

Topics Covered:

Prehistoric period

- Paleolithic
- Mesolithic
- Neolithic
- Chalcolithic

PREHISTORIC PERIOD

Human habitation in India can be traced back to ancient times encompassing the **Stone Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age** periods. These early eras are often referred to as the prehistoric period, as they need written records or decipherable texts.

Our understanding of this epoch relies heavily on archaeological discoveries, including **pottery, artifacts, stone tools, and metal** implements unearthed at various sites.

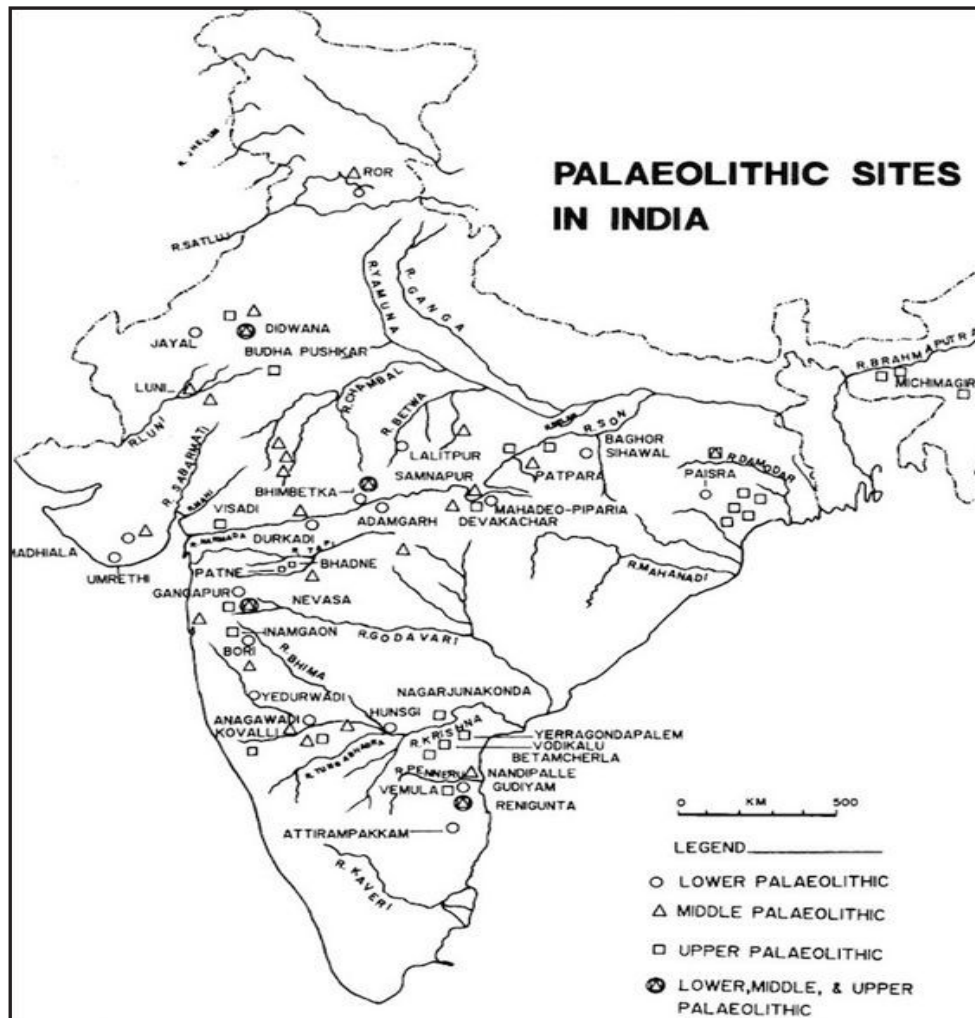
Drawing upon these archaeological pieces of evidence, the prehistoric period in India can be segmented into the following chronological divisions :

Chronology	Prehistorically Ages	Time period	
I	Paleolithic (Old Stone Age)	500,000 – 10,000 BCE	
II	Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age)	10,000 – 6000 BCE	
III	Neolithic (New Stone Age)	6000 – 1000 BCE	
IV	Chalcolithic	2100 - 700 BCE	

**Paleolithic Age: 500,000-10,000 BCE**

The Paleolithic Period represents an ancient stage in human technological development characterized by the **crafting and utilization of primitive chipped stone tools**. This era also featured the creation of small sculptures, such as carved stone statuettes depicting

women, clay figurines portraying animals, and various bone and ivory carvings. Additionally, cave walls were adorned with paintings, incised designs, and reliefs.



In India, the Palaeolithic Age is subdivided into **three distinct phases** based on the types of stone tools employed by its inhabitants and the corresponding climatic changes:

- (i) Lower Paleolithic
- (ii) Middle-Paleolithic
- (iii) Upper-Paleolithic

**(i) Lower Paleolithic Age :**

- The early Old Stone Age/Lower Paleolithic era in India began around 500,000 years ago, contrasting with Africa, where it began around two million years ago.
- Lower Palaeolithic tools are widespread in India, with **exceptions in parts of the Ganges valley, southern Tamil Nadu, and the hilly areas of the Western Ghats.**
- Significant **Acheulian tool** findings are documented at specific sites such as **Athirampakkam, Pallavaram, and Gudiyam near Chennai.**
- Other notable Lower Palaeolithic sites include **Hungsi Valley and Isampur in Karnataka..**
- **Bori in Maharashtra** is India's earliest Lower Palaeolithic site.

- There are two principal **tool-making traditions**: **Soanian** (East and Southeast Asian chopper chopping tools) and **Acheulian** (handaxe-cleaver or biface tools).
- Tools used included **hand axes, cleavers, and choppers, similar to those found in Western Asia, Europe, and Africa.**
- Stone tools were primarily used for chopping, **digging, and skinning.**
- Early Old Stone Age sites are found in the **Son or Sohan River Valley** in Punjab (now in Pakistan), Kashmir, Thar Desert, Belan Valley in UP, and Didwana in Rajasthan.
- **Nagarjunakonda** in Andhra Pradesh and Bhimbetka caves and rock shelters near Bhopal also exhibit Lower Palaeolithic features.

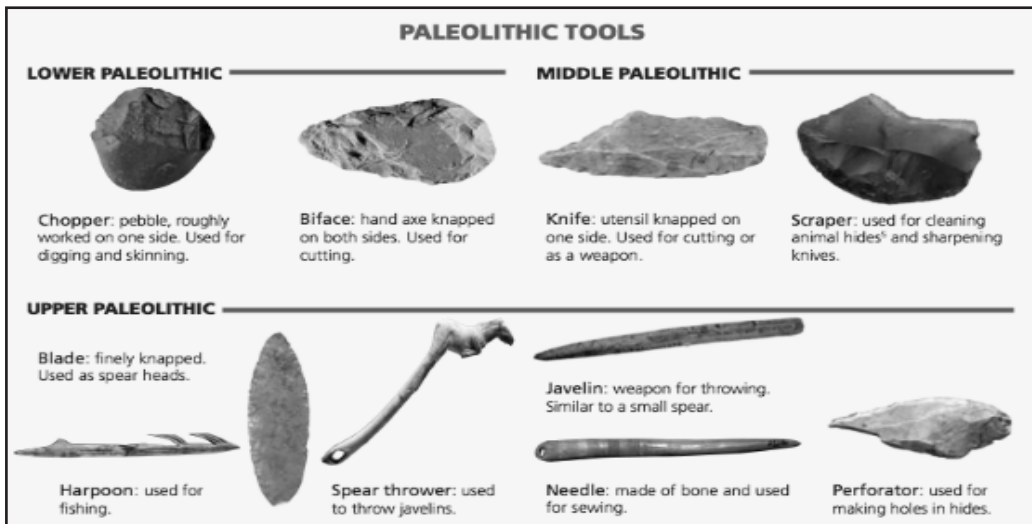
**(ii) Middle-Paleolithic :**

- The middle Paleolithic phase in India was initially identified by **H.D. Sankalia** on the **Pravara River at Nevasa.**
- Middle Palaeolithic culture in India: **3,85,000 to 40,000 BCE**
- Numerous sites from this period have been discovered since then, and **Athirampakkam's** Middle Palaeolithic dates back around **3.85–1.72 lakh years BP.**
- Indian Middle Palaeolithic culture is potentially as old as African Middle Palaeolithic culture.
- Industries primarily relied on small stone flakes, with regional variations across the country.
- This culture prominently featured tools **crafted from flakes**, produced using specialized techniques, earning it the moniker of the “flake tool industry.”
- Artifacts from this era have been discovered along the **Narmada River, Godavari, Krishna,** and in various locations south of the **Tungabhadra River.**
- **The Belan Valley** in Uttar Pradesh, nestled at the foothills of the Vindhyas, is renowned for its wealth of stone tools and animal fossils, encompassing species like cattle and deer. These remnants span both the Lower and Middle Stone Ages.

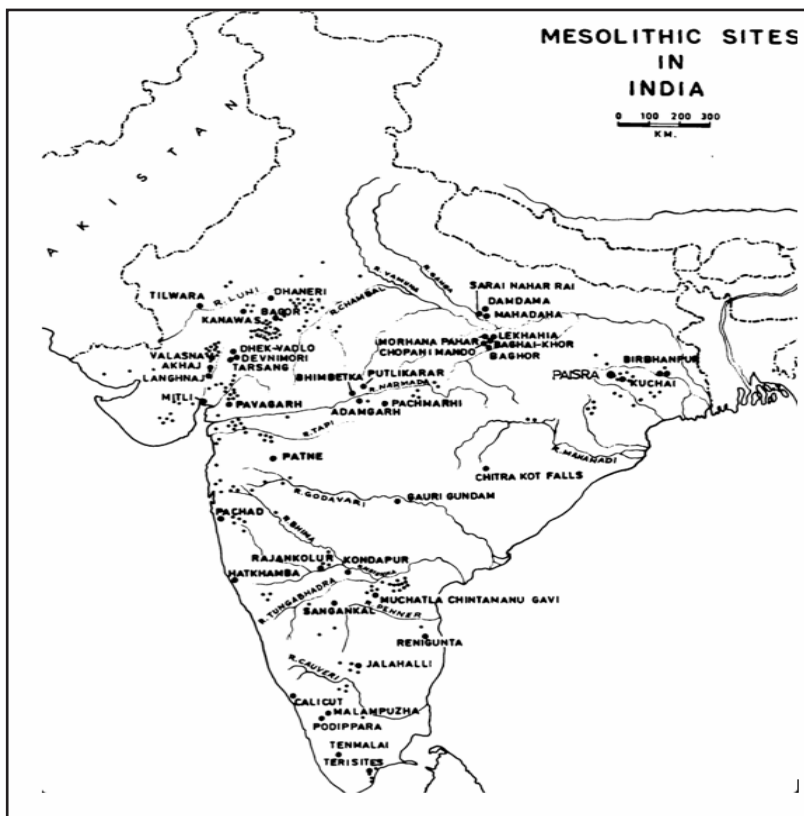
**(iii) Upper-Paleolithic Age:**

- Upper Palaeolithic sites in India include **Meralbhavi in Karnataka.**
- Other notable sites are **Kurnool caves and Godavarikhani in Telangana.**
- Additionally, **Baghor I and Baghor III in Son Valley,** Madhya Pradesh, are significant Upper Palaeolithic locations. **Patne in Maharashtra** is another important site from this period.
- The upper Palaeolithic Age worldwide signifies the emergence of new **flint industries** and modern-type humans.
- Upper Palaeolithic is distinguished by **technological advancements** in **stone tool** production, particularly the creation of parallel-sided blades for crafting various tools by blunting one side or backing.
- **In India, blades and burins** were employed and have been unearthed in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, central Madhya Pradesh, southern Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and nearby regions.
- **Caves and rock** shelters suitable for human habitation during the Upper Palaeolithic phase were identified at Bhimbetka.

- Upper Palaeolithic assemblages, featuring relatively large flakes, blades, burins, and scrapers, were discovered in the upper levels of the Gujarat sand dunes.

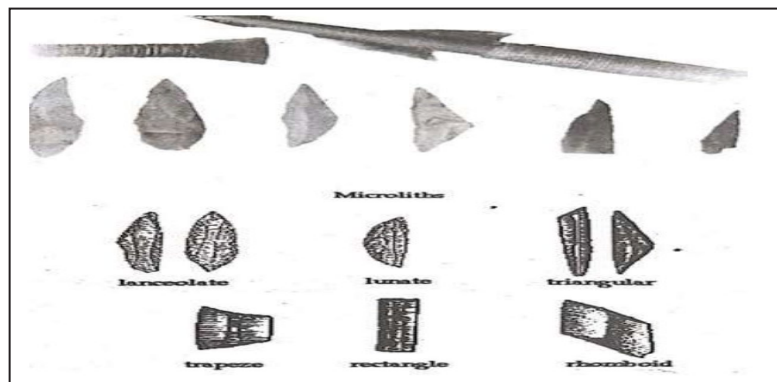


**Mesolithic Period (Middle Stone Age): 10,000-6,000 BCE**



- **Mesolithic sites in India:** Paisra (Bihar), Langhnaj (Gujarat), Baghor II, Chopani Mando, Sarai Nahar Rai, Mahadaha, and Damdama (Uttar Pradesh).
- Mesolithic culture in India: approx. **10,000 BCE**, extending to **Kerala and Tamil Nadu before the Iron Age**.
- In **Sri Lanka**, microliths emerged approximately 28,500 years BP.
- **Rock shelter sites:** Lekhakhia, Baghai Khor, Adamgarh, and Bhimbetka.

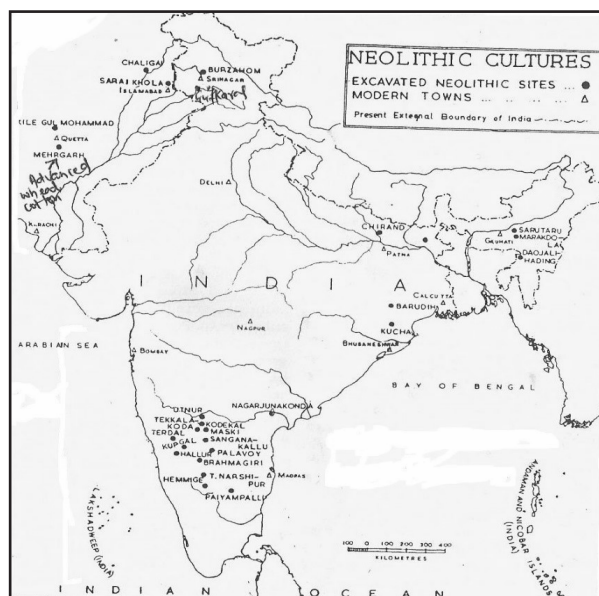
- **Coastal sites:** Mumbai, Thoothukudy (Tamil Nadu), and Vishakapatnam, with microlithic evidence
- During the early stages, people **primarily engaged in hunting, fishing, and food gathering**. Subsequently, they transitioned to **domesticating animals** such as dogs, sheep, and goats and cultivating plants, establishing the foundations of agriculture.
- Mesolithic attire consisted of **clothing fashioned from animal skins**.
- The adoption of **bows and arrows** became prevalent for hunting.
- A prominent characteristic of this period was the **use of microliths**, which were small stone tools crafted from flint or chert. These tools were utilized in hunting smaller animals and birds.
- Mesolithic individuals were enthusiasts of art and adorned stones with paintings illustrating wildlife, hunting scenes, dancing, and food collections.
- This era marked the **initial human settlement in the Ganga Plains**.



Mesolithic Stone Tools

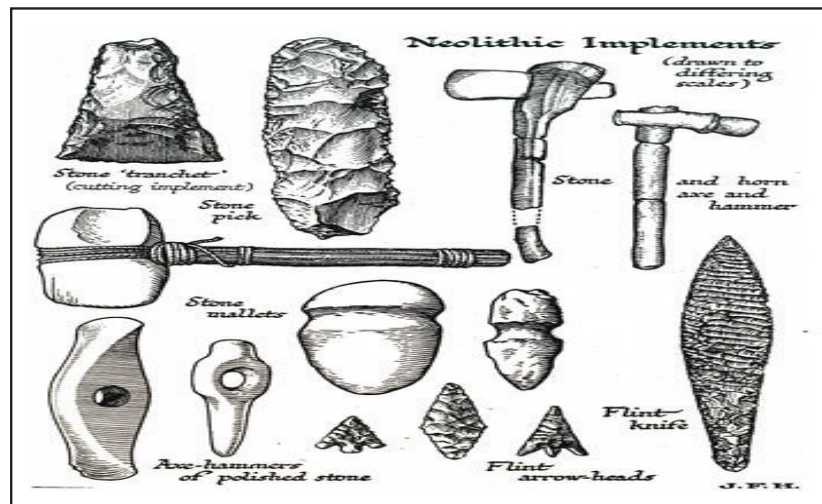
### Neolithic Age (New Stone Age): 6000-1000 BCE

The Neolithic Period, the final stage of the Stone Age, was characterized by **megalithic** architecture, the expansion of agriculture, and the adoption of polished stone tools. It represents a pivotal phase in human cultural history, signifying the shift from complete dependence on nature to the active exploitation of nature for human benefit.



- Neolithic culture's **early evidence** was found in the **Fertile Crescent (Egypt and Mesopotamia), the Indus region, the Ganges Valley in India, and China.**
- The Neolithic culture in **north-western India** stands as the **earliest evidence** of plant and animal domestication in the country. Notable sites like **Mehrgarh, Rana Ghundai, Sarai Kala, and Jalilpur, now located in Pakistan**, showcase this ancient agricultural and domestication heritage.
- The Neolithic culture in the **Kashmir** region **coexisted with the Harappan** civilization, a fact evidenced by sites like **Burzahom**. This significant archaeological site not only spans the Neolithic era but also offers insights into the Megalithic and Early Historic Periods.
- In the Ganges Valley and Central India, Neolithic sites such as Lehuradeva and Chopani Munda have been discovered. Lehuradeva, in particular, has yielded early evidence of rice cultivation dating back to approximately 6500 BCE. **Koldiwa, Chirand, Senuwar, and Mahagara** stand as key Neolithic sites in the area.
- Neolithic sites of **Eastern India** are abundant in **Bihar and West Bengal**, with prominent locations including **Birbhanpur and Chirand**. Other significant sites in the region include **Kuchai, Golbaisasan, and Sankarjang**.
- **South India's** Neolithic cultures are primarily located in **Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and the north-western part of Tamil Nadu**. These sites, numbering over **200**, feature ash mounds at their centers, surrounded by settlements. They are typically situated near granite hills with accessible water sources, predominantly in the **river valleys** of **Godavari, Krishna, Pennaru, Tungabhadra, and Kaveri**.
- Major Neolithic sites in South India include **Sanganakallu, Tekkalakota, Brahmagiri, Maski, Piklihal, Watkal, Hemmige, and Hallur in Karnataka**, along with **Nagarjunakonda, Ramapuram, and Veerapuram** in Andhra Pradesh, as well as **Paiyyampalli** in Tamil Nadu.
- Certain some of the early Neolithic sites of South India are characterized by **ash mounds**. Examples include **Utnur and Palvoy** in Andhra Pradesh, as well as **Kodekal, Kupgal, and Budihal** in Karnataka.
- In **north-eastern India**, the Neolithic culture emerged relatively **late**, primarily dating from **2500-1500 BCE** or even later.
- Artifacts such as shouldered axes and splayed celts have been discovered at sites in **Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh**. Notable Neolithic sites in Assam include **Daojali Hading and Sarutaru**. This region is marked by evidence of **shifting cultivation**, reflecting the agricultural practices and cultural development of the Neolithic communities in this area.
- Transformation from **hunting-gathering to agropastoral society**.
- In contrast to the Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age) era, this period witnessed the adoption of **polished stone tools** and axes, commonly referred to as "celts."
- **Emergence of pottery-making** due to the need for food storage. The necessity for grain storage led to the birth of pottery, initially crafted by hand and later utilizing pottery wheels.
  - **Discovery of fire** and widespread adoption of agriculture, including the cultivation of crops such as wheat, ragi, and horse gram.
  - Construction of houses from mud and reed materials.

- Use of microlithic blades, progressing to more sophisticated tools made from polished stones.
- Crafting various tools and weapons from bones, including needles, scrapers, borers, arrowheads, and more.
- Proficiency in **boat building** and textile weaving.
- Settlements are primarily established near hilly river valleys and slopes of hills.



### Chalcolithic Age: 2100-700 BCE

This age has seen the use of **metal along with stone weapons and** in India, it spanned around **2000 BC to 700 BC**.

The Chalcolithic period in India, also known as the **Copper Age**, marked a transitional phase between the Neolithic and the **Bronze Age**. During the Chalcolithic period, **copper was first used alongside stone tools**.



- **Agriculture Advancements:** Extensive cultivation of various pulses like green gram, grass pea, lentil, and black gram.
- **Animal Domination:** Domestication of animals such as cows, sheep, goats, pigs, and buffaloes, alongside hunting deer.
- **Regional Specifics:** Concentration of Chalcolithic settlements in eastern regions with a focus on fish and rice.
- **Pottery Diversity:** Prevalence of black and red pottery, as well as ochre-colored pottery, adorned with white linear designs.
- **Tool Variety:** Utilization of copper and stone tools.
- **Weaving and Spinning:** Proficiency in weaving and spinning.
- The **Ahar culture** also referred to as the Banas culture, derives its latter name from the Banas valley, which houses most of its archaeological sites. This culture represents one of **India's earliest Chalcolithic cultures.**
- **The Malwa culture**, widely distributed across central India, is the dominant Chalcolithic culture in the region. It was initially recognized during excavations at **Maheshwar on the Narmada River.**
- The **Jorwe culture**, highly significant in Maharashtra, covers almost the entire present state, excluding the west coastal strip and Vidarbha in the northeast. This culture derives its name from the type site of **Jorwe in the Ahmednagar district of Gujarat.**
- **Painted Grey Ware (PGW)** pottery is distinguished by its fine, smooth, and uniformly grey appearance, featuring a thin, meticulously crafted fabric. This pottery was fashioned from exceptionally high-quality clay.