

Class 9 Social Science

Chapter 4: Early Humans and Beginning of Civilisation

Easy-to-Understand Study Notes | Tiwari Academy

Chapter at a Glance

- **Early human history:** Most of human history belongs to the period before writing and is reconstructed mainly through archaeology.
- **Human evolution:** Early humans evolved in Africa and gradually spread to Asia, Europe and other parts of the world.
- **Stone Age:** Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic stages show changes in tools, food, settlements and lifestyle.
- **Neolithic Revolution:** Humans began farming, domesticating animals, making pottery and living in permanent villages.
- **Metal Ages:** Copper, bronze and later iron transformed tools, farming, crafts and social organisation.
- **Civilisations:** Surplus production, urban centres, trade, administration and writing supported the rise of early civilisations.
- **Major river-valley civilisations:** Sindhu-Sarasvati, Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Chinese civilisations.
- **Writing:** Harappan script remains undeciphered, while cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphs have been deciphered.

1. Before and After the Invention of Writing

Before Writing	After Writing
More than 99% of human history.	Less than 1% of human history - roughly the last 5,000 years.
Main evidence: tools, bones, fossils, cave art and other artefacts.	Both archaeological remains and written records are available.
Ideas and exact dates are difficult to reconstruct.	Written records provide names, events and relatively more precise dates.

Important scripts: Harappan/Sindhu lipi (undeciphered), Sumerian cuneiform, Egyptian hieroglyphs and later Brahmi in India.

2. Human Evolution and Archaeology

- **Biological evolution:** Gradual physical and genetic change from early ancestors to Homo sapiens.
- **Cultural evolution:** Development of tools, techniques and ways of adapting to climate and environment.
- **Archaeology:** Archaeologists study tools, bones, fossils and objects found at ancient sites to reconstruct the past.
- **Fossil:** Preserved remains, traces or impressions of plants, animals or humans from the distant past.

Human Ancestor	Important Point
Homo habilis	Lived in Africa; associated with early chopper stone tools.
Homo erectus	Upright/bipedal ancestor; made handaxes and cleavers; among the first to migrate out of Africa.
Homo neanderthalensis	Lived in Europe and Southwest Asia; used Middle Palaeolithic flake tools.
Homo sapiens	Modern humans; evolved in Africa about 300,000 years ago and developed complex technologies.

Migration: *Early ancestors began moving out of Africa around 2 million years ago. Homo sapiens later spread across the world.*

3. Main Periods of Early Human History

Period	Main Features
Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age)	Hunting-gathering; simple stone tools such as handaxes, cleavers and scrapers.
Mesolithic	Microlithic or tiny stone tools; fishing and wider use of rivers/lakes; transitional stage.
Neolithic (New Stone Age)	Agriculture, domestication, settled life, polished stone tools, pottery.
Chalcolithic	Copper used together with stone tools; early metallurgy and farming communities.
Bronze Age	Bronze metallurgy; expansion of towns, trade and early civilisations.
Iron Age	Widespread iron tools and weapons; stronger technology and more advanced societies.

4. Palaeolithic and Mesolithic Life

- **Palaeolithic people:** Lived mainly by hunting and gathering and used stone tools for chopping meat, digging tubers, scraping hides and breaking bones.
- **Indian sites:** Attirampakkam in Tamil Nadu and Isampur in Karnataka are among very early sites; Bhimbetka is another major site.
- **New tools:** Smaller scrapers, borers, points, blades, microblades and later the bow and arrow improved hunting.
- **Communication and art:** Humans used symbolic communication, cave paintings, body pigments and beads made of stone, bone and shell.
- **Mesolithic climate:** Around 12,000 years ago, warming expanded forests and grasslands and increased food resources.
- **Mesolithic economy:** Microliths supported fishing and collection of aquatic resources; rock art flourished, especially at Bhimbetka.

5. The Neolithic Revolution

- **Meaning:** The gradual shift from hunting-gathering to food production.
- **Key change:** Domestication of selected plants and animals.
- **New life:** Permanent village settlements developed.
- **New technology:** Tools were made for cultivation and food processing; pottery became common.
- **Why a revolution?** It changed food supply, settlement, population, work and social organisation, and laid the foundation for later urban life.

Important: *The change to agriculture happened at different times in different regions of the world.*

6. Neolithic Period in the Indian Subcontinent

- **Mehrgarh:** Oldest Neolithic site in the northwest, dating to about 7000 BCE; located on the Bolan River in present-day Pakistan.
- **Life at Mehrgarh:** People built sun-dried brick houses and granaries, cultivated wheat and barley, and raised sheep, goats and zebu cattle.
- **Crafts:** They made ornaments from lapis lazuli, carnelian and shells.
- **Copper:** Copper objects appeared by about 4000 BCE, marking a Chalcolithic stage.
- **By 2500 BCE:** Neolithic agricultural communities occupied much of the subcontinent, cultivating cereals, millets and pulses and herding animals.

7. Sindhu-Sarasvati Civilisation

- **Background:** Neolithic communities gradually developed into Chalcolithic settlements and later the Bronze Age Harappan civilisation.
- **Early Harappan stage:** Regional pottery, beads, shell bangles, terracotta objects, copper work, settlement walls, seals and early writing traditions developed.
- **Mature Harappan:** Urban phase began around 2600 BCE.
- **Important features:** Well-planned cities, drainage and water management, standard weights and measures, crafts, seals and script.
- **Agriculture:** The ploughed field at Kalibangan shows criss-cross furrows, indicating double-crop cultivation.
- **Trade:** Standard weights helped efficient interregional and long-distance trade.

Neolithic -> Chalcolithic -> Early Harappan -> Mature Harappan Urban Civilisation

8. Why Did Early Civilisations Grow Near Rivers?

- Rivers supplied water for drinking and farming.
- Floods often deposited fertile soil.
- Rivers supported transport and trade.
- Food surpluses supported larger settlements and specialised occupations.
- However, floods and environmental changes could also create serious challenges.

Civilisation	Main River Region
Sindhu-Sarasvati	Sindhu/Indus and Sarasvati-Ghaggar region
Mesopotamian	Tigris and Euphrates
Egyptian	Nile
Chinese	Huang He (Yellow River) and Yangtze

9. Mesopotamian Civilisation

- **Location:** Between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in West Asia; the fertile crescent supported early agriculture.
- **City-states:** Important Mesopotamian powers included Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian and Babylonian city-based civilisations.
- **Sumerians:** Built irrigation canals and dams, used mud and burnt bricks, and constructed ziggurats.
- **Ziggurat:** A stepped temple complex that was also linked with economic and administrative activity.
- **Cuneiform:** Wedge-shaped writing impressed on clay tablets; used for myths, laws, education and economic records.
- **Innovations:** Sumerians are credited with the wheeled cart, sailboat and a base-60 number system.
- **Hammurabi:** Babylonian ruler associated with the Code of Hammurabi, an important early compilation of laws.

10. Harappan-Mesopotamian Contacts

- Mesopotamian records mention trade with Dilmun, Magan and Meluhha.
- Meluhha is generally identified with the Sindhu-Sarasvati civilisation.
- Dilmun is associated with present-day Bahrain and Magan with Oman.
- Trade included semi-precious stone beads, ivory, timber, gold dust and probably copper.

11. Egyptian Civilisation

- **Nile River:** Annual floods deposited fertile black soil, called kemet, supporting agriculture.
- **Pharaohs:** Powerful rulers of Egypt.
- **Pyramids and mummification:** Linked with Egyptian beliefs in life after death and preservation of the body.
- **Social hierarchy:** Pharaoh at the top, followed by officials/nobles/priests, free landholders/artisans/merchants, and serfs/slaves.
- **Writing:** Egyptian hieroglyphs were written on monuments and papyrus; the Rosetta Stone helped Champollion decipher them in 1822.
- **Calendar:** Egyptians used a 365-day calendar linked with agricultural seasons.
- **Women:** Egyptian women could own property and run businesses.

12. Chinese Civilisation

- **River valleys:** Developed along the Huang He and Yangtze rivers.
- **Bronze Age:** Urban centres expanded around 1600 BCE with improved agriculture, metallurgy and crafts.
- **Shang dynasty:** 1600-1046 BCE.
- **Zhou dynasty:** 1046-256 BCE; rulers were regarded as kings and priests appointed by heaven.
- **Iron Age:** Iron became widely used from about 600 BCE.
- **Qin and Han:** Qin unified China; Han became another major Iron Age dynasty.
- **Writing and sources:** Oracle bones and tortoise shells preserve some of the earliest Chinese written evidence; Chinese writing is logographic.

13. Common Features of Bronze Age Civilisations

Feature	Explanation
River valleys	Most early civilisations grew in fertile river plains.
Agriculture and surplus	Higher food production supported larger populations.
Cities	Permanent urban centres developed.
Craft specialisation	Artisans produced pottery, metalwork, beads and other goods.
Trade	Local and long-distance exchange networks grew.
Writing	Used for administration, trade, records, beliefs and communication.
Administration	Cities required organised governance and management.
Social organisation	Different occupations and social groups became more clearly defined.

14. Important Terms

Term	Easy Meaning
Hominin	Modern humans and early human-like ancestors.
Artefact	An object made or used by humans.
Fossil	Preserved remains or traces from the distant past.
Palaeolithic	Old Stone Age.
Mesolithic	Middle Stone Age; associated with microliths.
Neolithic	New Stone Age; farming and settled life.
Chalcolithic	Copper and Stone Age.
Civilisation	Complex society with features such as towns/cities, surplus, administration, trade and often writing.
City-state	A sovereign state centred on a city and its surrounding territory.
Ziggurat	Stepped temple structure of Mesopotamia.
Cuneiform	Mesopotamian wedge-shaped script on clay tablets.
Hieroglyphs	Ancient Egyptian writing system.
Mummification	Preservation of a dead body in ancient Egypt.

15. Quick Revision

- Early human history before writing is studied mainly through archaeology.
- Homo erectus was among the first hominins to migrate out of Africa.
- Homo sapiens evolved in Africa and later spread around the world.
- Stone Age = Palaeolithic + Mesolithic + Neolithic.
- Palaeolithic people were hunter-gatherers using stone tools.
- Mesolithic people used microliths; fishing and rock art became important.
- The Neolithic Revolution introduced farming, domestication and settled villages.
- Mehrgarh is an important early Neolithic agricultural village in the subcontinent.
- Copper use led to Chalcolithic communities and later Bronze Age civilisations.
- The Harappan civilisation developed from earlier regional farming and craft traditions.
- Standard Harappan weights supported trade.
- Mesopotamia developed between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.
- Cuneiform was a Mesopotamian writing system; the Harappan script remains undeciphered.
- Meluhha in Mesopotamian records is generally identified with the Harappan region.
- Egyptian civilisation depended strongly on the Nile.
- Pharaohs, pyramids, mummification and hieroglyphs are key features of ancient Egypt.
- Chinese civilisation developed mainly along the Huang He and Yangtze.
- Shang and Zhou were important Chinese Bronze Age dynasties.
- Bronze Age civilisations shared features such as urban centres, trade, administration and writing.

