

Early Farmers and Herders

Class 6 Social Science

Complete Study Notes

Learning Objectives

Understand how early humans shifted from hunting and gathering to farming and animal rearing. Learn about the process of domestication, the beginning of settled life, food storage methods, and the importance of early villages. Explore major archaeological sites such as Mehrgarh, Burzahom, and Daojali Hading, and understand how these discoveries help us study early human societies [cite: 74].

Introduction to Early Farmers and Herders

One of the greatest turning points in human history was the beginning of agriculture and animal domestication. Thousands of years ago, people gradually realized that instead of depending entirely on hunting and gathering, they could grow crops and rear animals for a regular supply of food. This discovery completely changed the way humans lived and marked the beginning of settled communities [cite: 74].

The development of farming encouraged people to live permanently in one place, build houses, store food, and work together as a community. Over time, these small villages became the foundation of larger societies and civilizations. Archaeological discoveries from different parts of the Indian subcontinent provide valuable evidence about the lives of these early farmers and herders [cite: 74].

Domestication and the Beginning of Farming

The process of growing plants and rearing animals is known as domestication. Early humans carefully selected plants that produced larger grains and stronger stems. Similarly, they chose calm and gentle animals that could be easily looked after and bred over generations [cite: 74].

The earliest cultivated crops included wheat and barley, while the first domesticated animals included sheep, goats, cattle, and dogs. These animals provided milk, meat, wool, protection, and assistance in everyday life. Farming and animal husbandry together ensured a more reliable supply of food than hunting and gathering alone [cite: 74].

As people gained experience, they learned to prepare fields, sow seeds, remove weeds, protect crops from birds and animals, and harvest ripe grains. These activities required patience and continuous care, encouraging people to remain in one place instead of moving from region to region [cite: 74].

Settled Life and Food Storage

The introduction of farming completely transformed human life. Since crops required several months to grow, families built permanent homes close to their fields and water sources. This marked the beginning of settled village life [cite: 74].

Harvesting crops also created the need for proper food storage. Early farmers stored grains in large clay pots, woven baskets, and underground storage pits to protect them from moisture, insects, and animals. Some of the stored grains were used as food, while the remaining seeds were preserved for the next farming season [cite: 74].

Value of Livestock: Domesticated animals became a valuable source of food and wealth. They supplied fresh milk every day and could also provide meat whenever required. As these animals reproduced naturally, they acted as a continuous source of food and became an important part of early village economies [cite: 74].

Archaeological Evidence of Early Farming Communities

Archaeologists study ancient villages by excavating houses, tools, grains, pottery, animal bones, and other objects buried beneath the ground. Burnt grains and animal bones help scientists identify the crops people cultivated and the animals they domesticated thousands of years ago [cite: 74].

These discoveries provide valuable information about agriculture, housing, food habits, technology, and the daily lives of early farming communities. Every archaeological site helps historians understand how human society gradually evolved from nomadic groups into settled villages [cite: 74].

Important Early Farming Sites

- **Mehrgarh:** Located in present-day Pakistan, is one of the earliest known farming villages in South Asia. Archaeologists discovered evidence of wheat, barley, sheep, goats, and cattle. Houses were built using mud bricks and contained separate rooms for living and storing harvested grains. Burials found at the site indicate that people placed valuable objects and animals beside the dead, suggesting beliefs about life after death [cite: 74].
- **Burzahom:** Situated in present-day Kashmir, is famous for its unique pit dwellings. People dug deep circular or rectangular pits into the ground and built their homes inside them. These underground houses protected families from the extremely cold climate. Archaeologists also discovered fireplaces both inside and outside these houses, indicating different cooking arrangements during changing seasons [cite: 74].
- **Daojali Hading:** Located in present-day Assam, provides evidence of farming communities living in the hills near the Brahmaputra Valley. Stone tools, polished grinding stones, pottery, and jadeite objects discovered here suggest that people cultivated crops, processed grains, and maintained trade links with distant regions, including areas that are now part of China [cite: 74].

The Neolithic Age and Technological Progress

The period when people began farming and using polished stone tools is known as the Neolithic Age or New Stone Age. During this period, stone tools became stronger, sharper, and more efficient than those used by earlier hunter-gatherers [cite: 74].

People polished stones carefully to produce axes, knives, sickles, and grinding tools suitable for agricultural work. These improved tools helped farmers clear forests, cultivate land, harvest crops, build houses, and prepare food more efficiently. The Neolithic Age marked a significant technological advancement that supported the growth of permanent settlements and organized communities [cite: 74].

Importance of Early Farmers and Herders

The development of farming and animal domestication changed human history forever. Permanent settlements encouraged cooperation, trade, food storage, and the growth of new occupations such as pottery, weaving, carpentry, and tool making. Communities became more organized, and people began sharing knowledge and resources [cite: 74].

The achievements of early farmers and herders laid the foundation for villages, towns, and eventually great civilizations. Modern agriculture, livestock farming, and settled life all trace their origins to these remarkable developments that took place thousands of years ago [cite: 74].

Practice Questions

1. What is domestication? [cite: 74]
2. Name the earliest domesticated crops and animals [cite: 74].
3. Why did farming encourage people to settle permanently? [cite: 74]
4. Name any two important early farming sites [cite: 74].
5. Why is the Neolithic Age considered an important period in history? [cite: 74]

Answer Key

- **ANSWER 1:** Domestication is the process of growing plants and rearing animals for human use and food [cite: 74].
- **ANSWER 2:** The earliest domesticated crops were wheat and barley, while the earliest domesticated animals included sheep, goats, cattle, and dogs [cite: 74].
- **ANSWER 3:** Farming required people to care for crops until they were ready for harvest, encouraging them to build permanent homes near their fields and water sources [cite: 74].
- **ANSWER 4:** Two important early farming sites are Mehrgarh and Burzahom. Another important site is Daojali Hading [cite: 74].
- **ANSWER 5:** The Neolithic Age is important because people began farming, rearing animals, building permanent settlements, and using polished stone tools, leading to the development of organized societies [cite: 74].