practiced agriculture, domesticated cattle and sheep, and some of the groups were still hunting and gathering.
- Millets and rice were cultivated. Irrigation management developed in this period, since many of the megalithic sites are found nearby rivers and tanks.
- In the deltaic regions, irrigation as a technology had developed.
- Evidence of rice is seen in the megalithic sites like Adhichanallur in Thoothukudi district and Porunthal near Palani.

IRON AGE SOCIETY AND POLITY

- The Iron Age society had farming communities, pastoralists and hunter-gatherers'.
- Craft specialists, potters and blacksmiths were the professionals during this period.
- The society had several groups of peoples (tribes).
- The size of the burials and the variations found in the burial goods suggests the existence of numerous social groups and their diverse practices.

POTTERY

- Pottery is an important evidence found in the archaeological sites.
- The Iron Age and Sangam age people used the black and red colours to make black ware and red ware pottery.



Black and red ware in Adhichanallur.

- Potteries were used for cooking, storage and dining purposes.

IRON TECHNOLOGY AND METAL TOOLS



- The megalithic burials have abundant iron objects placed in the burials as grave goods. Weapons such as swords and daggers,
- The iron tools were used for agriculture, hunting, gathering and in battles.
- Bronze bowls, vessels with stylish finials decorated with animals and birds, bronze mirrors and bells have also been found.