

STUDY MATERIAL ON MESOLITHIC AGE

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THE MESOLITHIC AGE

- ❖ The term Mesolithic is generally used for post-Pleistocene (i.e., Holocene) hunting gathering stone age culture.
- ❖ Towards the end of the Pleistocene or beginning of the Holocene, there were certain changes in the stone tools.
- ❖ The gradual decrease in the size of stone tools can be seen very clearly, referred by pre-historian as microliths.

MICROLITHS:-

Microliths range in length from under 1cm to 5cm. The tools mostly made on short parallel-sided blades made of quartzite, chert, chalcedony, jasper, and agate.

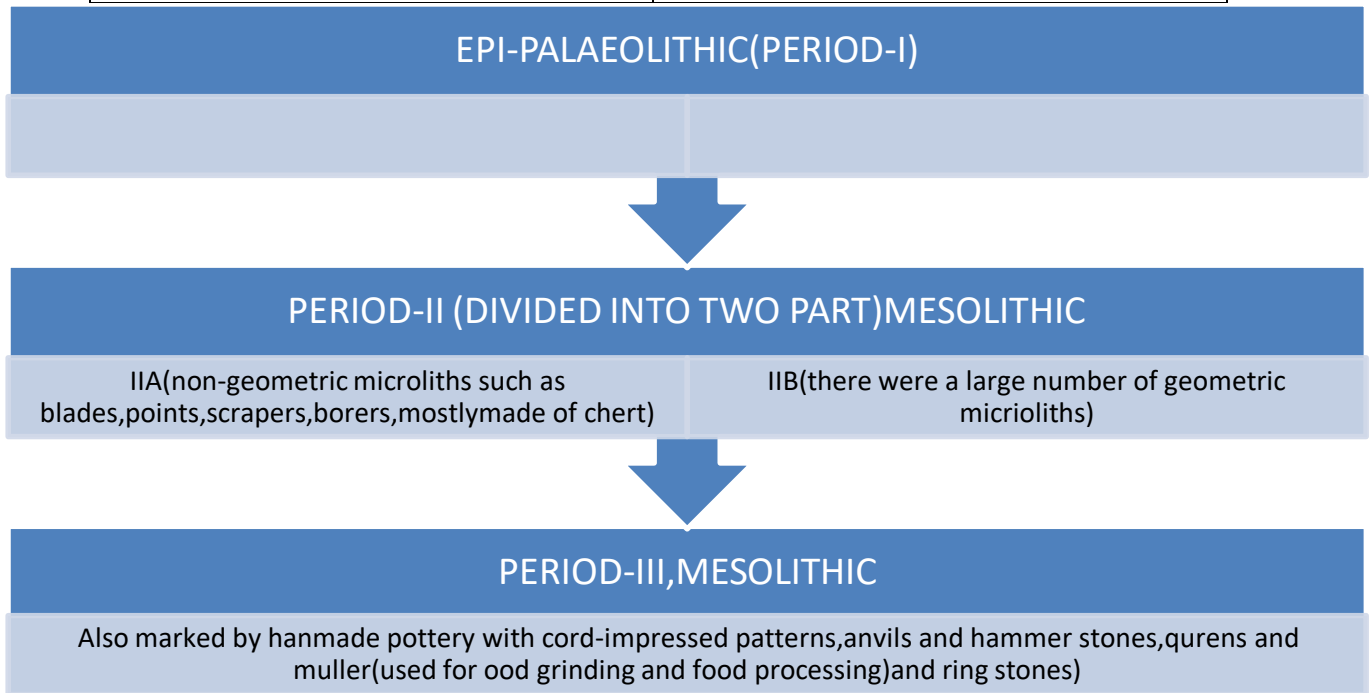
Microliths include miniature versions of some upper Palaeolithic tools types such as burins, points, and scrapers. But there is also introduction of tools in regular geometric shapes such as lunates, triangles, rhomboids, trapezes.

EPI-PALAEOLITHIC:-

The term is sometimes used for the transitional stage of tools that are smaller than those typical of the upper Palaeolithic, but smaller than microlithic.

Various dates of Mesolithic sites

Sites name	Date
Bhimbetka	6556-6177BCE
Baghor	4895-4580BCE; 4246-3991BCE
Bagor	5418-4936BCE;4575-4344BCE
Sarai Nahar Rai	9958-9059BCE
Paisra	6377-6067BCE



SARAI NAHAR RAI

- In Pratapgarh district,U.P.
- Geometric microliths along with shells and animal bones(of bison, rhinoceros, stag, fish, and tortoise.)
- Within the habitation area, there were 11 human burials in oblong pits- those of 9 men, 4 women, and a child.
- One of the buried skeletons had an arrow embedded in its ribs.
- Multiple graves i.e., four persons in one grave is also found.
- Microlithic tools , animal bones, and shells were placed in graves as grave goods.

- Skeletal material revealed that the dental health of the people was on the whole good, but that some of them suffered from **osteo-arthritis**.

MAHADAHA

- In Pratapgarh district, U.P.
- Microliths of chert, quartz, chalcedony have been found.
- Elliptical burial with sloping has been found. Even in a burial, man and women were buried together.
- Grave goods were also present.
- From butchering area, bones of wild cattle, hippopotamus, deer, pig and turtle have been found.

DAMDAMA

- On the bank of Sai river in Pratapgarh district, U.P.
- Discovered microliths, bone object, querns and mullers, anvils, and hammer stones.
- A hearth (fireplace), burnt floor plaster, charred wild grain and animal bones have been excavated.
- There were 4 multiple burials among the 41 human burials.
- An ivory pendant was found among the grave goods.

LEKHAKIA

- In Mirzapur district U.P.
- Rock shelters have yielded blade tools and microliths.
- Tools of progressively smaller size have been found in upper layer of deposits.
 - ❖ Baghai khor is another rock shelter site in the same area.

PAISRA

- In Munger district of Bihar.
- Apart from microliths, large and small fireplaces positioned very close to each other have been found.
- Thinness of deposits suggest a short period of Mesolithic occupation.

BIRBHANPUR

- Close to Damodar river in Burdwan district in West Bengal.
- Both a habitation and factory site.
- Microliths of mainly of Quartz and some of chert and chalcodeny.

BAGOR(Largest Mesolithic site in India)

- In Bhilwara district of Eastern Rajasthan, close to Kothari River.
- Three occupational levels represented continuous human occupation over more than 5000 years. Period I(5000-2800BCE;mesolithic),period II(2800-600 BCE;chalcolithic),period III(600-200 BCE; gave evidence of iron)
- Microliths made up of locally available chert and quartz consisted of blades and geometric microliths like triangles and trapezes.
- House floors paved with stone slabs.
- Stone paved area with large number of animal remains must have been a butchering area.
- Only one burial was unearthed, with no definite evidence of grave goods,

- Animal bones of domesticated animal sheep/goat/cattle have been found.

BAGHOR II

- Palaeolithic site(This site also has a Mesolithic phase)
- Tools of chert and chalcedony and geometric microliths occurred.
- A factory site.
- Location of five to six large shelters have been identified by a series of post-holes.

BHIMBETKA

- Mesolithic tools include blades and geometric microliths like triangles, trapezes and crescents.
- Quartz was in the Palaeolithic stage, but in the Mesolithic phase there was a shift to Chalcedony.
- Most important Mesolithic rock painting site.

- ❖ The other important sites are Teri sites(Tamilnadu), Renigunta(AP), Sanganakallu(Karnataka) etc

MESOLITHIC ART

- ❖ The first rock painting in India(in fact anywhere in the world) were discovered by A.C.L. Carlley in 1867-68 at Sohaghat in the Kaimur hills in Mirzapur district, UP.
- ❖ In 1957, the archaeologist first noticed the Bhimbetka rock.

- ❖ There are 642 rock shelter, nearly 400 of which have painting, engravings, brushings.
- ❖ Mathpal(archaeologist) identified three main phases of the rock paintings, with further sub – phases within these. The first five sub- phases are Mesolithic,the sixth is transitional,and last three belong to the historical period.
- ❖ **COLOUR-** sixteen colours or shades can be identified,white and light red used most often. The colours were made from minerals or some other substance like animal fate, marrow, or egg white. The red was made out of iron oxide, white from limestone, green may have been made from green chalcedony.
- ❖ some painting are monochrome(in one colour), while others are polychrome(in more than one colour)
- ❖ As at most Mesolithic rock art sites, animals dominate the scene at Bhimbetka. Twenty-nine species of animals are depicted. It is interesting to note that no snakes are depicted in Indian Mesolithic paintings, here or elsewhere.
- ❖ In mesolithic art ,animals are represented on their own or as part of hunting scenes. Hunters hunt singly or in groups. They are adorned with ornaments such as necklaces, bangles, wrist bands, elbow bends etc. Some are unarmed, others carry different kind of tools. The hunters are sometimes accompanied by dogs.
- ❖ Some of the animal figures are abstract, many of them are very realistic, sometimes shown in outline. Apart from hunting scenes, animals appear in more peaceful, sympathetic scenes such as those depicting pregnant animals.

- ❖ Mesolithic paintings at Bhimbetka and other sites also depict men and women young and old. Male figures often look like matchsticks, women are sometimes given fuller forms. Some men wear cloths, probably made of leaves, animal skin, or pieces of tree bark.
- ❖ The Bhimbetka paintings reflect a division of labour on the basis of gender. Men hunt and women are shown gathering and preparing food. Dry gourds and leather bags may have been used to hold water. There are scenes of people collecting fruit and honey. Some scenes depict sexual activity.

ORISSA

- ❖ Prehistoric rock art sites have been found at many other places in India as well. In eastern India, over 55 rock shelters with rock art have been identified in the western district of Orissa, especially in the Sundargarh and Sambalpur district.
- ❖ The richest area for rock painting are the 12 rock shelters of the Lekhamoda group in the reserve forest of Chhengahapahad and Garjanpahad. Rock shelters revealed a cultural sequence from Mesolithic to the Chalcolithic.
- ❖ An interesting feature of the rock shelters in Orissa is the co-existence of painting, and engravings in the same shelters.
- ❖ Art is mostly non-figurative (abstract patterns), both geometric and non-geometric. Animals occur infrequently and humans are even rarer.

KERALA

- ❖ There are so many rock art sites with painting and carvings.
- ❖ One of the oldest cave known as Ezhuthu Guha, situated in Idukki district.
- ❖ Animals were depicted, but no humans.
- ❖ No Mesolithic tools have been found so far in any of the Kerala rock shelters.

Why did prehistoric people make such paintings?

Probably for many reasons-

- To express their creative urges
- To decorate their homes
- To tell a story in pictures
 - ❖ some scenes may have been picture-stories of memorable events in their lives. Others may have been connected with rituals connected with hunting or fertility.

